

# NEWSLETTER

of

## The American Handel Society

Volume XXV, Number 3

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AHS Festival 2011 logo: Handel with Mt. Rainier in the background.

### FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK WINTER 2010

Please take a look at the program for “Handel in Seattle” printed elsewhere in this issue of the Newsletter. The papers for The American Handel Society Conference were solicited, reviewed and organized by the Program Committee and the Society owes a vote of thanks to Board Members Wendy Heller, who served as Chair, and Norbert Dubowy. As I have said in earlier issues of the Newsletter, Board Member Marty Ronish has put together a wonderful festival and I hope many members of the society can attend. Even if you cannot be there yourself, please pass along the information to fellow Handelians.

Also to be found elsewhere in this issue of the Newsletter is the call for membership dues for 2011. I would like to repeat the Treasurer’s request that those who also wish to pay money to the London Handel Institute and/or the Georg-Friedrich-Händel Gesellschaft in dollars through the AHS please make those payments by the beginning of June. Let me remind you that gifts to the AHS over and above the amount of the membership dues are always welcome. They can be designated for special projects or added to the society’s endowment which now stands at a little over \$54,000. The AHS uses the money received from membership dues, designated gifts, and interest from the endowment to fund the activities of the society and these include the biennial American Handel Society Conference and Howard Serwer Memorial Lecture which will take place this year in Seattle.

Finally, I would like to pass along two pieces of very good news from Halle. First, the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe (HHA) – the ongoing edition of Handel’s complete works for which the AHS nominates two members of the Editorial Board – has received a positive evaluation from the Union of German Academies of Science and will receive additional funding. This will allow the HHA to add a half-time editor to the continuing staff of the Editorial Office beginning this

### LONDON AS ATHENS: *TESEO* AND *ARIANNA IN CRETA*.

At the 2009 American Handel Festival in Kentucky, I had the honor of giving the Howard Serwer Lecture. The following is a condensed version of that presentation. An expanded version of the paper will appear in Bruno Forment, ed., *(Dis)embodying Myths in Baroque Opera: Multidisciplinary Reflections* (Leuven University Press, forthcoming).

My lecture examined *Teseo* and *Arianna in Creta*, Handel’s two operas about the mythical Athenian hero Theseus, as case studies for the use of Greek myth and tragedy in operas in the first half of the eighteenth century. Both operas were composed at turning points in Handel’s career. *Teseo* (Haymarket Theatre, 1713), was adapted from Quinault’s French opera *Thésée*, and was Handel’s first collaboration with Nicolò Haym. The

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young Handel was at this time deciding that his future lay in London, and in resetting a French libretto, he was abetting Queen Anne's policy of rapprochement with France. *Arianna in Creta* was composed on an Italian libretto by Pietro Pariati for Handel's final season at the Haymarket theatre, and in revival served as a bridge for his move to Covent Garden in the autumn of 1734. My focus was on the esthetics of dramatic reception of the classical tradition in these operas: I asked why, as a storyteller in music, Handel was attracted to writing Theseus operas at these times; what aspects and versions of those stories he was adapting; and what the relationship was with the genre of story telling called Greek tragedy.

Athenian tragedy, the only kind of Greek tragedy extant, was about the moments of extreme danger when the mythic patterns of societal creation or salvation are broken, or almost so. Heroes fail to conquer death and even inflict it on themselves or others, and the misfortunes of secondary characters in heroic epics, like Philoctetes, Dejanira, or Andromache, become the central subjects of the tragic dramas. Aeschylus is supposed to have called tragedies portions (*temache*) from the great banquets of Homer.<sup>1</sup> For the eighteenth century, as for us, this tragic drama carried a heavy cultural weight. In particular, it was thought to bear the responsibility of giving moral advice. Andre Dacier, for example, wrote: "[The Greek] theatre was a school, where virtue was generally better taught, than the schools of their philosophers, and at this very day, the reading of the pieces will inspire a hatred to vice, and a love to virtue." Another eighteenth-century critic claimed, "The aim and business of the *Greek tragedy* was by some fable or other, to teach and inculcate some moral passion."<sup>2</sup> But this didactic view of the purpose of tragedy was not the only one held by the ancients, and perhaps not even the principal one. Criticism from authors like Aristophanes, Plato and Aristotle, as well as the extant texts of the plays themselves, show that tragedy was also written for the purposes of melodramatic, spectacular entertainment as often as they were to teach a moral. Handel's serious operas on the Theseus story, which are free creations by early modern librettists on a tragic-like theme rather than straightforward imitations of Greek tragedy, reflect the ancient tensions in Greek drama between serious moralism and popular entertainment. To explore these tensions, I examined scenes from *Teseo* and *Arianna* to see how Handel and his librettists manipulated the Greek heritage and its Roman imitators.

