

# NEWSLETTER of The American Handel Society

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## JOHN LANGSHAW AS A HANDEL COPYIST

Graydon Beeks

John Langshaw (1725–98) was primarily known in his lifetime as an organ builder and as the organist of Lancaster Priory, the city's Parish Church, where he served from 1772 until his death. The best summary of his life is that given by Arthur W. Wainwright in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.<sup>1</sup> The story is told at greater length in Madeline Goold's engaging book, *Mr. Langshaw's Square Piano*,<sup>2</sup> the research for which was triggered by the author's purchase at an auction in 2004 of a square piano made in 1807 by John Broadwood of London and delivered that same year to the organist and composer John Langshaw, Jr. (1763–1832), who had succeeded his father at Lancaster Priory in 1798, having served as his assistant since 1784. What follows is intended to augment the information provided in these sources.

John Langshaw, Sr. was born in Wigan in Lancashire, the son of a pewterer. Nothing is known of his upbringing beyond the fact that he served as a member of the Town Waits from 1742–43. The next reference to him occurs in 1754, when two of his compositions were included in *The Muses Delight*, published in Liverpool by John Sadler.<sup>3</sup> In an advertisement for the publication dated July 17, 1754, one of the agents from whom it could be purchased was "John Langshaw, musician in Wigan."<sup>4</sup> At some point, he settled in London and became involved in the making of barrel organs.

In a letter dated May 29, 1760, Langshaw responded to an enquiry on behalf of Sir Archibald Grant (1696–1778), 2<sup>nd</sup> Bart. of Monymusk, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, who was interested in purchasing a barrel organ capable of playing minuets, gavottes, and marches, most of them composed by Handel, as well as Scotch Tunes and the "Easter Hymn" ("Jesus Christ is Risen Today").<sup>5</sup> It is clear that Langshaw was by then intimately acquainted with the workings of the barrel organ mechanism, but despite his use of the word "our," the letter gives no indication of who his collaborators might have been.

Two years later a team was assembled to build an unusually large barrel organ for John Stuart, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Bute, then at the height of his influence on the young King George III. It was initially intended for his London residence, Bute House, but was eventually installed in his country estate of

1 "Langshaw, John," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, January 8, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16034>.

2 (London: Corvo Books, 2008).

3 The pieces were "Say, mighty love, and teach my song" and "An Hymn for Christmas-Day"; a copy in British Library, E.872.

4 *Harop's Manchester Mercury* (July 23, 1754), information supplied by Donald Burrows.

5 Scottish Record Office GD 345/1283/2/59 for the letter and GD 345/809 for the list of tunes.

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## 2020 LONDON HANDEL FESTIVAL: HANDEL AND THE HANOVERIANS

Ellen T. Harris

In early January of 1745, Handel was forced to close down his season after performing only a quarter of the scheduled performances. Just shy of three weeks later, noting the generosity of his subscribers "refusing upon their own Motives, to withdraw their Subscriptions," he was able to announce in *The Daily Advertiser* (January 25) at least a partial resumption and a promise of a more complete continuation "in some time." Although the situations differ, there is a resonance now felt by music groups around the world due to the COVID-19 crisis, among them the 2020 London Handel Festival (LHF), abruptly shut down on Monday, March 16, in mid-season. It is heartbreaking to look through their events calendar: *Fernando*, canceled; *Ode to Saint Cecilia*, canceled; Royal Chamber Music, canceled; and so on.

I was lucky enough to be in London during the first two weeks of March and had the opportunity to attend three of the biggest events of the Festival during that time. On Friday, March 6, the Handel Singing Competition Semi-Final took place in St. George's, Hanover Square. The twelve semi-finalists had been winnowed down from 187 contestants who came from thirty-two countries. The five finalists were announced the next morning. I had never attended the LHF singing competition and was very impressed by the singing as well as by the size and passion of the audience. During the intermission and at the conclusion of the event, and even at subsequent LHF events after the finalists had been announced, there was animated discussion of the various singers. Each contestant performed two arias, one in Italian and one in English, with harpsichord accompaniment. The Competition Final, which was to have taken place on March 26 in conjunction with the London Handel Orchestra directed by Laurence Cummings was one of the casualties of the COVID-19 crisis.

Of the finalists, I was particularly struck with countertenor Meili Li, whose performance of "Che più si tarda omai"—"Stille amare" from *Tolomeo* was stunning vocally

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