

# NEWSLETTER

## of

# The American Handel Society

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### HANDEL'S *SCIPIONE* AND THE NEUTRALIZATION OF POLITICS<sup>1</sup>

This is an essay about possibilities, an observation of what Handel and his librettist wrote rather than what was finally performed. Handel composed his opera *Scipione* in 1726 for a text by Paolo Rolli, who adapted a libretto by Antonio Salvi written for a Medici performance in Livorno in 1704.<sup>2</sup> Handel's and Rolli's version was performed at the King's Theater in the Haymarket for the Royal Academy of Music.<sup>3</sup> The opera has suffered in critical esteem not so much from its own failings as from its proximity in time to the great productions of *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano* and *Rodelinda* which preceded it. I would like to argue, however, that even in this opera Handel and Rolli were working on an interesting idea: a presentation of Roman historical material in ways that anticipated the ethical discussions that we now associate with the oratorios. If that potential was undermined by what was finally put on stage, it is nevertheless interesting to observe what might have been.

Narrative material from the Roman republic was potentially difficult on the English stage of the early eighteenth century. The conquering heroes of the late Roman republic particularly—Sulla, Pompey, and especially Caesar—might most easily be associated with the monarch; but these historical figures were also tainted by the fact that they could be identified as tyrants responsible for demolishing republican freedom. Addison's *Cato* had caused a virtual riot in the theatre in 1713, as Whigs and Tories vied to distance themselves from the (unseen) villain Caesar and claim the play's stoic hero Cato as their own. The reaction was so loudly partisan that Pope reported that it caused Addison himself to despair that "their applause proceed[ed] more from the hand than the head."<sup>4</sup> But Addison had had higher moral aspirations for the reception of his *Cato*, contrasting it with the Italian operatic drama that also held the stage: "If the Italians have a genius for music above the English, the English have a genius for other performances of a much higher nature and capable of giving the mind a much nobler entertainment" (*Spectator* no. 18, March 21, 1711). Pope's prologue to *Cato* had remonstrated in a similar vein:

Our scene precariously subsists too long  
On French translation and Italian song.



### RINALDO AT CITY OPERA

Of the fourteen operas presented by the New York City Opera in its 2000-2001 season, six are new productions, and two of these are by Handel. *Acis and Galatea* forms part of the Spring 2001 series, beginning March 17. *Agrippina* has been promised for 2001-2002. I saw the second of six performances of *Rinaldo*, which debuted in the New York State Theater on October 31, 2000; I was present on November 4. The production promised a good cast, and the regime of General and Artistic Director Paul Kellogg has earned high marks for interesting, innovative productions, some of them (though not *Rinaldo*) transferred from Glimmerglass Opera.

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# HANDEL CALENDAR

The American Handel Society welcomes news or information about events of interest to Handelians. If possible, please include an address, telephone number and URL where readers may obtain details. For information on Handel concerts around the world, please visit also <http://www.gfhandel.org>

**La Resurrezione.** June 6. Théâtre des Champs Élysées, Paris. Angelo: Johanette Zomer; Maddalena: Magdalena Kozena; Cleofe: Claudia Schubert; San Giovanni: Paul Agnew; Lucifero: Klaus Mertens; Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra & Choir; Ton Koopman, conductor.

**Acis and Galatea.** June 6, 8, 10, 14, 16. Chicago Opera Theater, Athenaeum Theatre, Chicago (original production by Glimmerglass and New York City Opera). Acis: Michael Smallwood; Galatea: Nathalie Paulin; Damon: Jackalyn Short; Polyphemus: Derrick Parker; Nicholas Cleobury, conductor; Mark Lamos, producer. Visit <http://www.chicagooperatheater.org/>

**Gloria in Excelsis Deo.** June 7. St Marylebone Parish Church, Marylebone Road, London NW1 (first full UK performance for this newly discovered work). Rebecca Ryan, soprano; Royal Academy of Music Baroque Orchestra; Laurence Cummings, conductor. Tickets £10 (concert only) or £30 (concert with champagne reception), in aid of the Royal Academy of Music and the Handel House Museum. Cheques should be sent payable to Royal Academy of Music to the Box Office, Royal Academy of Music, Marylebone Road, London NW1 5HT; tel. 020 7873 7300 (10am-12pm and 2-3pm, weekdays only).

**Music by Handel, Bach, Telemann, and Biber.** June 8, 2001. Prince Michael School, Dean Close School, Cheltenham, England. Catherine Mackintosh, baroque violin; David Hatcher, viola da gamba.

## 2001 Halle Handel Festival:

**Messiah.** June 9. The Monteverdi Choir and Orchestra; John Eliot Gardiner, conductor.

**Rodrigo.** June 9, 15, 17. Opernhaus Halle. Rodrigo: Robert Crowe; Fernando: Alejandro Garri; Axel Köhler, conductor.

**Tamerlano.** June 9, 10, 12. Goethe-Theater, Bad Lauchstädt, Germany. Tamerlano: Monica Bacelli; Bajazet: Thomas Randle; Andronico: Graham Pushee; Asteria: Elizabeth Norberg-Schulz; Irene: Anna Bonitatibus; Leone: Antonio Abete; The English Concert; Trevor Pinnock, conductor; Jonathan Miller, director.

**Radamisto.** June 13. Opernhaus Halle. Anke Berndt, Lynda Lee, Raimund Nolte, Anna Ryberg, Jürgen Trekel, Manuela Uhl, Stephen Wallace; Händelfestspielorchester des Opernhauses Halle; Alan Curtis, conductor.

**Belshazzar.** June 14. Marktkirche zu Halle. Ingeborg Danz, Martin Oro, Mark Padmore, Carolyn Sampson, David Wilson-Johnson; Collegium Vocale Gent; Philippe Herreweghe, conductor.

Visit [www.haendelfestspiele.halle.de/monat.html](http://www.haendelfestspiele.halle.de/monat.html)

**Messiah.** June 11. St. Mark's, Venice, Italy. English Baroque Soloists; Monteverdi Choir; John Eliot Gardiner, conductor.

**Jephtha.** June 15. St. Matthew's Church, Clarence Street, Cheltenham. Iphis: Jacqueline Barron; Storgè: Margaret Cameron; Hamor: Andrew Olleson; Jephtha: Benjamin Hulett; Zebul: Simon Grant; Oriel Singers (director: Tim Morris); Corelli Orchestra, on period instruments; Warwick Cole, director.

## 2001 International Istanbul Festival

**Messiah.** June 15. Hagia Eireni Museum, Istanbul, Turkey. English Baroque Soloists; Monteverdi Choir; John Eliot Gardiner, conductor.

**L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato.** July 2. Hagia Eireni Museum, Istanbul, Turkey. Sophie Daneman, soprano; Tristan Hambleton, soprano; Paul Agnew, tenor; Anton Scharinger, bass; Les Arts Florissants; William Christie, conductor.

