

NEWSLETTER

of

The American Handel Society

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Handelian Anecdotes: A Cautionary Tale

The Handelian literature is full of anecdotes, many published long after the composer's death, which purport to illustrate aspects of the Great Man's character. Some have the ring of truth, while others can easily be dismissed. The great majority, however, fall somewhere in between these two extremes and must be viewed with a certain healthy scepticism.

John Taylor's *Records of My Life*, published in 1832 in two volumes, contains the following story (printed in Christopher Hogwood's biography of Handel on page 209):

I had the pleasure of a slight acquaintance with Dr. Morell, well known for learning and piety, and who selected subjects from the Scriptures for Handel's oratorios. I heard him say that one fine summer morning he was roused out of bed at five o'clock by Handel, who came in his carriage a short distance from London. The doctor went to the window and spoke to Handel, who would not leave his carriage. Handel was at the time composing an oratorio. When the doctor asked him what he wanted, he said "What de devil means de vord billow?" which was in the oratorio the doctor had written for him. The doctor, after laughing at so ludicrous a reason for disturbing him, told him that billow meant wave, a wave of the sea. "Oh, de vave" said Handel, and bade his coachman return, without addressing another word to the doctor."

Presumably this story refers to the year 1747 when Handel was setting Morell's libretto to *Alexander Balus* which does, indeed, contain a line with the word "billows" in Cleopatra's lengthy final scene.

There is nothing about this story which renders it categorically impossible. It might even be substantially true, despite the fact that Taylor apparently wrote his memoirs entirely from memory without relying on any form of written documentation. The portrait of an impatient composer accords well with the anecdotes concerning the composition of *Judas Maccabaeus* and *Alexander Balus* which Morell set down in a letter of circa

continued on page 5



The Rev. Thomas Morell, D.D. (1703-1784). Engraving by James Basire after painting by William Hogarth.

1990 AHS Membership Meeting

The meeting of the members of The American Handel Society will take place on Friday, November 5, 1990 in conjunction with the tenth Maryland Handel Festival at the University of Maryland, College Park. Situated just outside of Washington D.C., the Festival has been sponsored by the University since 1981. The Festival will offer members of the society tickets to individual concerts at a 15% reduction in price (the subscription price to the full series of concerts is already discounted). In addition, members of the AHS will receive the special festival rate at the Best Western motel (with its indoor swimming pool) adjacent to the College Park campus.

continued on page 4

Halle-an-der-Saale, Handel's birthplace, is an industrial city whose history reaches back for over a millennium. Its oldest buildings include the 10th-century foundations of a castle, a late medieval church (now restored), and the ruins of the Giebiechenstein redoubt in the area where Handel's grandfather Georg Taust was pastor. Later monuments including Handel's birthplace, the Marienkirche on the market square, the Calvinist Cathedral, the Martin-Luther University, and a few other old buildings number among its other historical attractions. For almost four decades the city has played host to a Handel Festival and its university has supported Handel research and the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe. Though Hallensers lament the neglect of their city during the last 45 years, they are rightfully proud that, discouraging conditions notwithstanding, the Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft has planned and presented an immense Festival that has produced memorable performances of Handel's works and scholarly conferences that have made valuable contributions to Handel scholarship.

In the last few years there have been signs of change in Halle: the white-on-red political banners and placards praising state socialism began to disappear about three years ago; within the last two years, the offices at the Händel-Haus acquired a computer and a photocopy machine. The final preparations for the 39th Festival went forward under conditions of even more radical change that continued during the festival itself. Visitors found at least three West German Banks preparing to do business in Halle, a commercial photocopy center on Leipziger Strasse (the street's original name having been restored only a few weeks before), political posters of all persuasions in layers on walls, and sidewalk merchants, mostly from West Germany, peddling all manner of goods for local currency or for west marks. Many stores had locally made goods for sale in east marks at reduced prices; others stores displayed West German goods for sale in west marks. Everyone was talking with a mixture of hope and anxiety about the impending economic unification of the two Germanies and its consequences. But the most startling sign of change was the name "MILDE SORTE", a cigarette popular in West Germany, emblazoned on the cover of the Festival's program book and on tickets.