1 Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistai*, 8.347e.

2 [Charles Gildon,] *The Laws of Poetry... Explained and Illustrated* (1721), p. 149; Dacier, *Aristotle's Art of Poetry* (1705), p. xx.

In *Teseo* V.i, Handel sets Medea's agonies about whether she can destroy her beloved Theseus with an accompanied recitative and aria that appear to be a recreation of a famous scene from Euripides' *Medea*. In Euripides play (lines 1040-64), Medea debates with herself about whether she is able to kill her own children. Euripides lines are a powerful but rhetorically understated monologue by a woman who has been betrayed by her husband Jason and pushed beyond what she can endure. Handel and Haym's *Medea*, an older woman suffering from unrequited love for the young Theseus, is a melodramatic sorceress; her language is rhetorically heightened by references to vengeful Furies, and by the violent language of the dismemberment and slaughter she means to visit on Theseus and Agilea, the woman Theseus loves. Handel's music emphasizes the near schizophrenia of the moment, beginning with sweet thoughts of her love for Teseo, and then suddenly shifting to a harsh refusal to let Theseus' beloved Agilea get the better of her. The aria torments her with insistent chords and a wailing oboe with her "Moriro" (reminiscent of "Pensieri" in *Agrippina*), then presses her forward with rushing ascending and descending scales as she contemplates her revenge. The whole is more reminiscent of Seneca's Latin tragedy than Euripides' original, and gauged to hit the emotions rather than the mind.

In *Arianna in Creta*, scenes with Theseus exemplify a different kind of literary and dramatic adaptation. Pierre Gautruche describes the fantastical central event on which the opera is based: "The most famous and notable of all Theseus's exploits, was the victory that he obtained of the Minotaure, who was half man and half a bull, whose birth we have mentioned in the former book, speaking of Pasiphae, the wife of Minos, who was the mother of this monster begot by a bull on her body."<sup>3</sup> In the opera Theseus also engages in combat with a second adversary, the Cretan captain Taurus (adopted from Plutarch's rationalized *Life of Theseus*) who serves as a human double to the Minotaur. Interestingly, though we are in the world of Greek myth, Theseus is quite clearly cast as a medieval knight errant, following a code of medieval chivalry rather than any ancient code of manly behavior. He defends fair ladies from monsters and other evil knights, and fights for his own honor and glory while doing so.

Act II.1-3 exemplify how classicism resolves into medieval, chivalric behavior in the opera. These scenes blend classical myth, philosophy and epic with medieval chivalry. A temple of Hercules on stage emphasizes a mythic link between Theseus and that hero. In front

3 Pierre Gautruche, *The Poetical History... Now Englished* 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (1701), 150.

of this visual reference to Hercules, Theseus expresses anguish at the necessity to make a choice between Ariadne, his “Delight and Treasure,” and his desire for Glory, thus evoking the famous “Choice of Hercules,” in which Hercules chooses a life motivated by virtue rather than one of pleasure.<sup>4</sup> References in the text to a gate that brings true dreams, and to the image of the tree standing firm in the face of a tempest, are both adaptations of famous passages from Virgil’s *Aeneid*.<sup>5</sup> A subsequent recitative dialogue between the Theseus and his friend Alceste, especially in the English translation in the libretto, casts the heroism in medieval and chivalric terms, with the his role as against the monster and Taurus as single combat and trial on a field of battle, which will win for Theseus both liberty for his country and of the woman he loves.

The 1734 *Arianna in Creta* was produced in the midst of Handel’s three operas based on Ariosto—*Orlando* (1733), *Ariodante* and *Alcina* (both 1735)—and it might be thought that if Theseus looks like a medieval knight in these works like a medieval knight in these works, maybe Handel and his arranger just forgot to turn off that particular switch. But the English audience, if they were at all inclined to read poetry, would know that in their literary tradition, Theseus *was* a medieval knight: In Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale* he appears as the victorious king of Athens in a chivalric story about the brothers who are rivals for the love of a lady they have seen out of a prison window. Chaucer got his idea from Boccaccio, who had written a twelve-book epic called *Teseide*. Shakespeare depicted him in the role of medieval warrior king not only in *Midsummer Nights Dream*, but also in the 1613 *Two Noble Kinsmen* that he wrote with John Fletcher, and which is a dramatization of Chaucer’s Tale. In 1700 Dryden published a translation of Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* in his collection of *Fables*.

