Handel, John Hughes and
Mary, Countess Cowper

While Handel was preparing to depart England for the Continent in the spring of 1719 to hire singers for the first season of the Royal Academy of Music, he received an invitation to perform at the home of Mary, Countess Cowper, in Lincoln’s Inn Fields. The invitation came via John Hughes, the poet, librettist, critic, and secretary to the Commissioners for Appointing Justices of the Peace. Hughes reports to his patroness in a letter dated May Day 1719:

Madam
Mrs Barbier’s Time being so very uncertain, I have engag’d another of my Musical Acquainance, Mrs Robinson, the Daughter of Dr Turner, who will be proud of the Opportunity of waiting on your Ladyship tomorrow in the Evening. Her late Improvement has I think plac’d her in the first Rank of our English Performers. Mr Robinson begs leave to send his own Harpsichord, that of your Ladyship’s being, as I remember, not exactly of the Consort Pitch. I have likewise sent to Mr Handel, who if he is not engag’d will, I am sure, be very glad of the Same Opportunity. I wish it may be any way in my Power to contribute to your Ladyship’s Entertainment or Satisfaction, & am very sorry it is only in Trifles I can express the very great Sense I have of Obligations which can never be acknowledg’d as they ought by

Madam
Your Ladyship’s most dutifull
& most obedient humble Servt

The Cowpers occupied important positions in London. William Cowper had been Lord Chancellor, the chief officer of the justice system and speaker (presiding officer) of the House of Lords. He resigned the Great Seal in April 1718 having apparently lost the confidence of the King, who considered that Cowper had sided with the Prince of Wales in the dynastic feud that so occupied London in those years. The Cowpers were in an unenviable position, as Lady Mary was Lady of the Bedchamber to the Princess of Wales, Caroline of Ansbach. A frequent theater-goer (accompanying the Princess), was at the opening night of Radamisto (27 April 1720) which had a “Great Crowd,” as she reported in her diary. Unfortunately, the diary from late 1716 to early 1720 is no longer extant because she destroyed what she considered might be incriminating comments concerning the relationship between the Prince of Wales and his father, so we cannot confirm that the house concert took place, who attended, or how the performers acquitted themselves. Lady Cowper was an accomplished harpsichordist. She was charged by a rival for her husband’s affections as “playing the best upon the harpsichord of any Woman in England,” thereby having an excuse to stay home and invite men to visit. Thankfully, her husband regarded her talents on the harpsichord as being greatly in her favor. On 30 May 1720, after the royal reconciliation had been effected, she reports that she played the instrument at an evening entertainment for the King and his daughter-in-law Caroline. Lord Cowper died 10 October 1723 and she only three months later on 5 January 1724 though twenty years his junior.

Jane Barbier was an English contralto who had performed in several of Handel’s stage works, including Rinaldo, Il pastor fido and Teseo. She had also sung Telemachus in Galliard’s Calisto and Telemachus, the libretto of which was by Hughes, who had portrayed her in his poem The Hue and Cry as good looking and headstrong. The article in A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians asserts that her 1718-19 season under John Rich was “an extremely busy one,” so she may well have been unavailable.

Mrs. Robinson was a soprano just beginning her career. According to A Biographical Dictionary she received two benefit concerts at the King’s Theatre in February 1719. At Drury Lane Theatre in October 1719 she sang Ariosti’s cantata Diana on Mount Latinos. During the first season of the Royal Academy she sang in the opening opera—Porta’s Numitore—Scarlatti’s Narciso, and Handel’s Radamisto. Her husband John was an organist and

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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 and telephone number where readers may obtain details. Much of the information listed below has been taken from the web site “Hear Handel,” to the organizers of which the Newsletter is much indebted.