The 1990 Festival doubtless will be the last to be produced under the conditions of state socialism in which large-scale cultural projects are, to a far greater extent than in the west, matters of politics as well as art. Questions about the future of the Händelfestspiele and indeed the Society itself were on everyone's mind. In the present case, the matter is complicated by the fact that the new unified Germany will have two very distinguished Handel festivals that take place in successive weeks in June and a third in February. Can all three continue? The artistic quality and the scholarly scope and richness of thirty-nine Halle festivals are a strong argument in Halle's favor—if choices must be made.

continued on page 5

There is a growing trend to view Handel's operas as comedies. This has been particularly evident as a director's choice in contemporary staged productions, but is seemingly more and more prevalent in scholarly writing on Handel as well. I find little, if any, historical justification for such a reading. On the other hand, I see, especially in the hands of contemporary operatic directors, an approach to *opera seria* that is geared to win the acceptance of twentieth-century audiences, not their understanding. Granted, it is difficult to know how to present *opera seria* to today's audiences.

Winton Dean stated the problem clearly in *Handel and the Opera Seria* (p.100): "A modern listener is easily puzzled by the tone of Handel's librettos, and in particular by doubt as to how seriously they ought to be taken." He then went on to classify as "antiheroic" seven of Handel's operas that "contain a prominent element of mockery, parody, or satire." Two of these, *Almira* and *Agrippina* are Handel's earliest surviving operas and include comic characters in the seventeenth-century tradition. Three of them are Handel's last, *Serse*, *Imeneo*, and *Deidamia*, which clearly form a group different in tone from Handel's earlier works. Indeed, the argument for *Serse* specifically mentions that "the basis of the story" resides in "some imbecilities [sic]," and the cast list describes *Serse*'s servant, Elviro, as "a facetious Fellow."

The remaining two, *Flavio* and *Partenope*, come respectively from the Royal Academy and the so-called Second Academy periods, during which times Handel was (otherwise) choosing only serious heroic texts. *Partenope*, however, is one libretto for which we have contemporary evidence that it might have been considered a parody in Handel's lifetime. In 1726, Owen Swiney described his relief that the opera was not chosen for the Royal Academy; he says that "Stampiglia (the author of it) endeavours to be humorous and witty in it" and that its success was based solely on "a depravity of Taste in the audience." (Quoted by Elizabeth Gibson in "The Royal Academy of Music and its Directors", p.150.)

It would be a simple matter to place these operas, excepting perhaps *Flavio*, in a special category of works identified by the use of comic characters or humorous scenes. It is difficult, however, to consider them comedies, and even more difficult to consider them parodies. In fact, the inclusion of comic characters may actually lessen the possibility that these texts were written with "mockery, parody, or satire" of the *opera seria* conventions in mind. Certainly, the use of comic characters has never been an absolute indication of parody; nor does their use necessarily indicate a less-than-serious drama. Rather, comic characters are generally used to place the actions of the serious characters in perspective. The serious characters may thus be seen to be foolish, but this does not make the serious characters a parody of their type. It is very important, I think, to make a clear distinction between comic interludes and comedy and between comedy and parody. *Romeo and Juliet* does not become a comedy because it contains comic elements;

nor is it a parody. The same could be said of Mozart's late operas. We can tell from the music (at the very least) that here are characters and emotions that are to be taken very seriously.