Visit <http://www.istfest.org/>

**Solomon.** June 16. Guildford Cathedral. Mary Nelson, Charlotte Mobbs, David Clegg, James Gilchrist; Guildford Choral Society; New London Baroque Sinfonia; David Gibson, conductor. Ticket enquiries: +44(0)1483 422901; Guildford Tourist Information Centre Tunsgate, Guildford +44(0)1483 444334 (Credit Card Bookings). Visit: <http://www.guildfordchoral.org>

**"Handel in England": a performance workshop.** June 17-30. Baroque Performance Institute, Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Oberlin, Ohio. Artistic director: Kenneth Slowik; Guest artist: Jacques Ogg; with the Oberlin Baroque Ensemble and an international faculty. Visit: <http://www.oberlin.edu/con/summer/bpi/>; E-mail: [ocbpi@oberlin.edu](mailto:ocbpi@oberlin.edu)

**Tamerlano.** June 18, 20, 21. Théâtre des Champs Élysées, Paris. Tamerlano: Monica Bacelli; Bajazet: Thomas Randle; Andronico: Graham Pushee; Asteria: Elizabeth Norberg-Schulz; Irene: Anna Bonitatibus; Leone: Antonio Abete; English Concert; Trevor Pinnock, conductor; Jonathan Miller, director.

**Giulio Cesare.** June 19, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 30. Gran Teatre del Liceu; Barcelona, Spain. Ann Murray, Ángeles Blancas, Petia Petrova, Ewa Podlés, Itxaro Mentxaka, Christopher Robson, Lynton Black, Simón Orfila; Harry Bicket, conductor; Herbert Wernicke, producer. Visit: <http://www.liceubarcelona.com/>

**Theodora.** June 21. Christ Church, Commercial Street, Spitalfields, London (Spitalfields Festival). Royal Academy of Music (RAM) Period Instrument Baroque Orchestra; RAM Chamber Choir & Soloists; Nicholas McGegan, conductor. Visit: <http://www.spitalfieldsfestival.org.uk>

**Giulio Cesare.** June 21, 25, 28, 30; July 2, 4, 6, 8. Drottningholms Slottsteater. Giulio Cesare: Lawrence Zazzo; Cornelia: Ann Hallenberg; Sesto: Malena Ernman; Cleopatra: Laura Claycomb; Tolomeo: Mikael Bellini; Achilla: Gabriel Suovanen; The Drottningholm Theatre Ballet; Roy Goodman, conductor; David Radok, producer. Visit: <http://www.drottningholmsteatern.dtm.se>

**La Resurrezione.** June 23. St. Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, Australia. Angelo: Helena Dix; Maddalena: Jocelyn Hickey; Cleofe: Christopher Field; S. Giovanni: Paul Batey; Lucifero: Shane Lowrencev; Australian Classical Players; Graham Abbott, conductor. Visit: <http://www.independent-classics.com.au/CONCERT14.html>

**Tamerlano.** June 27, 28, 30. Sadlers Wells, London (City of London Festival). Tamerlano: Monica Bacelli; Bajazet: Thomas Randle; Andronico: Graham Pushee; Asteria: Elizabeth Norberg-Schulz; Irene: Anna Bonitatibus; Leone: Antonio Abete; English Concert; Trevor Pinnock, conductor; Jonathan Miller, director. Visit: <http://www.sadlers-wells.com/> or <http://www.colf.org>

**Saul.** July 6, 23. Komische Oper Berlin. Visit: <http://www.komische-oper-berlin.de/>

**Messiah** (choreographed with costumes). July 7. Hamburgische Staatsoper, Hamburg, Germany. Sabine Ritterbusch; soprano; Yvi Jänicke, mezzo-soprano; Rainer Trost, tenor; Peter Galliard, tenor; Oliver Zwarg, bass; Thomas Mohr (bass). Visit <http://www.hamburgische-staatsoper.de/startup.html>

**Sing unto God** (HWV 263); **Utrecht Jubilate** (HWV 279). July 7. St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London. Also music by Vivaldi. London Pro Arte Baroque Orchestra; East London Chorus. Visit: <http://ds.dial.pipex.com/proarte/>

**2001 Beaune Festival of Baroque Music** (30 June-30 July)  
**L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato.** July 7. Cour des Hospices, Beaune. Sophie Daneman, soprano; Tristan Hambleton, soprano; Paul Agnew, tenor; Andrew Foster Williams, bass; Les Arts Florissants; William Christie, conductor. (Source: Operabase & Les Arts Florissants program; not cited at the Beaune Festival website.)

**Tamerlano.** July 8. Les Talents Lyriques; Christophe Rousset, conductor.

**Aci, Galatea e Polifemo.** July 14 (buffet baroque). Emmanuelle Haïm, conductor.

**Il trionfo del tempo e del disinganno.** July 20. Basilique Notre-Dame, Beaune. Sandrine Piau, Anna Maria Panzarella, Carlo Allemano, Marijana Mijanovic; Le Concert d'Astré; Emmanuelle Haïm, conductor. (Source: Operabase; not cited at the Beaune Festival website.)

Visit: <http://www.francefestivals.com/english/beaune/>

**L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato.** July 9. Tonhalle, Grosser Saal, Zürich. Sophie Daneman, Gwilym Bowen, Paul Agnew, Anton Scharinger; Les Arts Florissants; William Christie, conductor.

**"The Coronation of King George II"** (Coronation Anthems). July 12. Chichester Cathedral (Chichester Festival). Also music by William Child, John Blow, Henry Purcell, Thomas Tallis, John Farmer, and Orlando Gibbons. King's Consort; Robert King, conductor. Visit: <http://www.chifest.org.uk>

**Partenope.** July 13, 18, 22. Buxton Opera House, UK (2001 Buxton International Arts Festival). Jeni Bern, Stephen

Rooke, Diana Moore, Antonia Sotgiu, Louise Mott; The Early Opera Company; Christian Curnyn, conductor; Netia Jones, producer. Visit: <http://www.buxtonfestival.co.uk/>

**Messiah** (arranged by Mozart). July 15. Klosterkirche Beuron, Ludwigsburg, Germany (Ludwigsburg Schlossfestspiele). Christiane Libor, soprano; Carmen Mammoser, alto; Kenneth Tarver, tenor; Detlef Roth, bass; Choir and Orchestra of the Ludwigsburger Festspiele; Wolfgang Gönnerwein, conductor. Also July 22: Stiftskirche Wertheim, Mühlenstraße, Ludwigsburg, Germany. Visit: <http://www.ludwigsburg.de/>

**Serse.** July 16, 20. Nationaltheater, Munich, Germany. Serse: Ann Murray; Arsamene: Christopher Robson; Amastre: Kathleen Kuhlmann; Ariodante: Umberto Chiummo; Romilda: Susan Gritton or Yvonne Kenny; Atalanta: Julie Kaufmann; Elviro: Jan Zinkler; Ivor Bolton, conductor. Visit <http://www.staatstheater.bayern.de/staatsoper/homeod.htm>

