Göttingen: June 10–14, 1988

By chance both the President and Vice-President of the AHS were at Göttingen for the Handel Festival this year. There were few other Americans and British present; perhaps the falling dollar was a factor. At any rate, Handel was well represented in a number of different guises. The chief works were Samson and Jephtha: the former given by the North German Radio Orchestra and Chorus under the direction of Wolf-Dieter Hauschild; the latter for two successive nights by John Eliot Gardiner, the artistic director of the festival, with his Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque soloists. Curiously enough, Hauschild directed his modern instrumental group in eighteenth-century fashion while playing continuo at a raised harpsichord, while Gardiner led his original-instrument forces in the regular modern way while standing.

With a German audience, one of the great advantages for both oratorios was a complete printed word book with the English text on one side and the Gervinus German translation on the other. The works were sung in English, and the text could be read since the lights remained up. Would that this were done more often, since Hamilton's and Morell's English is not always completely intelligible, even to a native.

Samson was performed almost complete, for much of the Micah music, often omitted, was included. It took just under four hours with one twenty-minute intermission. The soloists were both German and English, the two English singers being Robert Tear and Sarah Walker, who sang Samson and Micah respectively. They are both very experienced artists who have long been known for their Handelian interpretation, and their performance showed a close emotional involvement in the music. The other soloists were in no way outshone, although their words sometimes got garbled. There was not even a smile from the German audience as the chorus sang “To man God's universal law/gave pow'r to keep the wife in awe.”

To this listener, the star of the Samson performance—as was certainly true of Jephtha—was the professional chorus. Its robust, full-toned attacks in “Awake the trumpet's lofty sound,” “Oh first created beam,” and "continued on page 4"
Four Handel Oratorios in Boston

This Lent Bostonians had an opportunity to enjoy performances of several Handel oratorios and to reflect on the best context for presenting such works. The contrast between the March 5 performance of *Theodora* at Emmanuel Church and that of *Hercules* at Jordan Hall on March 20 underscored both the suitability of these works for the concert hall and the difficulty of putting them across in a large stone church. In spite of its unflattering acoustics, the sacred aura of Emmanuel Church enhanced the performance of the Christian drama *Theodora* by the Chorus Pro Musica (Donald Palumbo, conductor) and the Emmanuel Chamber Orchestra (Craig Smith, conductor). Jordan Hall's livelier acoustics and greater sense of rapport between audience and performers facilitated the Boston Cecilia's efforts to project the full force of pagan tragedy in *Hercules*. The latter performance also made effective use of the stage: soloists moved around in the space alongside the conductor in a way that clarified the characters' interaction.

The acoustics of the concert hall made for a better balance between voices and instruments. Craig Smith conducted a chorus of 65 singers and a well-coordinated orchestra of 20 players. The Boston Cecilia's Donald Teeters conducted a chorus of 56 and an orchestra of 29 that played on period instruments. While the *Theodora* performance used harpsichord continuo exclusively, the *Hercules* performance introduced variety by using organ continuo for the choruses.

Both Mr. Smith and Mr. Teeters maintained an unbroken continuity from one piece to the next. Both drew from their orchestras clear, crisp playing, with a fine sense of dynamic shading, but Mr. Teeters's wider range of tempi brought out the dramatic contrasts more forcefully than did Mr. Smith's almost uniformly brisk pace.

The performances shared two soloists: Jeffrey Gall sang Didymus in *Theodora* and Lichas in *Hercules*; William Hite sang Septimus in *Theodora* and Hyllus in *Hercules*. The other soloists in *Theodora* were Janice Felty as Theodora, Mary Westbrook-Geha as Irene, and James Maddalena as Valens. The other soloists in *Hercules* were David Arnold as Hercules, D'Anna Fortunato as Dejanira, Nancy Armstrong as Iole, and Mark St. Laurent as the priest of Jupiter.

While Mr. Gall's recitative delivery in both oratorios confirmed him as a costumbrist, only in *Hercules* did he consistently sing the airs with the secure, intense tone for which he is famous. Nancy Armstrong and David Arnold matched him in emotional intensity, but no one matched the easy flow of his recitatives and the tasteful ornamentation of his airs. Both performances were remarkable for lovely vocal sounds, especially the mellifluous mezzo of Ms. Fortunato and the easy vocal production of Mr. Hite.