With Handel's operas, the detection of comedy or parody mostly depends on the eye of the beholder, and it is simply too easy to find unintentional comedy in any of Handel's operas. What then are we to say when in addition to the operas listed above, Reinhard Strohm calls *Orlando* Handel's "decisive answer to Baroque comedy" ("Comic traditions in Handel's *Orlando*," p.267), or when Winton Dean and J. Merrill Knapp write of *Muzio Scevola* that "this absurd gallimaufry might have been designed as a parody of all that is windy and inconsequent in the convention of heroic *opera seria*" (*Handel's Operas: 1704-1726*, p.369), and that *Ottone* "could pass for a parody of *opera seria*" (p. 420)? If these operas are parodies, then what is the model they parody?

Parody and comedy were no strangers to English eighteenth-century theater. *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) was, in addition to its political satire, a true parody of *opera seria*, and included a wonderful send-up of the March from *Rinaldo*. Even more straightforward a parody was John Frederick Lampe's *The Dragon of Wantley* (1738), which was largely directed at Handel. Of course, good parody, like good comedy, frequently depends on the actors playing their roles seriously; otherwise it is little more than slapstick, as any devoted fan of Gilbert and Sullivan knows.

Good comic material is intrinsically funny. One litmus test of comedy, therefore, is to play it seriously. Handel's operas fail this test. When sung and acted at face value, they reveal themselves to be serious explorations of human emotion, despite the rare comic moment. Though they can be easily parodied, they are not parodies.

No Handel opera, however, is exempt from being treated as a parody. Thus, for example, we have Donal Henahan's review of the 1989 Houston performance of *Giulio Cesare* (*The New York Times*, October 31, 1989) in which he praises the director, Nicholas Hytner, for attempting "to overcome the formal obstacles that Handel set in his path by treating 'Caesar' as a musical comedy with serious overtones." Handel is hardly the only opera composer who suffers in this way, and images of Wagner parodies come quickly to mind. Indeed, if *Partenope* is a parody in large part because Arsace is able to reveal that his supposed enemy Emireno is really his beloved Rosmira in disguise "through that monument to seventeenth-century impropriety, Arsace's challenge to a bare-chested duel" (Robert Freeman, "The Travels of *Partenope*," p.367), then surely *Siegfried*—in which the hero, thinking the enchanted Brünnhilde is a male warrior, cuts through her breast-plate and then exclaims, "Das ist kein Mann!"—is parody as well. Certainly audiences have tittered, if not laughed, at both moments.

As long as the Handel scholarly community continues to add to the list of Handel's supposed comedies and parodies of *opera seria*, directors, singers, and audiences will continue to feel justified in taking any opera and making fun of it. This gives a false impression not only of Baroque opera and *opera seria*, but of Handel's musi-

cal achievement as well. At the very least, Handel's music deserves better.

Ellen T. Harris

Handel Calendar

The AHS welcomes news or leads about events of interest to Handelians. If possible, please include an address where readers may obtain details.

Water Music (complete). Los Angeles Baroque Orchestra, dir. G. Maldonado. **Oct. 5:** 1st Pres. Church, Santa Monica, CA; **Oct. 6:** Our Savior's Luth. Church, Long Beach, CA; **Oct. 7:** Holliston United Meth. Church, Pasadena, CA. LABO, 2554 Lincoln Blvd. 344, Marina Del Rey, CA 90291-5082. (213) 578-7698.

Alcina. B. Valente, M. Lerner, D. Brown, C. Robbin, D.P. Byrne, G. McLeod; dir. G. Mostart, cond. K. Montgomery. **Oct. 27, 30, Nov. 1, 3:** Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Georgia & Hamilton Streets, Vancouver, B.C. Vancouver Opera Association, 1132 Hamilton Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6B 2S2. (604) 682-2871.

Maryland Handel Festival and Conference. Incl *Joseph, Agrippina, Messiah* and conference "Handel and his Performers," "Handel and the Old Testament," and "Editing and the Halle Handel Edition." Details in this issue of Newsletter. **Oct. 31-Nov. 4.** MHF, Dept. of Music, Univ. of MD, College Park, MD 29742. (301) 454-5265.

