

NEWSLETTER

of

The American Handel Society

Volume XVIII, Number 2

August 2003

HANDEL FESTIVAL IN HALLE 2003

The theme for this year's Handel Festival in Halle and its accompanying scholarly conference was "*Les goûts réunis*, The Europeanization of National styles in Handel's time." There was, not surprisingly, a good deal of French music performed and the winner of the 2003 Handel Prize was Marc Minkowski, director of Les Musiciens du Louvre, who has become a great favorite in Halle. Because the first weekend of the festival fell on Pentecost, the schedule of events was slightly different from the norm, but as always there were more concerts than any one person could attend, generally two or three taking place simultaneously in different venues. There were also church services, exhibitions, receptions, and expeditions to places of interest at some remove from Halle.

The official Opening Ceremonies and Festival Concert took place on Thursday, June 5 in the Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Halle. The music included the Dettingen Anthem and two of the Coronation anthems performed by the Choeur des Musiciens du Louvre and the Händelfestspielorchester under the direction of Uwe Grodd. There were also solos from the Ode for the Birthday of Queen Anne and *Samson* featuring trumpeter Reinhold Friedrich that should also have included the chorus but for some reason did not. The Festival Concert has yet to settle on a satisfactory format, reminding one yet again how difficult is to extract movements from the contexts for which Handel designed them.

This year's new production by the Halle Opera was of *Imeneo*, presenting the text of Donald Burrows' new edition of the work for the Hallische Händel Ausgabe. The staging by Michael McCaffery was laudably straightforward and without gimmicks. Singers, dressed in eighteenth-century attire, were allowed to address each other and the audience without being upstaged or being required to engage in unlikely activities themselves. The action took place in a single room, the back wall of which occasionally parted to reveal interesting vistas. The slender tale of the heroine Rosmene having to choose between Tirinto, with whom she is in love, and Imeneo, who has rescued her from pirates and to whom she feels gratitude, was taken seriously, as was the secondary plot involving her sister Clomiri's love for Imeneo. Although the libretto fails to specify what should happen to the two unhappy lovers after Rosmene chooses Imeneo, the collapse onstage of Tirinto and the attempted suicide of Clomiri during the final chorus of rejoicing (in the minor mode) was perfectly consistent with the course of the drama and also very moving.

Strongest among the singers were the mezzo-soprano Ulrike Schneider as Tirinto (a role original written for a castrato) and soprano Martina Rüping, a local favorite, as Clomiri, but soprano Alexandra Coku as Rosmene and basses

continued on p. 3



Frontispiece from William Coxe, *Anecdotes for George Frederick Handel and John Christopher Smith* (London, 1799). Courtesy of the Rita Benton Music Library, University of Iowa School of Music.

A TACITIST AGRIPPINA: CHICAGO OPERA THEATER, APRIL-MAY 2003.

I have not yet done a statistically significant survey, but it appears that the management of the Chicago Opera Theater knows that if you hire designers, directors and musicians who coordinate their efforts and pay attention to the basic demands of the text and score they are performing, the result can be excellent drama. At any rate, that was true of the COT's production of *Semele* in 2002, and it was even more evidently the case in this year's *Agrippina*, which provided one of the most exciting evenings of theater I have experienced in some time. I will note lapses from perfection below, because that is a reviewer's job, but those criticisms should not distract from the message that this *Agrippina* was, everything taken together, the most successful production of a Handel opera I have seen. (Note: I missed the Chicago Lyric's *Alcina* in 1999, which

continued on p. 4

The American Handel Society

School of Music
University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland 20742

ISSN 0888-8701
xviii/2

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 also visit <http://gfhandel.org/>

Alcina

- Sung in Italian with English surtitles -
New York City Opera
Alcina: Christine Goerke
Morgana: Lauren Skuce
Ruggiero: Katharine Goeldner
Bradamante: Jennifer Dudley
Oronte: Keith Jameson
Melisso: Joshua Winograde
Conductor: Daniel Beckwith
Producer: Francesca Zambello
9, 13m, 18, 21m, 24, 26 September 2003
New York State Theater, Lincoln Center, New York City, New York
<http://www.nycopera.com/>