**Agrippina.** July 18, 20. Festival Opera Barga, Barga, Italy. Visit: <http://www.essein.it/operabarga/>

**"The Ways of Zion do mourn"** (Funeral Anthem). July 19. Minoritensaal, Graz, Austria. Also Bach, BWV 198. Capella Leopoldina; Jörg Zwicker, conductor. Visit: <http://www.styriarte.com>

**L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato.** July 21. Royal Albert Hall, London. Tristan Hambleton, treble; Sophie Daneman, soprano; Anna-Maria Panzarella, soprano; Paul Agnew, tenor; Anton Scharinger, bass; Les Arts Florissants; William Christie, conductor. Visit: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/proms/> or <http://www.royalalberthall.com/>

**Agrippina.** July 21, 23, 29; August 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, 25. Glimmerglass Opera, Cooperstown, New York. Agrippina: Alexandra Coku; Poppea: Christina Bouras; Claudius: Derrick Parker; Ottone: David Walker; Nerone: Beth Clayton; Harry Bicket, conductor; John Cox, director. Visit: <http://www.cooperstown.net/glimmerglass/>

**L'Allegro, il penseroso ed il moderato.** July 22. Castell de Peralada (Peralada Castle), Catalonia, Spain. Sophie Daneman, soprano; Gwilym Bowen, soprano; Paul Agnew, tenor; Anton Scharinger; bass; Les Arts Florissants; William Christie, conductor. Visit: <http://www.festivalperalada.com/>

**Belshazzar.** July 27. Dartington International Summer School, Totnes, Devon, England. Visit: <http://www.dartingtonsummerschool.co.uk/>

**"A Walk in Venice"** (Italian Sonatas and Cantatas by Handel and Hasse). July 29. Ste-Cécile Church, Lamèque, New Brunswick, Canada (Lamèque International Baroque Music Festival). Suzie Leblanc, soprano; Claire Guimond, traverso; Serge Istomin, violoncello; Richard Paré, harpsichord. Visit: <http://www.intellis.net/FestivalBaroqueLameque/>

Dare to have sense yourselves; assert the stage,  
Be justly warmed with your own native rage.

Another remark from Addison in the *Spectator* (no. 39) explained what he thought spoken tragedy should accomplish: "As a perfect tragedy is the noblest production of human nature, so it is capable of giving the mind one of the most delightful and most improving entertainments. Diversions of this kind wear out of our thought every thing that is mean and little. They cherish and cultivate that humanity which is the ornament of our nature."

It seems to have been the native rage that predominated as a result of Addison's dramatic efforts, however, rather than the appreciation of entertainment of a higher nature. Fear of Jacobite resurgence generated in the seventeen-teens and twenties a series of plays, which trumpeted what one journalist in 1731 could still regard as "wild Notions of Liberty and Patriotism" that were descended directly from Addison's *Cato*.<sup>5</sup>

I want to suggest that it was Italian opera performed at the King's Theatre, so much despised by Addison and his friends, which had a better chance than *Cato* of creating a discussion of ethics and political virtue which might actually be heard; that the more complex medium of music, spectacle and English translation of the libretto might at once neutralize the potentially inflammatory material, and not so incidentally insinuate its message of social stability achieved through virtue.

In his opera *Scipione* Handel found suitable subject matter for an improving drama in a Roman whose actions were irreproachable: Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus the Elder (236-183 B.C.E.), conqueror of Hannibal and savior of Rome in the second Punic war, had preserved the Roman republic and its liberty, and had enjoyed an almost uninterrupted reputation as an *exemplum* of Roman virtue since antiquity.<sup>6</sup> Already in ancient times there grew up a body of stories which attributed to Scipio heroic and even divine qualities, a heroization that "was a unique phenomenon in Rome's history."<sup>7</sup> Ennius (239-169 B.C.E.) celebrated his exploits in a poem called *Scipio*, in which Scipio is made to claim, "If it is right for a mortal to ascend to the regions of the gods, for me alone does the exalted gate of heaven stand open."<sup>8</sup> Cicero (*de Re Publica*, frag. 3), after quoting the Ennius passage, remarked that "the same gate stood open for Hercules." The identification of Scipio with Hercules was exploited further by Silius Italicus in his *Punica* (XV.18-128), where he likens the young Scipio's choice to lead the Roman armies to Spain to the legendary choice of Hercules between Pleasure and Virtue:<sup>9</sup>

These anxious thoughts filled the young [Scipio's] mind, as he sat beneath the green shadow of a bay-tree that grew behind the dwelling; and suddenly two figures, far exceeding mortal stature flew down from the sky and stood to right and left of him: Virtue was on one side and Pleasure, the enemy of Virtue, on the other. (18-22)

Nature herself [argues Virtue] assigned man to earth as a lesser god; but her fixed law has condemned degenerate souls to dwell in the darkness of Avernus.

On the other hand the gate of heaven stands open to those who have preserved the divine element born with them. Need I speak of Amphitryon's son [Hercules] who destroyed all monsters? or of Liber [Bacchus], whose chariot was drawn through the cities by Caucasian tigers when he came back in triumph from the conquered East, after subduing the Chinese and the Indians? (74-81)

When Virtue had uttered these prophesies from the shrine of her heart, she gained Scipio to her side; he rejoiced in the examples set before him, and his face showed his approval. (121-23)<sup>10</sup>

The comparison of Scipio to Hercules and his choice in Silius Italicus is a precedent for a similar parallel that I believe is in Rolli's libretto, and I will return to it again at the end of the essay. In any case, Scipio was an example of Roman virtue and self-restraint of the old, republican kind. Between classical and Christian writers he was credited with having nearly every virtue available to a Roman.<sup>11</sup> For medieval and early modern Europe, he was essentially a mythic character, embodying all that was best in idealized Greek heroism, while sharing in the immediacy of the historical Roman past. Dante, Petrarch, Montaigne and many others regarded him as a benchmark for military and moral virtues of all kinds. A Plutarchan "Life" was invented for him in the sixteenth century, which was subsequently included in translations of Plutarch, including North's, and in the 1660s there was a popular French novel about Scipio and Hannibal in the second Punic War which circulated in English translation as *The Grand Scipio*.<sup>12</sup>

Handel's *Scipione* is based on an episode known as "the continence of Scipio", which took place during the second Punic War while the 26-year old Scipio was still in Spain, and not yet either "Africanus" or "the Elder". After capturing the town of New Carthage (modern Cartagena) from the Carthaginians and their Spanish allies, Scipio's men presented him with a beautiful, young Iberian noblewoman found among the captives. Instead of accepting the woman and forcing his attentions on her, he returned her to the local prince to whom she was betrothed, and provided her ransom money as a dowry. Livy tells us that the grateful young man forthwith "filled the ears of his people with the well-deserved praises of Scipio: a most godlike young man had come, who carried all before him not only by arms but with generosity and kindly actions" (Livy, 26.50).