Bach-Fest '90. Incl **Nov. 13:** Keiser: *Croesus*, R. Schwarz, cond.; **Nov. 15:** *Saul*, S. Greenberg, I. Verebics, D. Ragin, N. van der Meel, P. Lika; Gächinger Kantorei & Bach-Collegium Stuttgart; cond. H. Rilling. **Nov. 13-19.** BF 90, c/o Bell'Arte GmbH, 8000 München, 2, Marsstrasse 74, Federal Republic of Germany. (089) 123 36 92.

Clori, Tirsi e Fileno. N. Argenta, L. Hunt, D. Minter; Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, cond. N. McGegan. **Nov. 9:** 1st Meth. Church, Palo Alto, Ca; **Nov. 10-11:** 1st Cong. Church, Berkeley, CA; **Nov. 16:** Herbst Theater, San Francisco. PBO, 57 Post Str., Suite 705, S.F., CA 94104. (415) 391-5252.

"Handel Collections and their History." First Triennial Handel Conference. Details in The Handel Institute Newsletter. **Nov. 24-26.** THI, Dr. Colin Timms, Secy., Dept. of Music, Univ. of Birmingham, P.O. Box 363, Birmingham B15 2TT, England.

Messiah. (1742 version) L. Hunt, P. Spence, R. Tate, W. Parker; U.C. Berkeley Chamber Choir, dir. P. Brett; Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, cond. N. McGegan. **Dec. 19:** 1st Meth. Church, Palo Alto, CA; **Dec. 21:** Herbst Theatre, San Francisco, CA; **Dec. 22-23:** Hertz Hall, U.C. Berkeley, CA. PBO, 57 Post St., Suite 705, S.F., CA 94104. (415) 391-5252.

Göttinger Händel-Festspiele. June 12-16, 1991. Göttinger Händel-Gesellschaft e.V., Hainholzweg 3-5, 3400 Göttingen, Federal Republic of Germany, att'n: Frau E.M. Starke. 05 51 / 5 67 00.

Händel-Festspiele der DDR. June 7-11, 1991. Händel-Festspiele der DDR, Händel-Centrum, Kl. Brauhausstrasse 26, DDR-4020 Halle/Saale, German Democratic Republic, att'n: Dr. H. John or Dr. K. Haake.

AHS Meeting from page 1

Seating for all concerts is limited, and for that reason the Festival asks that AHS ticket orders (on the form enclosed) be in hand by September 25 at the latest. We also enclose a card for the Best Western Motel in College Park; it should be returned directly to the hotel no later than October 1.

Maryland Handel Festival Program

(Except where indicated, all events take place on the College Park Campus of the University of Maryland. Schedule and locations subject to change.)

Wednesday, October 31, 1990

4:30 p.m. Tawes Recital Hall

Fourth Annual American Handel Society Lecture
Don E. Saliers, Professor of Theology and Liturgics,
Candler School of Theology, Emory University:
"Words and The Word: Sounding the Text of
Handel's *Messiah*"

6:00 Buffet supper

7:00 Bus leaves for Baltimore

8:00 p.m.—Joseph Meyerhoff Symphony Hall, Baltimore

Concert I: MESSIAH

Phyllis Bryn-Julson, Anne Pemberton Johnson, Molly Donnelly, John Aler, David Evitts, University of Maryland Chorus, Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, Paul Traver, conductor

Thursday, November 1, 1990

10:00 a.m. Hornbake Library, third floor

Conference Session I: "Handel and His Performers"
Paul Hume, Moderator

C. Steven LaRue: "Francesca Cuzzoni, Faustina Bordoni, and the Creation of Handel's *Alessandro*"

Graydon Beeks: "Exit, Pursued by a Bear": The Haymarket Opera Orchestra and Handel's Arrival in England"

Richard G. King: "Handel and Princess Anne"