Jephtha

Iphis: Christine Brandes, soprano
Angel: Greta Feeney / Saundra DeAthos, sopranos
Storgè: Wilke te Brummelstroete, mezzo-soprano
Hamor: Daniel Taylor, countertenor
Jephtha: John Mark Ainsley, tenor
Zebul: John Ames, bass
Philharmonia Chorale
Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra
Nicholas McGegan, conductor
13, 14 September 2003, 7:30 pm - Berkeley, California
19 September 2003, 7:30 pm - San Francisco, California
20 September 2003 - Palo Alto, California
<http://www.philharmonia.org>

'Murder Most Foul'

Handel: Agrippina condotta a morire
Clérambault: Médée
Christine Goerke, soprano
Tempesta di Mare
3 October 2003, 8 pm: Suburban Philadelphia Location TBA, Pennsylvania
4 October 2003, 8 pm: Saint Mark's Church, 1625 Locust Street, Center City, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
<http://www.tempestadimare.org>

TELEMANN & HIS FRIENDS, BACH & HANDEL

Teresa Radomski, soprano
Dale Higbee, recorders
Gretchen Tracy, baroque cello
Susan Bates, harpsichord & organ
(Carolina Baroque)
• JS Bach: Organ Prelude: "Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ," BWV 639, from The Little Organ Book. Vol. II
• Handel: Sonata in A minor for recorder and continuo, Opus I, No.4, HWV 362
• JS Bach: Suite in G major for solo cello, BWV 1007: Prelude, Sarabande, Gigue
• Telemann: Cantata #4, "In gering- und rauhen Schalen," from "Der Harmonische Gottesdienst" (1725-26) for soprano, recorder and continuo
• Handel: "Almira," HWV 1, Act I, Scene 3: Recit. & Aria, "Chi piu mi piace il voglio"
• Handel: "Giulio Cesare," HWV 17, Act I, Scene 8, Aria, "Care speme"
• JS Bach: Well Tempered Clavier, Book II: Prelude & Fugue #19 in A major, BWV 888; Prelude & Fugue #15 in G major, BWV 884 for solo harpsichord
• Telemann: Cantata #45, "Durchsuche dich, O stolzer Geist," from "Der Harmonische Gottesdienst" (1725-26) for soprano, recorder and continuo

17 October 2003, 7:30 pm
Chapel, St. John's Lutheran Church, 200 W. Innes St., Salisbury, North Carolina
Admission by donation: \$12, \$10 seniors, \$5 students.
<http://www.carolinabaroque.org>

Messiah

- 150th annual performance -
Lisa Saffer, soprano
Matthew White, countertenor
Benjamin Butterfield, tenor
Handel and Haydn Society
Grant Llewellyn, conductor
30 November 2003, 3 pm
5 December 2003, 7:30 pm
6 December 2003, 3 pm
7 December 2003, 3 pm
Symphony Hall, Boston, Massachusetts
<http://www.handelandhaydn.org>

Messiah

Christine Brandes, soprano
Susan Platts, mezzo-soprano
Michael Slattery, tenor
Neal Davies, bass-baritone
La Chapelle de Québec
Les violons du Roy
Conductor : Bernard Labadie
5 December 2003, 7:30 p.m.
Claude-Champagne Hall, Université de Montréal, Canada
Subscriptions : (514) 987-6919
6 December 2003, 7 p.m.
Dominion-Chalmers United Church, Ottawa, Canada
18 December 2003, 8 p.m.
Massey Hall, Toronto, Canada
Ticket Office : (416) 872-4255.
20 December 2003, 7:30 p.m.
21 December 2003, 2 p.m.
Église Saint-Dominique, Québec, Canada
Subscriptions : (418) 643-8131
<http://www.violonsduroy.com>

Messiah

Soloists: TBA
The Sarasota Choral Society
7 December 2003
(Dress Rehearsal at 4:00 pm and Performance at 7:00 pm and includes full orchestra and pipe organ.)
Samuel R. Neel Auditorium, Manatee Community College
Bradenton, Florida.
This will be the 59th consecutive annual performance by the Choral Society.
Tickets are \$12 for the dress rehearsal and \$15 for the performance.
<http://www.sarasotachoralsociety.org/>