HÄNDEL-FESTSPIELE HALE, GERMANY. June 4 - 13, 1999. This year the Händel-Festspiele runs for ten days. Works to be performed include Acis and Galatea, Admeto, Agrippina, Alexander's Feast, Neun Deutsche, Ariane, Poro, and Samson by many of the world's foremost artists. For information call the Händel-Festspiele offices at 0345-500 90 222, or fax at 0345-500 90 416.


continued on back page
NEWS & NOTES

The American Handel Society and its Newsletter have seen some changes over the past few months. To begin with, we are pleased to announce the addition of three new board members: Professor Philip Brett, of the University of California; Professor Robert Ritterer, of the University of Illinois; and Dr. Brad Leissa, of Bethesda, MD.

At the meeting of the Board of Directors in November, 1998, founding member Howard Serwer announced his retirement from active duty, and the Board acknowledged his immense contribution to the Society by electing him an Honorary Director. Dr. Serwer was also feted at the Society's dinner, where he was presented with an engraving of the Houbraken portrait of Handel. Brad Leissa has agreed to serve as Secretary/Treasurer of the Society.

Bridget Brown, of Madison, Wisconsin has retired as the Newsletter's typesetter. Over the last several years she has done a splendid job, and it is largely thanks to her careful work that the Newsletter has maintained its quality and accuracy. We are sad to see her go, and wish to take this opportunity to thank her for her service. We are presently experimenting with other typesetters and printers and ask the Society's indulgence as we move into a new era.

The Maryland Handel Festival and Conference was a great success this year. In particular, the conference sessions and lectures, which the American Handel Society organized in conjunction with the Festival, were very well attended. Each day's session of papers drew approximately 75 audience members, and the lectures by Anthony Hicks and Ellen Rosand were each attended by more than 100. The oratorio performances were of the usual high quality, and a special treat was provided on Saturday evening, when the Pittsburgh early music group Chatham Baroque played a stunning program of string music by Jenkins, Mattei, Purcell and Handel.

The Maryland Handel Festival plans to present Susanna and Solomon in Spring, 2000, followed by performances of Theodora and Jepthah in the new Maryland Center for the Performing Arts in Spring, 2001. The future of the Festival after that is presently being negotiated. We will keep the members of the Society posted.

Finally, the Society's web page has been reconceived and updated by Brad Leissa. Members are urged to explore the new version at the following address:

http://www.intr.net/bleissa/ahs/

THE J. MERRILL KNAPP RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

The Board of Directors of the American Handel Society invite applications for the 1999 J. Merrill Knapp Research Fellowship, an award of $1,500 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 this 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 1999 Fellowship must be postmarked no later than April 15, 1999 and should be sent to:
Professor William Gudger
Department of Music
The College of Charleston
Charleston, SC 29424-0001

Applicants will be notified of the decision by May 15, 1998.

HANDEL CONFERENCE

“Great Among The Nations”

Handel and the various national styles of his period is the theme of the next Handel Institute Conference, to be held in London on 20-21 November 1999. The timetable will run on a half-hourly basis, so papers will be restricted to 20-25 minutes.

1998 MARYLAND HANDEL FESTIVAL AND AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS

DAVID ROSS HURLEY, "Hercules in Drag"

Thomas Broughton's libretto for Handel's Hercules cites two works as sources—the Trachiniae of Sophocles and Ovid's Metamorphoses. When Anthony Hicks suggested in 1992 that Seneca's Hercules Oetaeus also seems to have influenced the libretto, it became clear that Broughton drew upon other texts in addition to those he acknowledged. My paper examines two 'new' sources for Handel's Hercules. The first was recently identified as an influence upon Broughton's text by Todd Gilman—

Peter Motteux's libretto for Hercules, a masque for John Eccles originally performed in Motteux's play The Novelty in 1697. The second, identified here for the first time, is yet another ancient text that served both Motteux and Broughton: Ovid's Heroïdes. These new texts disclose a newcomer to the world of Handel's women, Omphale, queen of Lydia and former lover of Hercules. Her existence—or more precisely, the question of Dejanira's knowledge of it—has important ramifications for understanding Handel's libretto.