The Continence episode, repeated in numerous ancient sources, became part of the heroic lore attached to Scipio.<sup>13</sup> The conclusion of the story was a favorite with Renaissance and Baroque painters, who depicted Scipio returning the woman to her fiancé and parents. Nearly all paintings of the eighteenth century give the Iberian woman equal focus with Scipio,<sup>14</sup> but there is an interesting variation by Sebastiano Ricci, who worked both in north Italy and England at the beginning of the 18th century; this is more intimate and much more interested in Scipio's central role in controlling his desire. I note this painting in particular because Ricci, too, saw a thematic parallel between this "Continence" painting and the "Choice of Hercules": Ricci had also made a painting of the "Choice", more or less on traditional lines, with the seated and thoughtful Hercules

between the figures of Virtue and Pleasure. In the “Contenance” painting, the young Scipio, who bears a striking similarity to Ricci’s young Hercules, is placed in a similar posture, thus suggesting a similar choice between desire and magnanimity.<sup>15</sup>

Handel’s and Rolli’s operatic version tells the story as follows. As Scipio is rewarding his soldiers after the successful assault on New Carthage, he is presented with two beautiful captive women: Berenice, daughter of Ernando, king of the Balearic Islands, and Armira, the daughter of another Spanish prince. Scipione falls immediately in love with Berenice and entrusts the two women to the protection of his lieutenant Lelio, who falls in love with Armira. Unbeknownst to Scipione, Berenice was to be married to Lucejo, who was on his way to the wedding when New Carthage was taken. Disguised as a Roman soldier, Lucejo successfully insinuates himself into the palace where the women are being kept. As Berenice and Lucejo speak, Scipio turns up. Berenice pretends she does not know who Lucejo is in order to protect him. The first act closes with Lucejo struggling with uncertainty about whether Berenice is succumbing to Scipione’s advances.

In the second act, Berenice’s father Ernando arrives to ransom his daughter from the Romans. Scipione learns both of Berenice’s parentage and of her engagement to Lucejo (who is still disguised). Scipione pursues his suit to Berenice, though with entirely honorable intentions. The rest of the act is taken up by a series of romantic complications, but things clarify when Lucejo reveals who he is to Scipione and offers to fight him for Berenice. He is disarmed by Scipione’s guards. Scipione declares Berenice must marry a Roman, but she ends the act with a vigorous declaration of her constancy.

In the third act it appears that Scipione will send Lucejo to Rome in order to be able to pursue Berenice without competition. But Scipione grapples with his conscience and conquers his desires. He reunites the lovers, and a final chorus announces that Spain can be proud to be conquered by such a man. The Roman lieutenant Lelio’s desire for the Spanish princess Armira is only ambiguously resolved, for she has put him off with vague promises, while insisting that there can never be real love between conqueror and captive.

In 1726 this libretto had the potential to start any number of ideological hares. A treaty in 1725 between Spain and the Habsburg emperor Charles VI had made a war between England and Spain seem imminent to many Britons, and so the depiction of the conquest of Spain in the opera might be regarded as topical.<sup>16</sup> Secondarily, Armira’s insistence on liberty as a precondition for love with Lelio presents an interesting variation on the opposition between Liberty and Tyranny so dear to the rhetoric of the day. But what I would like to concentrate on here is the presentation of virtue in the opera. By 1726 the topic of public virtue would seem beyond cliché, and yet, as Shelley Burt has observed, “Following the Revolution of 1688, these platitudes were taken seriously and the politics of public virtue pursued in earnest.”<sup>17</sup> The opposition Country party, and then the Patriots under Bolingbroke made old-

fashioned republican virtue—which is to say aristocratic virtue—a cornerstone of their political opposition to the Whig government. At the same time the idea that innate human virtue was a necessary component of civic life was under philosophical attack in various ways. “Cato” in the early 1720s in the *London Journal* declared the old ideal of selfless civic virtue “too Heroick ...for the living Generation.” Bernard Mandeville attacked the philosophical optimism of the day and, according to Burt, came to the conclusion that, “Honorable actions, although valuable, are not virtuous, because they stem from an effort to satisfy the passion of pride rather than conquer it.”<sup>18</sup> Amidst such debates, an opera on the subject of the selfless virtue of Scipio takes on new interest.

The issue of virtue in *Scipione* is cast initially in terms of medieval chivalry, which comprises the mixture of warrior and lover so dear to opera. The depiction of Romans as chivalrous knights had at this point a long pedigree in European literature. Johan Huizinga observed that, in late medieval France, “Knighthood itself was considered to be Roman.”<sup>19</sup> In Italy, Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, the source of many operatic plots, could encourage a medieval knight to behave properly by referring to Greek and Roman heroics. Theodore Meron, observing the phenomenon in Shakespeare, remarks,

Shakespeare’s ability to extrapolate medieval and Christian concepts of chivalry to Roman, Trojan, early British and mythical wars and yet, at the same time, employ those early wars as a purported source and authority for chivalry should not come as a surprise. In this respect he follows the tradition of chivalric and English humanist literature. English medieval and humanist writers regarded Roman and Greek heroes as chivalrous pagan knights and good citizens, similar to those of the Middle Ages, except for their paganism.<sup>20</sup>

## **SPECIAL OFFERS FROM THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY**

The American Handel Society is offering sets of back issues of the *Newsletter* for the price of \$10 per year (three issues each), going back to the first year, 1986. All volumes are available, but some numbers are in short supply. We reserve the right to supply photocopies of individual numbers where necessary. In addition, the AHS has a limited number of copies of *Handel and the Harris Circle* at the price of \$7. This attractive and important booklet, written by Rosemary Dunhill, provides a useful introduction to the rich Harris family archive, recently deposited at the Hampshire Record Office in Winchester and discussed by Donald Burrows in the December 1996 issue of the *Newsletter*. The AHS also offers the CD “Handel’s Rivals” (music by Bononcini, Gasparini, Hasse, Porpora, Porta, D. Scarlatti, Vinci and Amadei) performed by the English ensemble Janiculum for \$14 (\$12 + \$2 shipping and handling).