Messiah

Nashville Symphony Chorus
Nashville Symphony
George Mabry, conductor
17 December 2003, 8 pm
War Memorial Auditorium, 301 6th Ave North, Nashville, Tennessee
<http://www.nashvillesymphony.org>

Messiah

Rosemary Joshua, soprano
Alice Coote, mezzo-soprano
Mark Padmore, tenor
Gerald Finley, baritone
Westminster Symphonic Choir (Joseph Flummerfelt, director)
The New York Philharmonic
Nicholas McGegan, conductor
17, 18 December 2003, 7:30 pm

AHS OFFICERS 2003-05

The Board of Directors for The American Handel Society is pleased to announce the following slate of officers for the 2003-05 term:

Graydon Beeks, President, Pomona College

Robert Ketterer, Vice President, University of Iowa

Marjorie Pomeroy, Secretary/Treasurer

NEWSLETTER of The American Handel Society

Kenneth Nott, *Editor*
The Hartt School
University of Hartford
200 Bloomfield Avenue
West Hartford, CT 06117-1599
Tel: (860) 768-4895
Fax: (860) 768-4441
E-mail: Nott@mail.hartford.edu

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

The American Handel Society

School of Music, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20742

Telephone (301) 581-9602 email: info@americanhandelsociety.org

www.americanhandelsociety.org

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

Richard G. King, *President*, University of Maryland

Graydon Beeks, Pomona College
Roger Freitas, Eastman School of Music
William D. Gudger, The College of Charleston
Ellen T. Harris, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Wendy Heller, Princeton University
David Hurley, Pittsburg State University, Kansas

Robert Ketterer, *Vice President*, University of Iowa
Kenneth Nott, *Newsletter Editor*, Hartt School of Music

Lowell Lindgren, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Alfred Mann, Honorary Director, Eastman School of Music
Nicholas McGegan, Honorary Director, Berkeley, CA
John H. Roberts, University of California, Berkeley
Marty Ronish, Albuquerque, New Mexico
Ellen Rosand, Yale University
*Paul Traver, Honorary Director, University of Maryland

*Founding Member

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Class of Membership (for current calendar year; otherwise, specify future starting year on lines below)

	\$	£	DM		\$	£	DM
___ REGULAR	20	13	35	___ SPONSOR	60	38	100
___ JOINT	25	16	45	___ PATRON	125	80	200
				___ LIFE	400	250	700
				___ SUBSCRIBER (institutions only)	30	20	50
___ DONOR	35	22	60				
___ STUDENT/RETIRED	10	7	18				
___ Membership in the Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft: \$28.							
___ Friends of the Handel Institute: £10/\$16; students £5/\$8.							

Those paying in dollars should make their checks payable to THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY and mail to THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY, School of Music, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. Those paying in sterling should make their checks payable to THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY and mail to the society at the above address. Those wishing to pay in DM should remit to Dr. Manfred Rätzer, Treasurer, Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft, Gr. Nikole Str. 5, O-4020, Halle/Saale, Federal Republic of Germany, and indicate that the payment is for the account for the AHS.

production. The text was sung in Italian, and the supertitles, adapted from those written for the New York City Opera, were not literal and tended to reinforce a darkly ironic view of the action. That was emphasized again by the treatment of the *scena ultima* that eliminated Juno's entry and her blessing on the proceedings. Claudio announced the general resolution of difficulties, "Habbian termine gl' odi....", but while the combined cast sang the final celebratory chorus,

Lieto il Tebro increspi l'onda
Sotto i rai del nuovo allor!

E festeggi sù la sponda,
Pien di gioia il Dio d'amor!

the supertitle screen ran a list of the enormities and violent deaths that, historically, were to follow for the entire cast: that Nero would kill his mother, marry Poppaea and then cause her death, that Otho would become emperor and be murdered, and so forth. The audience laughed at the ironies of it all, and then rose to its feet in appreciation for what we had seen and heard.

Now, I love a good theophany, and I missed Juno at the end, but it may be that the metatheatrical god from the machine hovering over the stage in the supertitles brought home the ironies of *Agrippina* for a modern audience more than the goddess would have done. The gratifying thing about this production is that, for the most part, those ironies were presented with a delicate touch, and we were left to work them out for ourselves rather than having our noses rubbed in them with heavy-handed literalism or unnecessary uglification of the mise en scène.