In act 2, scene 5 of Handel's Hercules Dejanira upbraids her
husband (who is actually innocent) for having fallen in love with another woman, Iole. In her aria "Resign thy club and lion's spoils," Dejanira accuses the hero of effeminacy for having fallen for Iole and suggests that he put aside his club, clothing, word, and shield and take up the spindle and distaff. In so doing, Dejanira refers to one of her husband's earlier erotic interests: according to a number of sources, Hercules had been sold in slavery to Omphale, who forced him to work spinning women's clothes and spin for her. This episode is the basis of one of the important scenes in Moteux's Hercules, where Omphale and her attendants are the immediate cause of Dejanira's jealousy. The ultimate source for the spinning Hercules, however, is Ovid's Heroides (available to both Moteux and Broughton in English translation), where Dejanira's suspicions about Iole are fueled by her knowledge of Hercules' exploits with Omphale. Broughton's act 2, scene 5 not only seems to have been influenced by Moteux, but also quotes directly from the Heroides. Dejanira's reference to Hercules' "female toils" for Omphale thus challenges the traditional view that in Handel's musical drama Hercules' character is entirely pure and Dejanira's jealousy is entirely unfounded.

SUSANNE DUNLAP, "The magic of Alcina: Transformations of the Sorceress from Caccini to Handel"
Throughout the history of opera, composers set many different themes that were derived from the great Renaissance epic poems, especially Ariosto's Orlando furioso and Tasso's Gerusalemme liberata. Handel himself followed this tradition by composing three different operas on stories from Orlando furioso. One of them, Alcina's enchantment of the hero Ruggiero, was first treated operatically by Francesca Caccini in her work La liberazione di Ruggiero dall'isola d'Alcina in 1625.

This paper examines the way in which Alcina is presented in Caccini's and Handel's operas, comparing the personality of the sorceress as she emerges in the text and music of each. The paper explores issues such as the differences from Ariosto's original story, the divergent historic backdrops of the two works, and musical questions such as tonality and vocal style. The differences in Caccini's textual and musical personality help to illustrate not only the differences between the two musical styles, but also a similarity in the way both composers used the available musical vocabulary to imbue Alcina with a distinct quality of "otherness."

KENNETH NOTT, "Injur'd Queen, L'indigna usurpatrice: The Portrayal of Athalia in Eighteenth-Century Oratorio"
The story of Athalia was a favorite of oratorio composers during the eighteenth century. In addition to Handel's justly admired setting of 1733, there exist versions by Caldara, Marcello and J.C. Bach, to name but a few. These oratorios represent the work of three librettists: Samuel Humphreys (Handel), Apostolo Zeno (Caldara and Marcello) and Pietro Metastasio (J.C. Bach). The libretto by Zeno propelled the opera to Racine's play of 1691 and represent in general outline, if not in specific details, what could be called the Racinian version of the story. Metastasio's libretto tells a very different story and is, as he claimed in a letter, completely independent of Racine.

A fruitful study of these two main Athalia traditions could center on the portrayal of the character of Athalia. In the Racinian versions, Athalia is a woman of great strength. She is an "evil" character by virtue of her unlawful and murderous seizure of the throne of Israel, but she is also a sympathetic character. She feels guilt for the slaughter of her grandchildren, she is haunted by a dream of her downfall and she even, albeit momentarily, feels a certain familial warmth towards the sole surviving grandson who will ultimately prove her undoing. When faced with defeat, she remains defiant even to the point of curing the new king, accurately predicting his later apotheosis. She is truly, as she describes herself in Handel's last act, an "injur'd queen," an impressive character of genuinely tragic stature.

Metastasio's Athalia is a very different person. Raymond Monelle has written that "Metastasio has least good at creating malandrini, really tellinaire, lovable characters." Furthermore, "his evil far from being heroic passages of spiritual conflict are based on intrigue, disguise, mistaken identity . . . ." In Metastasio's Gioia, Re di Giuda, Athalia plots to keep her throne through trickery. Though haunted by fear and madness, guilt and familial love have no place in her heart. She is, in comparison to the Racinian Athalia, weak and unsympathetic, in the words of Sebia, "findeg-na usurpatrice."