The general fascination with chivalry persisted in the subsequent centuries: for example, in *The Touch-Stone: OR, Historical Political, Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Reigning Diversions of the Town*, published in 1728, we learn that one source of subjects, “can boast an inexhaustible fund of models for theatrical entertainments, particularly operas; viz. Knight-Errantry, which has in all ages produced so many valuable volumes of romances, memoirs, novels and ballads, either written or oral.”<sup>21</sup>

In opera, too, Romans could on occasion express courtly concern for the feelings of others, as well as draw swords in anger over slighted honor, or over desired ladies. For example, in Matteo Noris’s *Tito Manlio* (1696), Tito’s son, Manlio, who has specific instructions to avoid battle with the enemy Latins, is nevertheless drawn into battle with his intended brother-in-law Geminio when the latter taunts him for not behaving like a proper *cavaliere*:

*Geminio*: A warrior of honor is ready for a challenge.  
*Manlio*: My heart is ready, and my arm; but because I must await a better time, noble Latin champion, I put off until later the honor of fighting with you.  
*Geminio*: I want you to receive this proud honor now.  
*Manlio*: (In what difficulties am I!) Now is not the time for martial courage.  
*Geminio*: You are no knight.  
*Manlio*: (Ah, such a bitter insult brings my hand to my sword.) ...<sup>22</sup>

In *Scipione*, Rolli and Handel treat the Spanish characters in particular as touchy and passionate *cavaglieri*. This chivalric virtue is defined by Ernando, king of the Balearic islands. His role was set by Handel for a bass, which in this case serves to establish him as the mature figure of father and advisor. His two arias (II.1, “Braccio sì valoroso” and III.1, “Tutta rea la vita umana”) help define who Scipione should be and how he should behave, but the second makes the point most vigorously. In III.1, Scipione is still uncertain how to deal with his passion for Berenice. He asks Ernando for Berenice’s hand, but Ernando refuses with regrets, as he has betrothed her already to Lucejo. “But he’s our prisoner,” objects Scipione. “Go and consider it.” “I have already weighed it in my thoughts,” replies Ernando, and continues with the aria. (All translations are from the original London libretto.)

All human life would guilty be,  
 Vain series of brutality,  
 If Honour did not hold the reins.  
 To give one’s word is one’s sworn faith to plight,  
 The tongue, that from the heart declares it right,  
 By honour bound its sacred force maintains.<sup>23</sup>

This is not only a statement of chivalric honor but also of moral purpose. Ernando chooses to honor his own sworn word rather than sanction a marriage that would clearly provide political advantage. The aria serves to remind Scipione himself of how he ought to behave as he resolves his own moral dilemma about whether to satisfy his desire by force of authority (not a chivalrous option), or allow the lovers to marry.

In contrast to the authority of Ernando stands Lucejo, who in his own way is steadfast, but whose somewhat limited

view of his role as knight does not permit him to see larger realities. He has the part right about questing to reach his lady Berenice, and when he arrives on the scene disguised as a Roman soldier, he has music that *sounds* like a soldier’s aria, with vigorous staccatos alternating with strong emotional runs in the violins (I.2; *HG*, pp. 15-17). But what he says contrasts with the music:

Lonely and lamenting I,  
 Like the murmuring turtle, fly,  
 That hunts his spouse, from glade to glade,  
 And finds [her], to artful toils, betrayed;  
 Poor bird, enamoured by the side  
 Of his fair imprisoned bride,  
 Gladly falls within his snare,  
 Because his love, his life, is there.<sup>24</sup>

Berenice, when she discovers his presence, is horrified. She urges him to go, and return with an army to rescue her.<sup>25</sup> He replies he would rather die than be parted from her. He only behaves like a warrior at the least useful time: in Act II, when he can no longer bear watching Scipione propose to Berenice, he reveals his true identity, and offers to engage Scipione in a duel for Berenice. Disarmed at once by Scipione’s men, he asserts defiantly, but somewhat uselessly,

To Rome I yield, to you I yield;  
 ...  
 But as a lover, still I must declare  
 I scorn to yield, and dare thee to the war...<sup>26</sup>

Lucejo behaves as if he is living in a seventeenth-century madrigal, not a world where there are larger responsibilities to be taken.

In the end, however, everything depends on Scipione’s reaction to the stated positions. Scipione faces a choice between the romantic, madrigalesque, and essentially self-indulgent chivalry expressed by Lucejo, and the graver responsibilities to oneself and the larger world represented by Ernando. But his identity as conqueror and ruler also puts him in a different position from either of the Spaniards, for he can enforce his pleasure like a tyrant, rather than challenge a rival as a knight, the way Lucejo attempts to do. On the other hand, if he is to live up to his responsibilities as a Roman, he must, as his lieutenant Lelio tells him (III.2), have a heart that is *grande e umano*. In effect, then, this is his version of Hercules’s choice between virtue and pleasure, and Rolli and Handel wrote text and music to make this point. Having heard Ernando’s defense of honor in III.1 as the support of civilized life, Scipione debates in accompanied recitative whether to send Lucejo to Rome and force his attentions on Berenice:<sup>27</sup>

He who has less pleasure, lives less.  
 Virtue is an agonizing idea,  
 through which desire dies of thirst right next to the spring.  
 Yes, yes, I want!...but...no...get hold of yourself.  
 Can you not use your strength,  
 can you not desire, and justly, because you can  
 possess what you want?  
 This is not a pleasure which you

will share with beasts and tyrants.  
 What a reputation for virtue! But no, one  
 ought not act to get fame. Genuine good  
 is what you do because it pleases you within.  
 Oh second thoughts, you are generous,  
 You bring back, I think, my peace of mind.<sup>28</sup>

The final scene of the opera, then, resolves into the tableau familiar from the historical paintings. Scipione announces in a lyric passage which begins the *scena ultima*, “Now the fallen enemy has felt his doom, I’ll try new triumphs, I’ll myself o’ercome, And prove the bravest conqueror at home.” (*HG*, pp. 106-7.) Berenice and Lucejo are united and Scipione hailed, as he is by Livy’s Alluceius, possessor of a nearly divine greatness of soul. The chivalrous Spaniards receive him as one of their own, a man who respects both oaths and love.

But the Choice of Hercules which Scipione makes moves him beyond even Ernando’s conceptions, and might be characterized as anti-chivalric. Chivalry, even in Ernando’s words, is concerned with individual honor, and elevates the individual, whereas Scipione’s choice is for the greater good and the denial of both his individual desires and personal fame. In this respect the libretto is in accordance with one eighteenth-century English attitude toward the subject: “Chivalry,” observes Mark Girouard, “had little relevance to [an] ordinary gentle[man] living in security and comfort and leaving war to professionals. ... He might be proud of his medieval ancestors, ...but that he should in any way imitate them would have seemed absurd to him.”<sup>30</sup> In making the case against the aristocratic code of chivalry, the opera at the same time embraces the arguments of one of its proponents, Ernando, who argues that life without honor is barbarous. It is left to Scipio, the Roman general and putative equivalent of the English monarch, to redefine with his choice what that virtue means: repression of the self in favor of the greater social advantage.

That, at any rate, seems to have been the intent of the opera as originally conceived by Rolli and Handel. A difficulty arises in the apparent elimination of Scipio’s accompanied recitative in III.1 in performance (above, note 28). If this effective bit of self-examination is eliminated, Scipio’s motivations are not expressed and must be inferred from context and the *scena ultima*. Scipio’s virtue in the opera becomes the established fact of the tableau in the historical paintings, rather than the result of dramatic process. Focus is thrown instead on Lucejo’s agonies, not surprising perhaps in light of the fact that Senesino was singing the role.