One final point: may one plead for two intermissions rather than one? A Handel opera is long, but the music is good and we don't mind staying for it, especially when it is being served as well as it was on this occasion. But it is a strong desideratum to have a couple of opportunities to stretch the legs and take time to absorb and discuss what we have seen and heard. Grimani and Handel knew this, and provided natural dramatic breaks between acts; it is a favor to the audience to respect the natural rhythm of the piece. I merely make this observation in self-defense, because I am already eagerly anticipating the L'incoronazione di Poppea which COT is promising us for next season.

Robert Ketterer

19, 20 December 2003, 8 pm
The Riverside Church, 490 Riverside Drive at 120th Street, New York City, New York
<http://www.newyorkphilharmonic.org>
<http://www.rider.edu/westminster/ensembles/symphonic.html>
<http://www.the-riverside-church-nyc.org/>

Alcina

Boston Baroque
17, 18 October 2003, 7:30 pm
Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, Massachusetts
<http://www.bostonbaroque.org/>

A Roman Holiday
Dixit Dominus
Laudate pueri Dominum
Saevia tellus inter rigores
Handel and Haydn Society
Grant Llewellyn, conductor
24 October 2003, 8 pm
26 October 2003, 3 pm
Symphony Hall, Boston, Massachusetts
<http://www.handelandhaydn.org>

Jephtha

Emmanuel Music
Fall/Winter 2003
Boston, Massachusetts
<http://www.emmanuelmusic.org/>

Giulio Cesare in Egitto

Houston Grand Opera
Giulio Cesare: David Daniels
Cleopatra: Laura Claycomb (soprano)
Tolomeo: Brian Asawa
Cornelia: Theodora Hanslowe
Sextus: Patricia Risley
Nireus: Matthew (?) White
Conductor: Patrick Summers
Director: James Robinson
30 October 2003
2, 8, 11, 14, 16 November 2003
<http://www.houstongrandopera.org/>

Otto Katzameier as Imeneo and Gregory Reinhart as Rosmenes' father Argenio were all very effective. The Händelfestspielorchester played well under the direction of Uwe Grodd. All told this must rank with *Poro* as one of Halle's most satisfying recent productions. Unfortunately, Miss Schneider was ill for the second performance and her role had to be acted and spoken by the prompter, illustrating once again the dangers of performing unfamiliar operas when the budget cannot be stretched to include understudies and emergency covers are nowhere to be found.

The other new opera production was a joint effort of the Handel Festival, the Goethe-Theater in Bad Lauchstädt, the Festwochen Hannover-Herrenhausen, and the Bayreuth Baroque Festival. This was Handel's five-act opera of 1712, *Teseo*, for which the libretto was adapted by Nicola Francesco Haym from Phillippe Quinault's *Thésée, a tragédie lyrique* set to music by Jean-Baptiste Lully. The staging by Axel Köhler was, for the most part, blessedly free of the sexual pawings, cheap jokes, and upstagings that have marred too many Halle productions (including Köhler's own of *Rodrigo* from two years ago). In general the story was taken seriously and the singers were allowed to get on with it. I did not understand why certain characters sometimes indulged in stylized baroque gestures, but it may have been to indicate that they were under the sway of the sorceress Medea. The grand transformations and other stage effects, which were a major part of the opera's initial success, were successfully finessed and the costumes appropriate.

The most impressive singing came from mezzo-soprano Maria Riccarda Wesseling as Medea and soprano Sharon Rostorf-Zamir as Teseo's beloved Agilea, while soprano Jörg Waschinski in the title role gave the best performance I have ever heard from him. Alto Artur Stefanowicz and soprano Miriam Meyer were both effective as the second couple, Arcane and Clizia, whose story is entirely tangential to the main plot. About alto Johnny Maldonado, who sang the crucial role of the Athenian King Egeo – the character who sets the plot in motion by rejecting Medea in favor of Agilea – I have mixed feelings. He can certainly manage the technical demands of the music and his voice is not unpleasant, but there is something profoundly unsatisfying about his performance. It may be that he fails to convey a real sense of emotional connection to his character – something I felt with his Ruggiero in an otherwise splendid production of *Alcina* in the same theater several years ago.