3:00 p.m. Tawes Fine Arts Building, Room 3131

Meeting of the Board of Directors of The American Handel Society

8:00 p.m. Colony Ballroom, Adele Stamp Union

Concert II: CHAMBER MUSIC BY HANDEL AND BACH

Anner Bylsma, cello

John Gibbons, harpsichord

Friday, November 2, 1990

9:30 a.m. Hornbake Library, third floor

Conference Session II: "Editing and the Halle Handel Edition"

Paul Hume, Moderator

Siegfried Flesch: "The Halle Handel Edition"

Mark Stahura: "A New View of Handel's Instrumental Markings"

Donald Burrows: "Handel's London Oratorio Performances"

4:00 p.m. Hornbake Library, third floor

Business Meeting of The American Handel Society

5:30 p.m. Best Western Maryland Inn, College Park

Cocktails and Supper for AHS members (no-host)

8:00 p.m. Tawes Recital Hall

Concert III: YOUNG ARTIST RECITAL

Pomeroy Prize Winners: Jennifer Wynn-Post, Molly Donnelly, Robert Petillo

Saturday, November 3, 1990

9:30 a.m. Hornbake Library, third floor

Conference Session III: "Handel and the Old Testament"

Paul Hume, Moderator

Howard H. Cox: "Handel's Portraits of Saul, David, and Solomon"

Jane Berdes: "Joseph Oratorios in the Venetian Ospedali grandi"

Duncan Chisholm: "Two Josephs: Handel versus Defesch"

2:00 p.m. Tawes Recital Hall

Concert IV: AGRIPPINA

Leneida Crawford, Allis Druffel, Lisa Erikson, Jeff Kensmoe, Eve Kornhauser, Karen Olson, Diane Rose, Russell Wilder, Maryland Opera Studio, Leon Major, director, University of Maryland Orchestra, Nicholas McGegan, conductor

(Additional performances on October 30 and November 1 at 8:00 p.m. in Tawes Recital Hall.)

Sunday, November 4, 1990

1:30 p.m. Maryland Room, Marie Mount Hall

Panel Discussion: "Joseph—a Coat of Many Colors"
Howard Serwer, Coordinator

Andrew Porter, Moderator

3:00 p.m. Memorial Chapel

Concert V: JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN

Rebecca Littig, Molly Donnelly, Graham Pushee, Robert Petillo, David Evitts, University of Maryland Chorus, Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, Paul Traver, conductor

The American Handel Society Research Fellowship 1990

The Directors of The American Handel Society are pleased to announce that the recipient of The American Handel Society Research Fellowship for 1990 is Richard G. King, a Ph.D. candidate in musicology at Stanford University preparing a dissertation on the composition and reception of Handel's *Alessandro*. He will also edit *Alessandro* for the Hallische Händel Ausgabe. Mr. King has undertaken a study of material relating to Handel in archives in the Netherlands, and the results will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Music & Letters* under the title "Handel in Holland, 1750". He will use the \$1,500 AHS Fellowship award to support further biographical research on Handel in those archives, and will present a paper at the 1990 Maryland Handel Festival and Conference. The AHS Fellowship Committee consisted of John H. Roberts, chair, Phillip H. Highfill and Marita P. McClymonds.

Anecdotes from page 1

1770. The vaudeville German accent is a typical feature of late accounts, but there are indications that Handel's pronunciation of English was somewhat inflected. Morell resided at Turnham Green just outside London and only a brief drive from Handel's house in Brook Street.

Taylor, who lived from 1757 to 1832, was the grandson of the "Chevalier" John Taylor, the oculist who operated unsuccessfully on Handel in 1758. Originally trained as an oculist by his father, the younger Taylor turned increasingly to the world of the theater, serving as drama critic for the *Morning Post* for several years before becoming its editor in 1787. He later purchased in turn *True Briton* and the *Sun*, selling the latter only in 1825. There is no reason to suppose that Taylor, who led a lively social life, was not acquainted with Morell who lived until 1784 and was, according to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, (paraphrasing John Nichols' *Literary Anecdotes*) "a warm friend and a cheerful companion, who loved a jest, told a good story, and sang a good song."