Boccaccio’s and Chaucer’s story starts with an account of how Theseus, returning from conquering the Amazons was accosted by the widows of warriors who had been killed in the expedition of the Seven against Thebes. These ladies plead with him to take his army and force the Thebans to allow them to bury the bodies of their husbands, who had been left exposed on the field. This story was told in Euripides’ tragedy *Suppliant Women*, one of the extant plays in which Theseus appears as a character, which might suggest that there were Greek tragic roots for the depiction of Theseus as a knight, and so also for the characterization of his combats in *Arianna in Creta*. But Chaucer and Boccaccio

4 Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.21-34; Cicero, *de Officiis*, 1.32.118.

5 Aeneas as a steadfast oak: Virgil, *Aeneid* IV.441-49. The gates of dreams: *Aeneid* VI.893-96

did not have Euripides available to them; they got the story from Book 12 of the Roman poet Statius epic called the *Thebaid*. So as with the case of *Teseo*, the opera has its roots more in the Roman tradition than the Greek. Nevertheless, this Roman version of Theseus, associated as it is with the chivalric tradition in the late middle ages, also has a natural affinity with other knights errant in Handel’s operas based on Ariosto and Tasso. *Arianna in Creta* in particular is not an aberration in the midst of *Orlando*, *Ariodante* and *Alcina*, but a perfectly logical part of that group. Furthermore *Teseo*, with its gallant hero and powerful sorceress, fits thematically into the group of operas produced at the same time that included *Rinaldo* (1711) and *Amadigi* (1715).

To return to my first discussion, Handel’s *Teseo* and *Arianna* are an especially interesting demonstration of how the early eighteenth century might choose to create serious, Greek-like drama on the opera stage. Unlike *Admeto* or *Hercules*, they have no original Greek dramatic model to follow. Like the Greek tragedians before them, Handel and his librettists were taking portions from the banquet of epic, although in this case it was not Homeric epic, but Italian and Spanish Renaissance chivalric epic. Their mythical story patterns involved questing knights like Orlando, Rinaldo, or Amadigi, saving fair maidens, operating on a chivalric code, and defeating monsters, sorceresses, and other warriors. If the means of presenting these effects was mostly filtered through Roman and medieval sources, the process of adapting Theseus’s story to the stage was as old as Euripides.

— Robert C. Ketterer  
The University of Iowa

## 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.

## NOT SUCH A ‘LOW EMPLOYMENT’: DR JOHNSON AND EDITING

Kenneth Nott’s quotation from the Preface to the *Dictionary of the English Language* in the Spring 2010 *Newsletter* was fortunately not Dr Johnson’s last word on the subject of scholarly endeavour, though the fame of his dictionary has naturally tended to give its contents a dominant role in our perception of the author. The tone of the preface was no doubt coloured by Johnson’s feelings on completing his work, and we may suspect that he was setting up defences against the critical reception of the *Dictionary* by minimising the significance of the lexicographer. A decade later, when he came to write the preface to another large project, *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, his tone was rather different, partly because that preface devoted considerable space to a critical review of previous Shakespeare editions, but also because the conclusion of his labours this time left him with a more positive perception of the role of the editor than of the lexicographer.

This emerges most clearly in a passage that reviews the previous eighteenth-century editions of Shakespeare’s plays from Nicholas Rowe and Alexander Pope:

The nation had been for many years content enough with Mr Rowe’s performance [i.e. edition], when Mr Pope made them acquainted with the true state of Shakespeare’s text, showed that it was extremely corrupt, and gave reason to hope that there were means of reforming it. He collated the old copies, which none had thought to examine before, and restored many lines to their integrity; but, by a very compendious criticism, he rejected whatever he disliked, and thought more of amputation than of cure.<sup>1</sup>

This was a work which Pope seems to have thought unworthy of his abilities, being not able

to suppress his contempt of *the dull duty of an editor*. He understood but half his undertaking. The duty of a collator is indeed dull, yet, like other tedious tasks, is very necessary; but an emendatory critic would ill discharge his duty without qualities very different from dullness. In perusing a corrupted piece, he must have before him all possibilities of meaning, with all possibilities of expression. Such must be his comprehension of thought, and such his copiousness of language. Out of many readings possible, he must be able to select that which best suits with the state, opinions, and modes of language prevailing in every age,<sup>2</sup> and with his author’s cast of thought, and turn of expression. Such must be his knowledge, and such his taste. Conjectural criticism demands more than humanity possesses, and he that exercises it with most praise has very frequent need of indulgence. Let us now be told no more of the dull duty of an editor.