Both performances were uncut. Mr. Smith even included recitative that Chrysander left out of his edition. The Jordan Hall program included a libretto, but the auditorium was darkened, making it difficult to read. The Emmanuel Church program, less helpfully, included only a synopsis, but there was plenty of light by which to read it.

Harris Sheridan Saunders, Jr.

When the Handel & Haydn Society was founded in 1815, it was primarily an organization for Bostonian choristers. And so it remained until last year, when Christopher Hogwood became its artistic director and an excellent "period orchestra" emerged as the new focal group. The score of *La Resurrezione* provides superb opportunities for display of instrumental skills, and it was brilliantly executed March 25 at Symphony Hall by the H&H orchestra of forty: 8+8+5+5+3 strings, 4 oboes, 2 trumpets, flute, bassoon, viola da gamba, theorbo, and harpsichord. Among the outstanding players were concertmaster Daniel Stepner, oboist Stephen Hammer, gambist Laura Jeppesen, theorboist Paul O'Dette and harpsichordist James David Christie.

The performers utilized the edition prepared by Anthony Hicks for the recording conducted by Hogwood in 1982. David Thomas, the *basso profundo* on the recording, repeated his magisterial rendition of Lucifer for the Boston audience. The other four soloists were from this side of the Atlantic: Jeanne Ommerlé was the Angel, Sharon Baker was Mary Magdalene, Catherine Robin was Mary Cleophas, and Jeffrey Thomas was John the Evangelist. They all sang exquisitely, with sober yet expressive ornamentation of their da capos, and they emulated the Roman premiere of 1708 by joining for the "chorus" that ends each part of the work. Some members of the audience must have been disappointed by the non-appearance of the 178-season-old H&H chorus, and Handelians among them were disappointed to read that next season's schedule would include only one work by their favorite master: the 135th annual H&H presentation of *Messiah*. Indeed, at two of the six events scheduled for next season, even the "period orchestra" will be replaced, since the instrumental works chosen are by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Bizet, Strauss, Ravel, Sibelius, and Copland!

A second rendition of *La Resurrezione* was given on the afternoon of March 27. At the same time, *Samson* was performed across the river in Cambridge by the Masterworks Chorale, conducted by Allen Lannom. (Unfortunately I was not able to hear this performance, which received a very favorable review in *The Boston Globe*.) Praiseworthy renditions of four Handel oratorios thus provided Handelians in the Boston area with an exceedingly festive Lenten season of 1988.

Lowell Lindgren

Correction

In the financial statement for 1987 printed in the last issue, the figure for interest/dividends received and consequent sums should be changed as follows:

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New Publications and Research

Publications


Dissertations


Have you missed one or more mailings from the AHS? If you have not received three Newsletters for each year of membership, please notify the Secretary.

Handel Calendar


“Hear, Jacob’s God” were simply splendid. “Then round about the starry throne” seemed a little more routine, perhaps because we know it so well and expect more than the usual.

If one is a Gardiner admirer, giving the highest marks to his orchestra, chorus, and soloists, then it can almost be said that the Jephtha performances were breathtaking. Gardiner gave a rhythmic vitality and energy to the music which made it come spectacularly alive, even on two successive evenings. The German audience responded in kind with buzzahs, shouts, and rhythmic clapping, generally not heard in a critical university town. Again the chorus was a leading factor. Its makeup is particularly interesting: ten women (mostly sopranos) and eighteen men, at least four of whom are male altos. The multicolored timbre created is very distinctive, particularly with precise control of dynamics and phrasing. The young soloists also gave their music a lift. Mezzo Anne Sofie von Otter, as Storge, showed a lovely voice, as did soprano Lynne Dawson as Iphïs. Michael Chance’s countertenor blended skillfully with both in “These labours past” and the famous quartet. The orchestra, which played at low pitch, knew exactly what Gardiner wanted and performed accordingly. The result showed minute preparation at rehearsals —the secret of any superior performance.

C. P. E. Bach got his share at Göttingen on this, the two hundredth anniversary of his death. There were fine performances of his Magnificat and the oratorio Die Israeliten in der Wüste by the Stuttgart Kammerchor and Barockorchester under Frieder Bernius. I am told a favorite new CD in the Bundesrepublik is a coupling of Johann Sebastian Bach’s Magnificat with that of his son.