What makes the story suspect is its content. The line containing the pivotal word is the second line of Cleopatra's final aria:

Convey me to some peaceful shore,
Where no tumultuous billows roar,
Where life, though joyless, still is calm,
And sweet content is sorrow's balm.
There free from pomp and care, to wait,
Forgetting and forgot, the will of fate.

The first line of the aria is the text in which, according to Morell's other anecdote, Handel objected to the meter with the words "D—n your Iambics." Morell then converted the "Iambics" to "Trochees" beginning "Lead me to some peaceful shore," but by the time he had finished altering the rest of the aria, Handel had set them in their original form. It is clear from that story (admittedly written down some twenty years after the fact) that Handel had before him the entire text of the aria and would surely have asked his question about the meaning of the word "billows" at that time. Perhaps he did, and the early morning visit to Turnham Green took place at another time on another pretext. Memory has a way of rearranging events, and this anecdote depends on the memories of two elderly men.

Even if we accept that the basic elements of the story may well be true, it does seem odd that Handel should have had such difficulty with a word he had set perfectly well many years earlier in the chorus "Smiling Venus, Queen of Love" which ends the second act of the 1732 version of *Acis and Galatea*.

Smiling Venus, Queen of Love,
Guard her with thy gracious care.
May thy native billows prove
Ever friendly to the fair.

Duncan Chisholm

Halle from page 2

Perhaps the most moving event of the Festival was the "Händel-Gottesdienst" on Sunday morning, June 10. Held in the Marienkirche where Handel was baptized and using the very organ (restored, of course) that he had played as a student of F. W. Zachow, the service had been a feature of the Festival in the early 1950s, but was dropped more than a quarter-century ago. Subsequently the government restored the interior of the church to its former glory, but it has been generally inaccessible except during Sunday services and for a couple of hours during the week. The renewal of the "Händel-Gottesdienst" after so many years was something new for most of the visitors, but for the people of Halle who crowded into this very large church, it was an historic and emotional moment. During the sermon in which the pastor spoke eloquently of the changes that had come over the lives of the people of Halle, many, including guests from abroad, wept.

This year the oratorios were *Messiah*, *Semele*, *Theodora*, and *Jephtha*—all done in English; for the occasion the program book included German translations. This is to be applauded, for, whatever arguments may be made for translating vocal works into the language of the audience, the loss of musical and poetic affect outweighs (for this listener) any gain in immediate comprehension. Alas, the gain was too often canceled by very poor English diction. The Bulgarian mezzo Mária Petrasovská is a wonderful artist who would have been magnificent as Storge in *Jephtha* and Ino/Juno in *Semele* if only we were not badly distracted by her heavy accent. Her diction improved from time to time so that one had the sense that she had had insufficient rehearsal and coaching for the rest. So concerned was she for her notes and words in Juno's "Without measure is the pleasure", that she was unable to project the goddess's feelings of revenge and triumph. By contrast, the Halle Philharmonic chorus's English diction in *Theodora* was almost perfect, attesting to dedication and hard work.

In the performance of *Jephtha*, Christian Kluttig conducted the 13-voice "Favorit- und Capell-Chor" of Leipzig, the Handel Festival Orchestra of Halle, and soloists. To some the chorus seemed lost in the 900-seat Landestheater, perhaps because occasionally the orchestra overwhelmed them. Apart from those moments (and there were not too many), the chorus's singing was entrancing even though such a small ensemble for a late Handel oratorio is scarcely authentic. For the most part the soloists sang recitatives at full voice as though they were arias, cadences at the recitative ends were without exception delayed, the organ played during most of the airs, and there was a discernible pause after every single number. Nonetheless, "Deeper and deeper still" was still a great moment of a noble music drama.