The problem with the preface to Johnson’s *Shakespeare* is that it is difficult to limit the quotations, since so much of what he says resonates with the experience of generations of editors, literary or musical. Those familiar with Watkins Shaw’s classic *Textual and Historical Companion to Handel’s ‘Messiah’* will already be familiar with the quotation that forms the book’s motto, taken from this passage in Johnson’s preface:

It is impossible for an expositor not to write too little for some, and too much for others. He can only judge what is necessary by his own experience; and how long soever he may deliberate will at last explain many lines which the learned will find impossible to be mistaken, and omit many for which the ignorant will want his help. These censures are merely relative, and must be quietly endured. I have endeavoured to be neither superfluously copious, nor scrupulously reserved, and hope that I have made my author’s meaning accessible to many who before were frightened from perusing him, and contributed something to the public by diffusing innocent and rational pleasure.

Above all, Johnson’s preface reflects the refreshment and stimulation that the editor can experience from renewed detailed contact with major creative works. Indeed, this prompted him to begin the preface with reflections on the value of the works under review, concluding as follows:

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

The reverence due to writings that have long subsisted arises therefore not from any credulous confidence in the superior wisdom of past ages, or gloomy persuasion of the degeneracy of mankind, but is the consequence of acknowledged and indubitable positions, that what has been longest known has been most considered, and what is most considered is best understood.

The problem for the editor of any major text that relies on performance, is perhaps that the opportunity to develop a relationship 'most considered and best understood' with a work also sets up so many possibilities for disappointment in its realisation. When it comes to the music, the notes may be correct, but the sound may not be appropriate; in opera, what you see on the stage may be in conflict with the dramatic logic of the score. Johnson's preface even has a prophetic hint of the experience of inappropriate 'readings' of Handel's dramatic works in performance. He is referring to the effect of explanatory annotations, when the reader's attention should be concentrated on the drive of the drama: 'let him preserve his comprehension of the dialogue and his interest in the fable'. Mostly, the 'fables' in Handel's dramatic works are clear, coherent and specific, and their power is undermined by the introduction of irrelevant matter:

The mind is refrigerated by interruption;  
the thoughts are diverted from the principal  
subject; the reader is weary, he suspects not why;  
and at last throws away the book which he has too  
diligently studied.

The greater danger is perhaps that the innocent member of the audience does not 'throw away the book', but comes away with the impression that what has been seen is actually Handel's work.

— Donald Burrows

1 There is another paragraph at this point, devoted to Warburton's Shakespeare edition; however, the subject-matter runs on as given here, and it looks as if the paragraph is an interpolation to Johnson's original draft.

2 The equivalent for the Handel editor is obviously musical style.

## 2011 DUES

A reminder to send in your dues for 2011  
(see form on p. 7) to Marjorie Pomeroy.

year which to further the goal of completion in 2023.

Second, AHS member Wolfgang Ruf will receive the 2011 Handel Prize of the City of Halle, conferred through the Händel Haus Foundation, in recognition of his significant service to the music of Handel. The award will be presented during the Handel Festival in June. Prof. Dr. Ruf served as President of the Georg-Friedrich- Händel-Gesellschaft from 1995-2009 and until 2007 served as co-General Editor of the HHA. He also held the position of Professor at the Institute for Music of the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg, and undertook the planning of the scholarly conferences held annually during the Handel Festival. Originally trained as a diplomat, Prof. Dr. Ruf will be especially remembered for his firm but tactful leadership during difficult times. I know that the members of the AHS extend hearty congratulations to Prof. Dr. Ruf on this well-deserved honor.

— Graydon Beeks

## HANDEL CALENDAR

The American Handel Society welcomes news or information about events of interest to Handelians. If possible, please include address, telephone number and URL where readers may obtain details. Announcements concerning Handel events from around the world are available by logging onto <http://gfhandel.org/>

## 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/>

## CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

### Thursday, Mar. 24

(Thursday daytime events have separate fees)\*

- 10:00 - 11:30: Baroque Dance Lecture-Demo (Anna Mansbridge)  
11:30 – 1:00: Catered lunch and Country Garden slide show (Paul Willen)  
1:00 - 5:30: Sing Handel choruses  
6:00 – 8:00: Opening Reception (Handel's harp music at 6:30 pm by Maxine Eilander)

### Friday, Mar. 25

- 8:30 am: Snacks and coffee  
9:00 – 11:45: **Paper Session I: Singers and Their Contexts**