In terms of the moral debates of the day, however, the opera, as first conceived, may be seen to object both to an outdated aristocratic virtue which finally satisfies only the self, and on the other hand to deny the claims by “Cato” and Mandeville that selfless civic virtue does not exist. If this is so, then I would make three claims for this work.

1) It addresses issues of political philosophy of the day in a way that does not offend any of the parties which might have seen it—king, country opposition, Whig government—because of the way in which it synthesizes conflicting definitions of virtue while answering

contemporary claims that civic virtue is a philosophical fantasy. Its politics are thus “neutralized” in such a way as to avoid the troubles of Cato while joining in the political dialogue.

2) Even with the elimination of the accompanied recitative, Handel and Rolli succeeded in producing the humane and morally improving drama envisioned by Addison for his spoken theatre, but which he denied to Italian opera.

3) The opera looks forward to the Handelian oratorio as popular vehicle for moral and patriotic messages. Ruth Smith suggests that the patriotic image of the self-sacrificing leader is not much represented in Handel’s operas, as it is in his later oratorios such as *Alexander Balus* and *Jephtha*. I would contend that in the opera *Scipione*, at least, Handel is already beginning to work with the artistic image of a moral ideal, eventually to be modulated to Biblical themes in the oratorios, but appealing here to the audience who patronized the Italian opera in the King’s Theater.

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1 This essay was read first at the April 2000 meeting of ASECS in Philadelphia, and is part of work in progress on operas written on Scipio stories. I wish to thank Ruth Smith for her commentary on an earlier draft; all errors are of course my own.

2 W. Dean and J.M. Knapp, *Handel’s Operas, 1704-1726*, rev. ed. (Oxford, 1995), p. 607 and note 6, citing (and slightly correcting) R. Strohm, “Händel und seine italienischen Operntexte”, *Händel-Jahrbuch* 21 (1975), pp. 120-22 (= Strohm, *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera* [Cambridge 1985], pp. 52-3). Sartori’s catalogue of libretti (vol. 5 no. 21258) wrongly identifies Rolli’s libretto as coming from Zeno’s *Scipione nelle Spagne*.

3 Both Rolli’s libretto and Handel’s music were written in haste to fill a gap in the season caused by the delayed arrival in London of Faustina Bordoni, for whom Handel was already composing *Alessandro* (performed later in the spring of 1726). See W. Dean and J.M. Knapp, *Handel’s Operas*, pp. 606ff, and D. Burrows, *Handel* (New York, 1994), pp.153-54. There is a general description of the opera by A. Hicks in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, vol. 4, pp. 269-70.

4 Letter of Pope to John Caryll, April 30, 1713, quoted by F. Smithers, *The Life of Joseph Addison*, 2nd ed. (Oxford 1968), p. 265.

5 “But *Cato* itself has increased the Evils of the present Time, how many Poetasters have since then infested the World with Wild Notions of Liberty and Patriotism!” The essay, in *The Universal Spectator*, April 10, 1731, is signed “Crito.” See J.C. Loftis, *Essays on the Theatre from Eighteenth Century Periodicals* (Los Angeles 1960), p. 17, and Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England* (Oxford 1963), p. 82.

6 For discussions of the ancient sources, see F.W. Walbank, "The Scipionic Legend", in *Selected Papers: Studies in Greek and Roman History and Historiography* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 120-37; and H.H. Scullard, *Scipio Africanus: Soldier and Politician* (Ithaca, 1970), pp. 18-27.

7 Scullard, *Scipio Africanus*, p. 25.

8 "Si fas est endo plagas caelestum ascendere cuiquam est / mi soli caeli maxima porta patet." The line is preserved in Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 1.18, where it is embedded in the fragmentary passage from Cicero's *de Re Publica* quoted here.

9 See A.R. Anderson, "Heracles and his Successors," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 39 (1928), pp. 31-7. Cf. Galinsky, "Scipionic Themes in Plautus' *Amphitruo*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 97 (1966), pp. 226-7.

10 Loeb Classical Library translation by J.D. Duff (New York & London, 1934).

11 See Henry Wheatland Litchfield, "National *Exempla Virtutis* in Roman Literature", *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 25 (1914), pp. 1-71, esp. the chart, p. 30. They include *virtus, pietas erga patriam, parentes, ceteros, constantia, continentia, paupertas, pudicitia, gravitas*. Christian writers suggested he sometimes lacked *clementia* and *moderatio*.

12 Pierre Ortigue Vaumorière, *Le grand Scipion* (Paris, 1656-57), translated by "G.H." as *The Grand Scipio: an Excellent New Romance* (London, 1660).

13 The story is told also in Polybius, Book 10.18, in similar though briefer terms by Valerius Maximus "de abstinentia et continentia" (IV.iii.1), and in Cassius Dio, 27.48 and Zonaras's summary of Dio, 9.8.

14 She is, for example, the central focus of Tiepolo's mural in the Villa Cordellina in Vicenza, painted in 1743-44.

15 See J. Daniels, *Sebastiano Ricci* (Hove, Sussex, 1976), Plate III, cat. no. 147 ("The Continenence of Scipio"), and fig. 20, cat. no. 19 ("The Choice of Hercules").

16 R. Hatton, *George I* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), pp. 267-79. There is an irony here, since Salvi's libretto, from which Rolli adapted *Scipione*, was written to celebrate Habsburg accomplishments in Spain during the War of Spanish Succession.

17 S. Burtt, *Virtue Transformed. Political Argument in England, 1688-1740* (Cambridge, 1992), p.150.

18 Burtt, p. 140, commenting on Mandeville, *An Enquiry into the Origin of Honour; and the Usefulness of Christianity in War* (London, 1732). Five years after the production of *Scipione*, James Pitt was to write, "To expect men in power and office should pursue the good of the public, without any regard to their own particular interest, is the most ridiculous expectation in the world." (*London Journal*, September 25, 1731, quoted by Ruth Smith in *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth Century Thought* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 335 and note 1.

19 J. Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. R.J. Payton and U. Mammitzsch (Chicago, 1996), pp. 61ff.; 75.

20 T. Meron, *Bloody Constraint: War and Chivalry in Shakespeare* (New York & Oxford, 1998), p. 47.

21 Quoted by E. Harris, *The Librettos of Handel's Operas*, vol. 10 (New York & London 1989), p. x. *The Touch-Stone* has long been attributed to James Ralph; however, Lowell Lindgren has recently argued that its author was more likely Robert Samber. See Lindgren's "Another critic named Samber whose 'particular significance has gone almost entirely unnoticed," in *Festa Musicologica: Essays in Honor of George J. Buelow*, ed. T. J. Mathiesen and B. V. Rivera (Stuyvesant, NY, 1995), pp. 407-34.