This comparison raises questions which merit further investigation. How are villains and particularly villainous women portrayed in eighteenth-century oratorio and opera? Is the portrayal of Athalia as a weaker, more marginalized character simply the result of Metastasio's desire to separate himself from Racine, or is it a sign of a Metastasian world-view which is ruled by reason and reasonable (male) monarchs and has no place for powerful, sympathetic, tragically flawed women?

KEN MCLEOD, "Masculine Anxiety in Handel's Semele"
In defining "Women" Nathan Bailey's Dictionarium (1736) includes the following illustrative proverb: "Women, Wealth, and Wine have each two Qualities, a good and a bad . . . they are either a blessing or a curse, according to the use we make of them." Such a definition resonates with traditional constructions of women as duplicitous and disruptive objects. Eighteenth-century English plays and music dramas are rife with depictions of male fears of cuckoldry, shrewish women, and women who trangress sexual boundaries and who are punished due to misplaced aspirations of power over men. These images are almost invariably the products of male authors and testify to the perceived necessity of maintaining a discourse of gendered difference and hierarchy. They also belie an ongoing level of masculine anxiety and desire to maintain patriarchal order in the face of potentially disruptive feminine power during this period.

Many of Handel's dramatic texts reflect such negative characterizations of women, particularly in the librettos of his oratorios. Masculine anxiety and desire for control of female empowerment occurs in the oratorio Semele. Delicute female behavior and the consequences of desiring power over men are evident in Congreve's original plot summary: "Juno, after many contrivances . . . assumes the Shape and voice of Ino . . . by the Help of which Disguise and Artful Inquisitions, she prevails [with Semelé] to make a Request to Jupiter, which being granted must end in her utter Ruin." Depictions of male impotence also abound as in Jupiter's "thunder of the smallest size," and Juno's directive to Sminth, "Obey my will, thy leader rod resign." Semele's mirror scene, Ino's "Thou hast undone me!" and "The heavenly sphere turns round" further testify to the duplicitous and disruptive portrait of women, focusing on Semele in the context of prevailing attitudes towards women in English society and literature, I discuss the negative images of women within the text and Handel's reinforcement of female vanity and duplicity through juxtaposition of keys, open forms, and excessive ornamentation.

WENDY HELLER, "The Pleasures of Self-Sacrifice: Handel's Admeto on the journey from Venice"
The ability to transform myth is perhaps one of opera's most undervalued contributions; throughout the history of the genre, composers and librettists, with the apparent complicity of audiences and producers, have staked the start an extraordinary liberty to reshape our most basic legends, altering them not only to accommodate the idiosyncrasies of music and stagecraft, but also to reinforce new ideals in a pleasurable digestible form. While this is scarcely an unexpected occurrence for the most dangerous mythic women such as Medea, Alcina, and Dejanira, who are almost invariably refigurated in their operatic transformations, scholars have been less enthusiastic about the treatment accorded one of the most dutiful and heroic women of all mythology by Handel and his Italian predecessors: Alcestis, whose widow devotion and embrace of female virtue was so great that she chose death and a descent to hell that she might spare her beloved husband King Admetus from further suffering and death. As a seventeenth-century Venetian opera heroine ( Aureli and F. Ziani: 1669; 1679), transformed twice—once for Hanover and again for Handel's London in 1727—Alcestis's self-sacrifice, albeit noble, is drooped in comic overlay, mitigated by jealousy, deception, transvestitis, and even violence in the carnivalesque play that was the Venetian legacy to the genre. In the context of its Venetian and Hellenic ancestors as well as Euripides's play Aulcon, this paper will examine the Aulcon myth as transformed in Handel's Admeto, Re di Tessaglia (1727). I demonstrate the ways in which the oft-criticized peculiarities of the original libretto by Aurelio Aureli maintained in the Handel setting—including the addition of a subplot and second primary female character—can be better understood as serious responses both to fundamental themes underlying
Euripides' representation of Alcestis and to Venetian conventions for the treatment of female heroines in opera. Finally, I argue that this intersection between Handelian and Venetian sensibilities is of critical importance for understanding the treatment of women in other "Venetian-born operas," such as Sera or Giulio Cesare, and perhaps the source of their special appeal for modern audiences and critics.