Katherine Lowerre (East Lansing, Michigan), "An English Opera Singer in Handel's London: Framing Narratives and Professional Networks"

Matthew Gardner (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität, Heidelberg, Germany), "*Esther* and Handel's English Contemporaries"

David Vickers (Royal College of Music, Manchester), "Reassessing the Italians in *Esther*: Handel's Bilingual Versions of his First English Oratorio"

Graydon Beeks (Pomona College), "Sweet Bird:" The Story of Dame Nellie Melba's 1907 Recording"

- 12:00 – 1:00: Janet See baroque flute recital  
1:15 – 2:30: Catered Lunch/AHS Board Meeting  
2:30 – 4:45: **Paper Session II: Ancients and Moderns**

Corbett Bazler (University of Rochester), "Reforming Handel: The Failed Heroics of *Imeneo* and *Deidamia*"

Ruth Smith (Cambridge University, UK), "*The Choice of Hercules* and Handel"

Robert Ketterer (University of Iowa), "Iphigenia at Covent Garden"

Jonathan Rhodes Lee (University of California, Berkeley), "Must She her Acis Still Bemoan? *Acis and Galatea* and Sensibility"

- 7:00: Howard Serwer Memorial Lecture: David Hurley  
8:00: Concert: Boston Early Music Festival: *Acis and Galatea*

### Saturday, Mar. 26

- 9:00: Snacks and coffee  
9:30 – 11:45: **Paper Session III: Oratorio and Ode**

Minji Kim (North Andover, MA), "The Voice of the People: Israelite Choruses in the 1720 Version of Handel's *Esther*"

Helen Farson (University of California at Santa Barbara), "Quelling the Passion: Handel's Reply to Dryden's Arguments in *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day*"

Fred Fehlsen (The Julliard School), "Reconsidering the Musical Language of Handel's *Messiah*"

Stephen Nissenbaum (University of Massachusetts, Amherst), "Handel and the Boston Tea Party, 1773"

- 12:00 – 1:00: Handel Chorus concert  
1:15 – 3:00: AHS luncheon, Donald Burrows: "Beyond the 'New Deutsch': a progress report on the Handel Documents project;" AHS General Membership Meeting  
3:00 – 6:00: Afternoon free  
7:00: Pre-Concert Lecture: John Roberts  
8:00: Concert: Pacific Musicworks and Tudor Choir: *Esther*

### Sunday, Mar. 27

- 10:00 – 1:30: **Brunch and Paper Session IV: Sources and Documents**

Ireri Chavez-Barcenas (Princeton University), "The Performing Parts of Handel's Latin Works in the Koch Collection"

Annette Landgraf (HHA, Halle, Germany), "The Explanation and Deeper Meaning of Three Names in a Handel Document"

Thomas Goleeke (Tacoma, Washington), "Handel's Gigue in D Minor: Is this the Earliest Version?"

Break

### Topics and Typologies

Angharad Davis (Yale University), "Towards a Typology of Handel's Borrowings"

Greg Decker (Florida State University), "Colonizing Familiar Territory: Musical Topics, Stylistic Level, and Handel's Cleopatra"

- 2:00: Pre-Concert Lecture  
3:00: Concert: Seattle Baroque Orchestra  
6:00: Post-Festival Dinner

# The American Handel Society

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## OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

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## The American Handel Society – Membership Form

Please mail the completed form and appropriate membership dues as instructed below:

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I agree to have the following listed in a printed Directory of AHS Members (check as appropriate):

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Friend of the Handel Institute, London – Regular	30	15	-
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TOTAL REMITTANCE			

\* - This organization does not have a reduced rate for retirees.

Those paying in dollars or sterling should make their checks payable to THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY and mail them to Marjorie Pomeroy, Secretary/Treasurer, THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY, 49 Christopher Hollow Road, Sandwich, MA 02563. Those wishing to pay in Euros should remit to Prof. Dr. Manfred Rätzer, Treasurer, Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft, Gr. Nikolaistraße 5, 06108 Halle (Saale), Federal Republic of Germany, and indicate that the payment is for the account of the AHS. Friends of the London Handel Institute may also pay their AHS dues in sterling by making their checks payable to The Handel Institute and mailing them to Malcolm London, Hon. Treasurer, The Handel Institute, 108 Falcon Point, Hopton Street, London, SE1 9JB, with the appropriate annotation.

Payments in dollars for GFH or HI memberships must be received before 1 June.

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## The American Handel Society

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