Donald Burrows's performance of *Theodora* in the somewhat smaller Konzerthalle am Boulevard (a converted church) was, with its chorus of about sixty-five, more conventionally disposed than *Jephtha*. Technical difficulties persuaded Burrows to dispense with the or-

continued on page 6

Halle from page 5

gan, but the performance was none the worse for it. Recitative moved along briskly, cadences were not delayed except for affective reasons, and number followed number almost without pause—except in dramatic situations that suggested one. Juliane Claus matched the chorus's fine diction and sang beautifully. The palm in this performance, however, must go to the chorus which, responding to Burrows's enthusiasm for the score, sang with love and with fire.

Paul Traver's performance of *Semele* featured the Chamber Singers of the University of Maryland Chorus, the Collegium Instrumentale of Halle, and soloists who included, besides Petrasovská as Ino/Juno, Gillian Fisher as Semele, Axel Köhler as Athamas, and Robert Petillo as Jupiter. The 1989 Maryland performance of *Semele* was reported in the previous issue of this newsletter; the Halle performance differed from it only in that Traver made a few small cuts turning some full da-capo arias into dal-segnos. As in Maryland Fisher sang breathtakingly. Petillo, a young American tenor, sang extremely well and portrayed Jupiter variously as the philanderer, the lover, the monarch, and the impatient lover annoyed with his girlfriend's importuning. He did this with a tiny gesture here or a change of facial expression there, demonstrating that oratorio needs only a bit of acting to move it from the realm of dull song recital to that of music drama. Köhler was very fine in the role of Athamas, and of the non-English speakers, his diction, though far from perfect, was at least not distracting.

This year there were only two operas, *Sosarme* and *Tamerlano*, plus a staged production of *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo*. *Sosarme* was a revival of the performance presented in 1989; *Tamerlano* was a new production directed by Peter Konwitschny. Except for the first scene, the set by Helmut Brade was an open stage (clear to the outside wall furthest upstage) on which were let down all of the house's drop-poles (about 20) still attached to their wires, and scattered about were perhaps ten pieces of lighting equipment. Anyone moving from upstage or downstage had to pick his or her way among the wires and over the poles. Looking like the interior of an abandoned factory, the set must have saved the festival money.

In lieu of a program article, a twenty-page pamphlet was on sale; its purpose, one supposes, was to convey through the words of others and through pictures, someone's (perhaps the director's) musings about the meaning of the work. The pamphlet included, among other things, a fragment of Roland Barthe's "Fragment einer Sprache der Liebe," a bit of Veronika Veit's "Sprichwörter in mongolischen Epen," a reproduction of a Robert Mapplethorpe not-quite-full-frontal photo of a female nude, and a center spread reproducing Robert Capa's 1944 war photo "South of Bastogne." It was as though the director wanted to make sure that the audience knew that he (the director) knew that *Tamerlano* was about power, love, and loyalty, and that he had thought deeply about it. The effect was insultingly naive.

Inasmuch as the program note consisted of a collection of disconnected quotes and pictures, I have taken the liberty of presenting an unedited transcript of my jottings made in the dark during the course of the first two acts: "Overture heavy; opening scene—set failure?; prompter in the pit; distracting lighting; acrobatics; "Star Wars" light swords; thrashing around—fetal positions; Geb' mir Rache → wrestling match; set: a dozen small mattresses in a factory(?); orchestra too loud; heavy action during ritornellos; cast works stage lights as weapons; sing-song recitative; stage lights as props; costumes plausible fourteenth-century near-east; contrived bits; Irene as vamp! orange fright wig, green suit; disguise manufactured on stage; boxing gloves in rec.; boxing scene with comic bits with champagne (flat); cloth play; trio crawling for a knife."