Not to be omitted from mention were performances in the St. Albani church by Edward Tarr and his wife, Irniatrad Kröger, on baroque trumpet and organ. Tarr, an American with international reputation on his instrument, has a knack of presenting Handel concertogrosso and organ-concerto transcriptions brilliantly with suitable ornamentation and style that does not offend taste. His wife brings the same approach to the organ. There was also a welcome rapprochement of the two Germanys in that the festival address was given by Professor Bernd Baselt of Halle. His lecture with musical examples clearly and succinctly illustrated “The Biblical Theme in Handel’s Works and His Reform of the Oratorio.” Altogether, an interesting and creative festival.

J. Merrill Knapp

Plans for future Göttingen festivals have been revised. Next year’s event will take place June 9–13 or 14 and will feature Saul, Susanna, and ballet. Plans for June 1–5, 1990, include Dixit Dominus and operas by Mozart (Idomeneo) and Handel.—Ed.

Worse, the director made the singers behave like fidgety school children. They darted about the stage singing Handel’s arias or attempted them in all manner of athletic poses. By late in Act II the stage was strewn with bits of clothing and props like a teenager’s bedroom. The effect of such theatrical busy-ness was to make Handel’s music psychologically inaudible.

After the performance, when the booing had died away, we were saddened that the beautiful little Goethe Theatre had been used for a production that could have been mounted anywhere. The director who works there has a heaven-sent opportunity to restore Handel’s music dramas to their original glory—and acquire no little glory for himself. One hopes that before long we will be treated to a production at Bad Lauchstädt of an opera by Handel.

The topic of this year’s scholarly conference was “Concerning Performance Possibilities in Handel’s Oratorios.” The session was planned as a more or less informal exchange of views among scholars and performers. The speakers addressed questions of staging, translation, the placement of soloists, and the choice among versions of a given work. What distinguished this year’s session from previous such meetings was a willingness by scholars and performers to take each other’s positions seriously. One hopes that further development of such mutual respect will soon engage the attention of stage directors. Publication of a summary of the discussion is planned for the 1989 Händel-Jahrbuch.

Howard Serwer

George Frideric Handel Society

A new performing organization devoted to Handel has been formed in New York. The George Frideric Handel Society aims to attract a wide audience to Handel’s secular vocal music through a program of historically informed (though not necessarily “period”) performances emphasizing high levels of musicality and fidelity to Handel’s texts. The society plans to establish a complete repertory company and issue new performing editions of the works it presents. The latter would feature “clean” musical texts that include all authoritative performance options; copious notes would explain all aspects of the works, their context, and their interpretation.

The society’s first season includes a fall chamber series, a production of Silla on January 29 (see Calendar), and perhaps later a staged oratorio. Proceeds from regular and fund-raising performances will support the society’s activities. Singer Peter Terry is president and artistic director; the board of advisors is headed by H. C. Robbins Landon. The George Frideric Handel Society is based at 244 West 72nd Street, Apt. 4E, New York, NY, 10023.
The American Handel Society

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In the last few years, scholars have come to recognize that traditional musicological studies alone cannot provide a clear picture of Handel and his world. The American Handel Society seeks the participation of all scholars—
theatre historians, social historians, literary historians and all others whose subject matter is Handel's England. And
of course, The American Handel Society welcomes the support and participation of all persons interested in
Handel and his world. Activities of The American Handel Society will include

—publication of the Newsletter of The American Handel Society,

—sponsorship of meetings of the Society,

—cumulation of a computerized bibliographic data base of writings about Handel and his music and about related
subjects,

—maintenance of a register of performing materials for Handel's major works,

—cumulation of a Handel discography,

—establishment of an electronic bulletin board/conferencing network to facilitate communication among members
and subscribers.

The Founding Members and the Board of Directors of The American Handel Society invite you to become a
member. Wide support from scholars and those interested in Handel will help the Society make a strong start in
achieving its goals. In 1988 members will receive

—the Newsletter of the American Handel Society,

—a 10% discount on scores and books (not restricted to Handel) through Dale Music Company of Silver Spring,
Maryland, one of America's leading dealers. In addition, Dale has agreed to make available to our members
four recent titles from Cambridge University Press at a 20% discount. Other special offers are also available.
See the order form on the last page of this newsletter.

—the AHS Membership Directory, showing members' Handel-related activities such as research, performance,
and collecting.

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