The acoustic in the little theater at Bad Lauchstädt can make the orchestra sound harsh, and the Lautten Compagny of Berlin did nothing to moderate this tendency. They might have been better advised to eliminate the harp, which Handel does not call for, and replace it with another stand of violins. The conductor Wolfgang Katschner could occasionally relax his speeds to good effect and consider more carefully questions of balance. On the whole, though, this production of *Teseo* was a success and gave a good picture of one of Handel's least-familiar scores.

The third opera performed at this year's festival was a revival of last year's production of *Deidamia*. The staging by Nicholas Broadhurst, set variously on the Isle of Anglesey, off the coast of Antarctica, and in an aquarium, made as little sense this time around, although the audience seemed less inclined to laugh at the jokes. Musically matters were well in hand, with sopranos Ann Monoyios and Anke Herrmann especially successful as Deidamia and her confidante Nerea. Lucia Sciannimanico sang well but her slight stature again made the character of Ulisse less than an even match for Deidamia. The one change in cast from last year brought Martina Rüping as Achille, which was a definite improvement. She was especially

successful in her bravura Act III aria "Ai Greci questa spada." She also convincingly portrayed Achille as a young man and potential hero, which made her character the natural focus of Ulisse and Deidamia's attentions, even at the close of the opera when she had nothing to sing.

The only oratorio at this year's festival was *Messiah* given by the Choeur des Musiciens du Louvre and the Lautten Company Berlin. This performance I did not hear, but the presence of harp, theorbo, and baroque guitar in the continuo group did not bode well. Among the concerts, ranging in size from solo keyboard recitals to full orchestral evenings, there were two that I found memorable. The first was a reconstruction of a Vespers service for the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary as performed at the Bavarian Court in the time of Orlando di Lasso (1532-1594). This was given in the Dom by the Ensemble Weser-Renaissance of Bremen under the direction of Manfred Cordes. The psalm settings, for from three to eight voices, as well as the *Magnificat octavo toni* were taken from Lasso's *Magnum opus musicum*, published after his death by his sons. The antiphons, which were sung both before and after the psalms, were sometimes in chant and sometimes in anonymous polyphonic settings from the early 16th century found in a manuscript in the Bavarian State Library. The scoring was cleverly varied and ranged from voices alone to the various combinations of voices and wind instruments described by Praetorius in his *Syntagma Musica*. The performance was first-class.

The second concert took place in the Marktkirche and featured the music of Handel's teacher Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow, the former organist of the church, and Handel himself. The performers were the Capella Cantorum Berlin and the Ensemble "construmenti" together with a solo vocal quartet, all under the direction of Klaus Eichhorn. The featured works were four of Zachow's larger cantatas, two scored for trumpets and strings and the others for oboes and strings. The alternation of solo and choral movements reminded one of similar works by Buxtehude, and the singing and playing were impressive. The program also included two of Handel's organ concertos (Op. 4, No. 5 and 6) played on the Reichel organ of 1664 which hangs on the east wall above the altar. This instrument, with its high pitch and peculiar temperament, is always difficult for instruments to match. It was made more difficult here by having the organ play in the written keys of F Major and B-Flat Major, and having the accompanying instruments tune a step low and then play in the keys of G Major and C Major. Although this made it possible to perform the concertos, the parts did not lie so easily under the hand for the string players.

A third concert – cleverly titled "Music of Power – Power of Music" – featured the Musica Antiqua Köln, who performed airs, dances, and instrumental pieces from Lully's operas and ballets on the first half. They were then joined by the VokalEnsemble Köln in a performance of the *Ode for St. Cecilia*. To my ears Reinhard Goebel's direction was overly aggressive, with virtually every tempo a shade too fast and the string articulations harsh and biting. The soprano soloist Johannette Zomer had a knack for exploding into her high notes. The tenor Marcel Beekman was more successful in his arias, but lacked a firm rhythmic sense in his recitatives. The chorus sang well in only lightly accented English.