ELLEN ROSAND, "Handel's Oratorio Narrative"

Handel's oratorios, in which "the Solemnity of Church-Music was agreeably united with the most pleasing Airs of the Stage," promised their audience the musical delights of the opera house leavened by the instruction and moral uplift of a church service. Intended as something of a corrective, they were designed to speak more directly than opera to their audience. They differed from opera not only in language (Italian rather than the Handelian musical style (simpler forms, more direct, lyric text-setting), subject matter (usually biblical rather than profane), and moral impact, but in the very nature of their dramatic development. In opera, music, stage action and costumes combine to present a coherent and usually continuous story, with most of the action taking place within view or at least earshot of the audience. Oratorio drama, in contrast, relying on the audience's familiarity with the biblical story and willingness to comprehend its potential allegorical implications, often lacks continuity, presenting instead a series of events that leave space for emphasis of the moral message. Unstaged, its characters uncostumed, oratorio is a drama of the mind. But Handel's musical setting enables his audience to see,\* The oratorios seem to have lured the composer to extraordinary heights in the musical representation of action and setting. Handel's music mimics the two most notorious actions in the story of Joshua, the battle of Jericho and the sun standing still, and in Alexander Balus, it represents the precipitating event of the plot, Cleopatra's kidnapping. Contrasting settings are depicted in both works by means of orchestration, meter, melodic-rhythmic style, and form. The oratorio may have been considered a moral alternative to the lush decadence of opera, but the very deprivation of stage spectacle had the paradoxical effect of inspiring some of Handel's most spectacular music.

DONALD BURROWS, "Handel's Women in the mid-1740s"

Handel's career in the 1730s was dominated by the competition between London's opera companies and by the uneasy relationship between the composer and the new generation of opera managers led by Lord Middlesex. It isarguable that Handel's continuing refusal to work with the opera company was a key factor affecting his professional activities in the 1740s. Society ladies in London who supported the opera company in the mid-1740s held alternative entertainments on his oratorio nights to draw the audience away, and Handel was denied the services of the operatic soloists who had hitherto served his casts for both opera and oratorio. The women歌唱家 were women affected by this than the men: Beard, Lowe and Reinhold were theatre singers who continued their previous association with Handel, but the women in his successful oratorio season of 1743 were 'goddesses from the farces' who had never sung for him in London before. Subsequent years saw considerable instability in the situation: many of the women soloists sang for Handel in only one season. A radical change occurred in 1748, the season of Alexander Balus and Joshua, when Handel was once again able to employ opera soloists, probably because of a change in the opera company's management. The leading ladies, Casarini and Gaili, undertook an unusually heavy schedule by singing for Handel's oratorios on Wednesdays and Fridays, while still appearing at the opera house on other nights of the week. It happens, furthermore, that the opera programme at the time included pasticcio revivals of music from Handel's older operas.

STAN PELKEY, "Political Discourse and the Representation of Authority in the Music of Handel"