22 *Geminio*: Guerrier d'onor alla disfida è pronto. / *Manlio*:

Pronto è il cor, pronto il braccio; / ma perchè miglior tempo attender deggio, / alto campion latino, / l'onor di pugnar teco io mi riserbo. / *Geminio*: Io vo' ch'ora tu vadda / di questo onor superbo. / *Manlio*: (In quali angustie sono!) / Tempo rimane al animo guerriero. / *Geminio*: Tu non sei cavaliero. / *Manlio*: (Ah, puntura sì acerba / porta al brando la mano.)...

23 Tutta rea la vita umana / Saria sol brutale e vana / Senza il freno dell' onor. / Dar parola, è dar sua fede, / E la lingua, che la diede / Fu ministra sol del Cor.

24 Lamentandomi corro a volo, / Qual colombo che solo, solo / Va cercando la sua diletta / Involata dal cacciator. / E poi misero innamorato / Prigioniero le resta a lato, / ma la gabbia pur l'aletta / Perchè restaci col su' amor.

25 Say, thou charmer of my eye, / Say, Lucceius, thou must die: / But, my charmer, do not say, far from me, go far away. (I.6, p. 17)

26 Cedo a Roma, e cedo a te, / Ma in amor, / No non ti cedo, no, / ti sfido all' armi. *Scipione* (*G.F. Händels Werke: Ausgabe der Deutschen Händelgesellschaft*, vol. 77) ed. F. Chrysander (1877), pp. 59-61.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 76-78

28 Chi meno gode, vive men. Virtute / È tormentosa opinion per cui / Muor di sete il desire al fonte appresso. / Sì, sì voglio—ma—no—torna in te stesso. / Puoi non usar tua forza / Puoi non voler, giusto perchè tu puoi / Posseder quel che vuoi? / Questo è un piacer, che non avrai comune / Co' bruti, e co' Tiranni. / Qual fama di Virtù! Ma no, per fama / Ben oprar non si dè. Ben far verace / E quel ch' uom fa, perchè al su' interno piace. / Oh secondo pensier, sei generoso, / Tu riporti, lo sento, il mio riposo.

This accompanied recitative has its basis in III.18 of Salvi's libretto, where it, too, is a Choice of Hercules; however, the dilemma is very different. Scipio is being offered Berenice by her father's representative, but chooses not to accept the marriage because it will distract from the immortal glory of his military career. Rolli has reconceived the piece to address the issue of Virtue, not glory and immortality.

Handel scored this passage, and it is given in Italian in the 1726 libretto, but not translated into English, which suggests it was not included in the first production. This is, as Dean and Knapp observed, "an extraordinary decision, for it is one of the opera's most striking movements" (*Handel's Operas*, p. 615). The consequence of such a cut is discussed below.

29 Dopo il Nemico oppresso, / Voglio esser di me stesso / Più forte Vincitor.

30 Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven & London, 1981), p. 19.

31 Smith, *Handel's Oratorios*, pp. 336-37.

**2001 Rheingau Musik Festival**

**Water Music; Suite Nr. 1 F major** (HWV 348). July 29. Basilika, Kloster Eberbach. Also music by Vivaldi and Pisendel. Academy of Ancient Music; Andrew Manze, conductor.

**Acis and Galatea**. August 19. Basilika, Kloster Eberbach. Acis: Patrick Henckens; Galatea: Simone Kermes; Damon: Johannes Kalpers; Polyphemus: Peter Lika; Prager Kammerorchester; Prager Kammerchor; Michael Hofstetter, conductor.

Visit: <http://www.rheingau-musik-festival.de/>

**Flanders (Brugge) Early Music Festival**

**"Roma Amor"** (works by Handel, A. & D. Scarlatti, Traetta). August 5. Sint-Jacobkerk, Brugge, Belgium. Les Talens Lyriques; Christophe Rousset, conductor.

**"Haendel versus Brahms"**. August 10. Ryelandtzaal, Brugge, Belgium. Johannette Zomer, soprano; Valérie Gabail, soprano; Jan Michiels & Inge Spinette, pianoforte.

Visit: <http://www.musica-antiqua.com/>

**Acis and Galatea**. August 6. Royal Albert Hall, London. Galatea: Rosemary Joshua; Acis: Toby Spence; Damon: James Gilchrist; Polyphemus: John Tomlinson; Chorus of the Academy of Ancient Music; Academy of Ancient Music; Paul Goodwin, conductor. Visit: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/proms/> or <http://www.royalalberthall.com>

**Handel Arias**. August 8. Kyburigade, Switzerland. Lynne Dawson, soprano; The King's Consort; Robert King, conductor. Also August 11, Nordic Baroque Music Festival; Parish Church, Nordmaling, Sweden; August 12, Turku, Finland. Visit: <http://www.tkcworld.com>

**2001 Innsbruck Festival (11-25 August)**

**"Cantatas & Sonatas"**. August 11. Spanischer Saal, Schloss Ambras, Innsbruck, Austria. Handel: "Vedendo amor", "Siete rose rugielose". Also music by Vivaldi, Purcell, A. and D. Scarlatti. Lawrence Zazzo, countertenor; Nicolau de Figueiredo, Cembalo

**Music for the Royal Fireworks** (including fireworks display). August 25. Hofgarten-Pavillon, Innsbruck, Austria. Bläserensemble der Innsbrucker Sommerakademie; Alfredo Bernardini, conductor.

Visit <http://www3.tiscover.com/fest-alte-musik/>

**2001 Three Choirs Festival**

**Concerto Grosso No. 5**. August 22. Gloucester Cathedral. Also the aria "Giove in Argo" and **Diana Cacciatrice**. The London Handel Orchestra; Denys Darlow, conductor.

**Messiah**. August 22. Gloucester Cathedral. Nicki Kennedy, soprano; Robin Blaze, countertenor; James Gilchrist, tenor; Michael George, bass; David Ponsford, continuo; Ian Ball, continuo; Philharmonia Orchestra; The Gloucester Festival Chorus; Gloucester Cathedral Choir; David Briggs conductor.

Visit <http://www.3choirs.org/>

**2001 Edinburgh International Festival (12 August-2 September)**

**"David Daniels Sings Handel"**. August 23. Usher Hall, Edinburgh, Scotland. Concerti a due cori Nos. 1, 2 and 3; Arias from **Partenope**, **Giulio Cesare** and **Rodelinda**. David Daniels, countertenor; Scottish Chamber Orchestra; Rinaldo Alessandrini, conductor.

**"Handel in Dublin"**. August 27. Usher Hall, Edinburgh, Scotland. **Messiah**, Organ Concertos Op. 4 No. 3 in G minor and Op. 4 No. 5 in F. Lisa Milne, soprano; Robin Blaze, countertenor; Catherine Wyn-Rogers, mezzo-soprano; Paul Agnew, tenor; Neal Davies, bass; Silas Standage, organ; Scottish Chamber Orchestra; Sir Charles Mackerras, conductor.