Other visitors will have to report on the remaining concerts. The scholarly conference featured fifteen papers by scholars from eight different nations presented in sessions spread over two days. They will be published in the 2004 *Händel Jahrbuch*. The high point occurred midway through the first day when the distinguished Handel scholar and editor Terence Best received an honorary doctorate from the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg in recognition of his

2003 KNAPP RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP AWARDED

The Board of Directors of the American Handel Society is pleased to announce that the 2003 J. Merrill Knapp Research Fellowship is awarded to Zachariah Victor, a Ph.D. candidate at Yale University. Mr. Victor will use the fellowship for travel and research in support of his dissertation, "An Interdisciplinary Study of Vocal Genres and the Pastoral in the Music of Alessandro Scarlatti, 1693-1707," including connections between Handel and Scarlatti as cantata composers. Mr. Victor received the B.A. cum laude from Lawrence University in 1999, with majors in music and English. He received the M.Phil. from Yale in 2002. The advisor for his dissertation is Prof. Ellen Rosand.

For the Board, William Gudger, chair, Fellowship Committee

The winners of the Fellowship since it was established in 1989 are listed below:

1989	David Ross Hurley	University of Chicago
1990	Richard G. King	Stanford University
1991	John Winemiller	University of Chicago
1993	Michael Corn	University of Illinois
1993	Channan Willner	City University of New York
1995	Mark Risinger	Harvard university
1996	Barbara Durost	Claremont Graduate school
1998	Todd Gilman	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
1999	Kenneth McLeod	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
2000	Stanley C. Pelkey	Eastman School of Music
2001	Major Peter C. Giotta	United States Military Academy
2002	Minji Kim	Brandeis University

contributions to Handel scholarship. Dr. Best, who is a Vice-President of the Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft and co-General Editor of the Hallische Händel Ausgabe, then presented a lecture on "French influence on German keyboard music: Froberger, Bach, Handel," providing generous illustrations at the harpsichord.

At the annual Membership Meeting of the Georg-Freidrich-Händel-Gesellschaft greetings from The American Handel Society were conveyed by outgoing President Richard King, who also presented a complete set of program booklets from the Maryland Handel Festival to the Händel-Haus Library. The meeting was preceded by the Festival Lecture given by Professor Anselm Gerhard of the University of Bern and concluded with the election of a new Vorstand and Präsidium.

Next year's festival will take place from June 3-13, 2004 with the theme "Handel and the German Tradition." It will featured a staging of *Hercules* and a concert performance of Lotario – one of Handel's least-known operas – as well as performances of *Messiah*, *L'Allegro, il Penseroso, ed il Moderato*, and *Judas Maccabaeus*. There will also be concerts of choral, orchestral, and chamber music, as well as a scholarly conference, all focusing on the general theme. Further information is available at the festival website (www.haendelfestspiele.halle.de). Tickets will go on sale in January at the latest, so anyone interested in attending should plan ahead.

Graydon Beeks

THE HANDEL INSTITUTE AWARDS FOR RESEARCH

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, 2003.

Further details from:
Dr Elizabeth Gibson
The Red House
Aldeburgh
Suffolk IP15 5PZ
United Kingdom
elizabeth@gibsone.free-online.co.uk

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*. For further details, contact the *Newsletter* Editor.

caused confirmed Verdians and Wagnerians of my acquaintance to swear a new allegiance to Handel.)

Agrippina, with its multiple peripeties and elaborate sexual complications, is the child of Italian comedy and very nearly a farce in the manner of Feydeau. It is also commonly recognized that Vincenzo Grimani's libretto is one of the most coherent and well written of the texts with which Handel worked over the years.

Set in the same morally dubious world as Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, its ancient sources are historiographical: Tacitus' bitter Annals and Suetonius' gossipy *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, together with a dash of Plutarch for the characterization of Ottone. Grimani's writing for Handel is lighter than Busenello's for Monteverdi, but there is plenty of scope in *Agrippina* for genuine emotion and ironic reflection on the powers that be, ancient and contemporary. To my ears, something rather rare occurs. The young Handel, still making his way, and faced with a libretto by the powerful Cardinal Grimani for an opera to be produced in the Grimani opera house of S. Giovanni Grisostomo, was fitting his music to the text rather than molding the text with his music, as he did in later years, even with the excellent librettos of Haym. The result is a bit literal (read: a little dull) in getting the exposition out of the way, but somewhere around Nerone's insincere "Qual piacer" (I.vii) things take fire, and the piece is as successful a *dramma per musica* as one could wish, the words and music playing off one another in nearly perfect balance.