Throughout the eighteenth century, the British debated the legitimacy of the Hanoverian dynasty and the nature of monarchy. A central feature of these debates was the use of classical and Biblical characters, themes, and allusions. These tropes permeate the librettos of Handel's oratorios and operas, and their implications for the political meaning of the librettos has recently received new scholarly attention. Because the same classical and Biblical figures were used as object lessons by both sides in political debates, the political implications of Handel's librettos alone can be ambiguous. Handel's use of associative tonality can be shown to indicate to the listener which characters in his dramas are legitimate rulers or figures of moral authority. In this way, Handel's music clarifies potential ambiguities in the librettos. His numerous representations of divine, ancient, and British kingship reveal striking similarities in musical content (keys, surface figurations, general affective quality). The aural associations among these representations thus produce a confusion of divine, ancient, and traditionally British symbols of monarchy closely analogous to that found decades earlier in Augustus Anglicus, the famous celebration of the life of Charles II. Taken as a whole, Handel's compositions suggest that he was a loyal supporter of the Hanoverian dynasty. This paper seeks to demonstrate a connection between political discourse and musical content; in doing so, it draws music into the general historical discussion of politics and the arts in the Augustan Age. (In keeping with the theme of the Conference, special attention was given to Agrippina, Deborah, Theodora, and Susanna.)

RICHARD G. KING, "The Flower of Princess: Anne of Hanover"

Among the women who played a significant role in Handel's life, Anne, daughter of George II and Caroline of Ansbach, stands out as among his best pupils, as a loyal patron, and as a friend of long-standing. She learned well enough from Handel that a knowledgeable contemporary, J. W. Lustig, could observe that "she and Frederick the Great were the most accomplished amateur musicians of the century. The details of her patronage of Handel are sketchy, but it is clear that she played an important role during the years of the so-called "Second Academy," and it is possible that her patronage continued after she left England in 1794 as wife of Willem, Prince of Orange. Her friendship with Handel was such that in 1750 he spent a good part of his final trip to the continent in her company.

Anne (1709-1759) was a remarkable woman of wide-ranging intellectual interests. The political aspects of her life have been outlined in a recent biography; however, the many facets of her cultural interests and patronage have yet to receive serious attention. Among the musical topics discussed are Anne's documented performances on the harpsichord (she was apparently in demand as a performer), her musical relationship with Frederick the Great, her creation of a Dutch court orchestra, and the lively musical culture at her court. Concerning art, a pastime to which Anne devoted considerable energy and resources, house inventories show that several of her homes were decorated with numerous paintings by the Princess, some of which may survive today. Further, references in letters and diaries show that her tal-

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The Handel Institute Awards

**Performance**
Applications are invited for the Byrde Award (up to £1,000) to support performance of Handel's music and assist young professional musicians at the start of their careers. Deadline April 1.

**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.

Further details from:
Professor Colin Timms
Department of Music
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
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Tel/fax: 0121-414 5781
Email: C.R.Timms@bham.ac.uk
A Curious Handel Performance

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deputy to William Croft at Westminster Abbey. His name is among those who were members in 1739 of what was later to become the Royal Society of Musicians; Handel also was a member. 1 Robinson subscribed to seven of the ten Handel works issued by subscription from 1728 to 1729 for which lists survive. 2 Hughes had collaborated with Handel (and Alexander Pope and John Gay) on Acis and Galatea in 1718, which, as Brian Trowell has remarked, "was Handel's first extended setting of English verse, and his first encounter with an English librettist in dramatic form," and he may also have been involved with Esther. 3 Dean states that "Handel had known Hughes as early as 1711, when the latter had sent him some poems to set, among them perhaps some short cantata Venus and Adonis. 4 A violinist himself, it is possible that he attended and participated in the entertainment described above.

David Hunter

3 Diary of Mary, Countess Cowper, 37.
9 Rose Mason, "Subscribers to Handel's Rodelinda and Faramonde A Preliminary Study of the Ten Works Published by Subscription During His Lifetime," (M.M. report, The University of Texas at Austin, 1998).
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, see the subscription notice inserted in this month’s Newsletter.

HANDEL-L on LISTSERV@UMDD.UMD.EDU

HANDEL-L is a list sponsored by The American Handel Society at the University of Maryland, College Park. 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.

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Howard Serwer serves as owner and moderator of HANDEL-L. In that capacity he reviews all postings for relevance and suitability and communicates with submitors if necessary. Serwer’s electronic address is hs7@umail.umd.edu.

The American Handel Society

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