Visit: <http://www.eif.co.uk>

**2001 Festival International de Musique et d'Art Lyrique, Montreux (18 August-10 September)**

**Alcina**. August 26. Auditorium Stravinski, Montreux, Switzerland. Alcina: Joan Rodgers; Morgan: Lisa Larsson; Ruggiero: Monica Groop; Bradamante: Patricia Bardon; Oberto: Gail Pearson; Oronte: Rufus Müller; Melisso: Lorenzo Regazzo; The Academy of Ancient Music; Choeur des Musiciens du Louvre; Paul Goodwin, conductor.

Visit <http://www.montreux-festival.com/>

**Concerto grosso in D major, Op. 6 No. 5, Water Music: Suite in D; "Va tacito" from Giulio Cesare**. August 31. Royal Albert Hall, London. Also music by Vivaldi. Andreas Scholl; counter-tenor; Genevieve Lacey, recorder; Australian Brandenburg Orchestra; Paul Dyer, conductor. Visit: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/proms/> or <http://www.royalalberthall.com>

**Water Music: Suites in D, F and G major; Concerti Grossi Op.6 No.6 and Op. 3, No. 2**. September 21. Ateneul Roman, Bucharest, Romania. The Academy of Ancient Music; Paul Goodwin, conductor. Visit: <http://www.aam.co.uk/>

**Arias from Rinaldo and Rodelinda**. August 28. Salle Henry Le Boeuf, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Belgium. Andreas Scholl, countertenor; Barbara Bonney, soprano; Freiburger Barockorchester. Visit: <http://www.sofil.be/>

Compiled by Brad Leissa

**THE HANDEL INSTITUTE AWARDS**

Applications are invited for *Handel Institute Awards* (up to £1,000) in support of research projects involving the life or works of Handel or his contemporaries. Deadline September 1. Further details may be obtained from the secretary of the Handel Institute, Dr Elizabeth Gibson, The Red House, Aldeburgh, Suffolk, IP15 5PZ, England (email: [elizabeth@gibsone.free-online.co.uk](mailto:elizabeth@gibsone.free-online.co.uk)).

How would the joint direction/production team of Francisco Negrin and Anthony Baker stage the many magic effects called for in the score? Things started well enough: there was a magic cube that appeared in various sizes, its sides often covered in clouds, directly responsive to the libretto's cloud, which "covers Almirena and Armida, and carries 'em up swiftly into the Air." While this cube did not levitate, it was a useful device. Characters could be trapped in it; it could rotate and suddenly become translucent revealing a new character; and the famous Mermaids/Sirens of Act II seemed to float out of its surface. The cube became a useful emblem of magic effects, and it was the central stage effect, there being little scenery.

But things went dreadfully wrong with this production at the end of Act II. When Armida sang "Vo' far guerra," Handel's famous harpsichord obbligato became the occasion for very low humor. One of the "dreadful Monsters" of the libretto, present in the form of dancers who parodied eighteenth-century servants, played a mock harpsichord on stage. This led to some campy interchange between Armida and the pit harpsichordist, Armida finally sweeping the monster aside to pretend to play the harpsichord, which exploded in the final ritornello. The audience members around me were laughing so hard it was impossible to hear Handel's "celebrated" harpsichord solo much less the formidable voice of Christine Goerke. I was not amused.

As for the text, the "Urtext of the Halle Handel Edition by Michael Rot" was used, according to the program. The program noted that an accompanied recitative from the 1731 version had been interpolated, but the text was mainly that of 1711, with about five arias cut without comment. An anonymously translated libretto, mostly uncut, was for sale in the lobby. With two intermissions, the production ran from 7:30pm to about 10:40.

Harry Bicket was the conductor, and he got responsive playing from the modern instruments in the pit. The strings seemed happy, while the woodwinds played with too dark a tone. This spoiled Armida's "Ah! crudel," which is one of the highlights of the score.

The directors' decision to turn a magic opera into a farce left the audience cheering for the villains by the end. Christine Goerke was a forthright Armida and Denis Sedov a brilliant Argante, and their larger voices projected well in the infamously feeble acoustics of the New York State Theater. For the three male leads Handel had two castrati and a woman, but we got no less than three countertenors. This was apparently David Daniel's first on-stage Rinaldo and he did some effective singing in the slower arias, but the passage-work in the faster arias was not as well focused. Daniel Taylor, the only other alumnus of the new Decca recording of *Rinaldo* conducted by Christopher Hogwood, was not Eustazio as on the recording but rather Goffredo. Shorn of his entrance aria at the outset of Act I, Taylor did not sing well the night I attended, with pitch problems possibly a result of attempting to project in this big theater. A third countertenor, Christopher Josey, sang the part of Eustazio. A bit of countertenor weariness set in as a result of this casting decision; a strong female mezzo as Goffredo (as in Handel) would have added variety.

Based entirely on recordings and videos, I have always admired the artistry of Lisa Saffer, but her Almirena was curiously pale. Her "Lascia ch'io panga" desperately needed ornaments in the da capo. The minor roles were generally well served, and Nina Stern was a fantastic on-stage "flautoletto" [sic] player in the "delightful Grove" scene (sorry, no live birds).

William D. Gudger

## HANDEL-L

HANDEL-L is a list sponsored by the American Handel Society at the University of Maryland. The list offers a forum for discussion of the life, times, and works of George Frideric Handel as well as related topics. HANDEL-L is open to all and welcomes comments, questions, and short reports from scholars, performers, and others interested in Handel. To subscribe to HANDEL-L, send the following command to [listserv@umdd.umd.edu](mailto:listserv@umdd.umd.edu):

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Graydon Beeks serves as moderator of HANDEL-L. In that capacity he reviews all postings for relevance and suitability and communicates with submitters if necessary.

## NEWSLETTER

### of The American Handel Society

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The Editor welcomes comments, contributions, and suggestions for future issues.

## THE J. MERRILL KNAPP RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

The Board of Directors of the American Handel Society invite applications for the year 2002 J. Merrill Knapp Research Fellowship, an award of up to \$2,000 to be granted to an advanced graduate student or a scholar in an early stage of his or her career. This fellowship may be used on its own or to augment other grants or fellowships, but may be held no more than twice. The fellowship is intended to support work in the area of Handel or related studies. The winner of the award is given the opportunity to present a paper at the biennial meeting of the American Handel Society.

In awarding the fellowship, preference will be given to advanced graduate students; to persons who have not previously held the fellowship; to students at North American universities and residents of North America; and to proposals on specifically Handelian topics.

Applicants should submit a resume, a description of the project for which the fellowship will be used (not to exceed 750 words), a budget showing how and when the applicant plans to use the funds, and a description of other grants applied for or received for the same project. In addition, applicants should have two letters of recommendation sent directly to the Society at the address below.

Applications for the 2002 Fellowship must be postmarked no later than March 15, 2002 and should be sent to: Professor William Gudger, Department of Music, The College of Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina 29424-0001. Letters of recommendation may be sent by e-mail to [gudgerw@netscape.net](mailto:gudgerw@netscape.net). Applicants will be notified of the Board's decision by May 15, 2002.

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