That balance and mutual play was honored in nearly every aspect of COT's production. The stage setting was modern, with references to fascist Italy, evident mostly in Ottone's military costume and in the golden, eagle-topped staffs carried by the cheerfully goose-stepping chorus in II.iv when Claudius was welcomed home, but these references were suggestive and appropriate without being overbearing. Michael Ganio's abstract set was simple, usually efficient, and always good to look at, paying homage to the perspectival Baroque stage through progressively inset burgundy velours that enveloped bright white steps and platforms rising upstage. A single tall marble column, topped with a Roman imperial bust, stood stage center right, and a bed at stage level slid in and out of the stepped platform at need. Scenes changed by addition or removal of a grid of piping, drapes featuring the image of a classical nude female statue viewed from various angles (for Poppea's apartment), and a large flat reproducing a detail from a Poussin landscape (for the garden scenes). The white of the steps and platforms made the most of Robert Wierzel's lighting, which once or twice seemed to me one of the harsher and less well-integrated aspects of the production. A third thematic

HANDEL-L

HANDEL-L is a discussion list open to everybody wishing to discuss the music, life and times of George Frideric Handel and his contemporaries. Subscribers are welcome to initiate or respond to a wide variety of topics. "Lurkers" are welcome to monitor proceedings anonymously.

All Handel enthusiasts, at any level of specialisation, are encouraged to provide reviews and feedback concerning recordings, opera productions, concerts, and literature. HANDEL-L combines this appreciation of Handel's music with comments, short reports, and discussion from scholars, performers, and journalists who maintain a serious interest in the composer and his world: the discussion list is a valuable source for breaking the latest Handel news around the world.

To join HANDEL-L visit
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/handel-l/>

color was gold, that shone against the burgundy and white and served as an emblem for the power that everyone on stage seemed to crave. It was evidenced in the golden thrones that adorned the stage at various times, and reflected in Agrippina's costumes at appropriate moments. Tracey Dorman's costuming was also elegant and simple, in harmony with the rest of the production.

Lillian Groag's stage direction was theatrically intelligent and always clear. The humor moved through gradations of irony and slapstick, the latter neither clumsy nor inappropriate to the music or dramatic context. She took the serious parts seriously and treated the comic parts as comedy. The result was once again an elegant balance between opposites which, as she observed in her program notes, give the opera "the sheen of Truth, of life-as-we live-it, and of the fundamental paradox of real experience found only in Shakespeare, Mozart, Chekhov and everyday life."

There were deliberate references to modern theatricals, as when during *Vaghe perle* (I.xiv), the tuxedoed chorus offering strings of pearls to a suggestively clad Poppea made deliberate visual reference to the video of Madonna's "Material Girl". Even more inspired was Agrippina's "Non ho cor che per amarti" (I.xxiii) to Poppea, where the dropping of extra sugar cubes into a cup of coffee, combined with the insincere lyrics on friendship, briefly evoked the hypocrisies of the teatime scene between Cecily and Gwendolyn in Act II of the *Importance of Being Earnest*.

Emmanuelle Haïm conducted with energy and imagination. The period orchestra sported a particularly deep and impressive continuo section, that included the wonderful Mary Springfels on viola da gamba, and both Ms. Haïm and the equally wonderful Barbara Weiss on harpsichord. It does have to be said that intonation in the pit was elusive now and again, and the strings got ahead of the singers in some of the more rapid passages. More disappointingly, on the evening I attended (May 10), the oboe and the singers lost contact with one another at two crucial moments, during Ottone's heartbreaking "Voi che udite il mio lamento", which closed the first half of this production, and Agrippina's tormented "Pensieri", treated as part invocation scene and part nervous breakdown.