Having sat through two uninterrupted acts of such distractions, I left, wondering if I will ever get to see a Handel opera done as he might have done it. There was some very fine singing by Köhler, Hendrikje Wangemann, Annette Markert and the redoubtable Petrasovská. The musical quality of their performances was astonishing considering that they had to sing while wielding fluorescent tubes (the "Star Wars" light swords), manipulating large spotlights, picking their way among drop poles and wires, crawling, writhing, or boxing.

Handel's autograph of *Tamerlano* bears eloquent witness to the struggle that he had with its composition. Byproducts of the struggle are four aria settings, a duet, and an accompanied recitative that he composed and then discarded. The festival's planners took advantage of this by presenting these numbers in the opening concert, which also included the D Major Water Music Suite.

As always there were far too many musical events for one person to take in, and in certain cases I can only report the views of others. Mr. Stephen Simon conducted the performances of *Messiah* and of *Sosarme*. The latter took place in the "Kursaal" at Bad Lauchstädt. The performance was unstaged, and because the room was of a size and type similar to that of a salon or music room, Maestro Simon had the seating arranged as it might have been for a private performance. Those who were present reported that the arrangement worked extremely well and that the performance was absolutely first class.

Iter Facio

Contributors to this Issue

Ellen T. Harris is Associate Provost for the Arts and Professor of Music at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and President of the American Handel Society.

Duncan Chisholm is an independent Canadian scholar based in London who has a particular interest in the political implications of Handel's librettos.

Iter Facio is a regular contributor to the AHS Newsletter, generally reporting on European Handel Festivals.

The American Handel Society Research Rellowship 1991

The Directors of the American Handel Society invite applications for the 1991 American Handel Society Research Fellowship, an award of \$1,500 to be granted to an advanced graduate student pursuing research on Handel or related fields. Appropriate areas of study in addition to Handel scholarship might include, for example, work on Handel's contemporaries in music or theater, or more general studies of operatic or theatrical traditions. The winner of the award is given the opportunity to speak at the annual meeting of The American Handel Society.

Applicants must be currently studying at a North American University and must submit a resume, a description of the project for which the Fellowship will be used (not to exceed 750 words), and a budget showing how and when the applicant plans to use the funds. In addition, applicants must have two letters of recommendation sent directly to the Society at the address below.

Applications for the 1991 Fellowship must be post-marked no later than March 15, 1991, and should be sent to AHS Fellowship Committee, c/o Ellen T. Harris, President, American Handel Society, 10-200, Massa-

chusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA 02139. Applicants will be notified of the Committee's decision by April 15, 1991.

Handel's *Messiah* on Video

The University of Oklahoma Foundation has recently released a group of programs originally produced for public television in a series of VHS-format videocassettes entitled Early Music Television. The series includes one 30-minute program, first broadcast in 1984, called "Handel's *Messiah*. A Commemoration" which views the 1784 Handel Commemoration performances in Westminster Abbey through the eyes of Dr. Charles Burney, the pioneer music historian. The script, written by Kerry S. Grant, Eugene Enrico, and James Yoch, draws upon Burney's letters, memoirs, and publications, allowing Burney (played by actor John Casey) to tell the story in his own words. Excerpts from *Messiah* are performed by the Ars Musica Baroque Orchestra and the Oklahoma Collegium Musicum. The tape is available for \$32.95 (including postage and handling) from The University of Oklahoma Foundation, Inc., 100 Timberdell Road, Norman, OK 73019.

The American Handel Society

DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND 20742 TELEPHONE 301 454-5758

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APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY

Name _____ Date _____

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<p>___ REGULAR \$ 15</p> <p>___ DONOR 30</p> <p>___ PATRON 100</p>	<p>___ JOINT 20 (married couples; two memberships—one set of publications)</p> <p>___ SPONSOR 50</p> <p>___ SUBSCRIBER 30 (institutions only; does not include discounts for books or performances)</p>
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Please attach your check payable to THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY for the amount of your dues and mail to THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY, Department of Music, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742.