The singing and acting was uniformly excellent, from Brandon Mayberry's beleaguered Lesbo, who is granted only a brief arietta, to Monica Colonna's sexy and powerful Agrippina. I can only report that Ms. Colonna's Agrippina was so completely convincing that I became absorbed in the character and forgot to think about her singing by itself; it was stunning, I believe, ranging impressively in emotional color that reached a peak in the disturbed intensity of "Pensieri", to be followed by the celebratory joy of "Ogni vento". Her reconciliation with Claudio, "Se vuoi pace, o volto amato" (III.xiv), was a masterpiece of complexity, as her manipulation of the emperor developed a hint of remembered tenderness. Jane Archibald as Poppea had not quite enough platinum and brass to pull the Madonna routine off with total conviction in her opening "Vaghe perle." But once she thought she was being imposed upon, and had determined on revenge, she generated dramatic interest equal to that of Agrippina. Her "Se giunge un dispetto"

which ends the first act brought the house down.

The male side of things included something of a surprise. The emperor Claudio, in my experience, is usually played as a *pantalone* role, a portrayal consistent with the ancient record that treats Claudius as a fool, run by his wives and freedmen. In this production both Claudio (Derrick Parker) and Lesbo, his buffo second, were handsome men with powerful voices; as a result, it was necessary to take the emperor's side of things more seriously than usual. Predictably, everyone onstage fell asleep during Claudio's sonorous and lengthy "Cade il mondo" (II.iv), but there was no question the emperor's word was law, and had to be dealt with somehow rather than simply sidelined. Moreover he constituted a serious sexual threat to Poppea and a challenge to Ottone, not merely a clownish nuisance. Pascal Bertin played Ottone both with a bewildered innocence and a determination which, if not as military as his costume, won through the hypocrites and plots around him. His strong and melodious countertenor voice easily overcame the sometimes difficult acoustics of the Atheneum Theater. The same was not always true of Stephen Wallace's Narciso, whose voice is not as strong; but his acting was impeccable and his moving rendition of Narciso's "Spererò poi che mel dice" (II.xvi) was one of the highlights of the production. Ricardo Herrera as Pallante was a basso straight man to Wallace's bumbling Narciso; I admired Herrera's performance as Somnus in *Semele* last year and regretted the score of *Agrippina* did not give him more to do.

The characterization of Nerone provided the one slightly jarring element in the production for me. Kristina Hamar-Ström's Nerone was a self-destructive neurotic who played Russian roulette with a pistol during his first aria, snorted coke while drinking martinis, and played with fire. He very clearly had a reciprocal sexual fascination with his mother: they were discovered on the bed together during the overture and opening scene. Most of this might be inferred, one way or the other, by what one "knows" about Nero from Tacitus and Suetonius. But it doesn't quite connect with the Nero in Grimani and Handel ("Why is he singing 'Madre t'adorerò' to a gun?"), nor, finally, with the Nero in the ancient sources: for all Nero's neuroses or worse, a death wish does not seem to have been part of his psychological makeup. He lived to perform and be adored, and at his final moment of pathetic suicide, as the forces of his enemies closed around him, he regretted that he was robbing the world of a great artist: "Qualis artifex pereo!" were supposed to have been his final words (Suetonius, *Nero*, 49). Ms. Hamar-Ström did not seem entirely comfortable with everything she was doing, either, but all could be forgiven, because once she started singing, nothing else mattered.

A chorus consisting of the understudies for the eight roles in the opera reinforced the sense of the court's degenerate nature produced by this characterization of Nerone. Vocally the chorus supported the *tutti* moments in the score, and otherwise served as courtiers and servants. Dressed identically in tuxedos, with mustaches and slicked-back hair and hollowed eyes, they replicated Nerone in appearance, and formed a rather creepy and threatening backdrop to the action, undercutting the farcical and romantic elements, and reinforcing a Tacitist reading of the opera that was, finally, at the center of this

UPCOMING HANDEL PERFORMANCES OF NOTE

New York City Opera opens 2003-04 season with Alcina.

Carolina Baroque offers performances of works by Handel and his contemporaries.

See Handel Calendar for details.

CONGRATULATIONS! DR. TERENCE BEST

Over two decades of scholarly work on the music of Handel was recognized this summer through the awarding to Terence Best of an honorary doctorate from the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg.