

# NEWSLETTER of The American Handel Society

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## BOSTON, BIRMINGHAM, AND THE RECEPTION OF ROBERT FRANZ'S EDITION OF *MESSIAH*

Luke Howard

The 1803 publication of the Wolfgang A. Mozart/Johann A. Hiller edition of Handel's *Messiah* soon led to Mozart's additional accompaniments becoming accepted as standard.<sup>1</sup> The Antient Concerts in London and a smattering of English critics resisted Mozart's additional accompaniments at first, some even questioning their authenticity.<sup>2</sup> But by 1825, lingering opposition to Mozart's version of Handel had practically faded away in England. A reviewer for the 1827 performance at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, wrote that *Messiah* was performed there "as we trust it will always be, with Mozart's accompaniments."<sup>3</sup> During this time, anyone who longed for the purity of *Messiah* "as Handel wrote it" was branded in the reviews an "austere stickler,"<sup>4</sup> ignorant dilettante,<sup>5</sup> or cold and dull hearted.<sup>6</sup>

In the ensuing decades, the Romantics' perpetual aspiration toward novelty inspired more musicians—often lesser known than Mozart or even Hiller—to contribute their own "additional accompaniments" to *Messiah*. The high (or low) point may have been reached with Sir Michael Costa (1808–84), whose immoderate orchestration was performed regularly at Handel Festivals from 1859 on (see below for further discussion). The narrative shifted after 1868. That year, the publication in facsimile of the autograph score of Handel's *Messiah*, preserved in Buckingham Palace at the time, demonstrated clearly how far from the original the current performance practices had drifted. It was around this time that Jenny Lind, who had performed the soprano solos in *Messiah* in England as early as 1850 up to 1867, reportedly declared, "Before you can make the world understand what a beautiful thing the score of the 'Messiah' is, you must wash it clean."<sup>7</sup>

The call for a restoration must have been shocking to many, who either assumed that Handel's *Messiah* as they knew it was unadulterated or believed that Mozart's accompaniments

1 F. G. [sic] *Händel's Oratorium Der Messias, nach W. A. Mozart's Bearbeitung* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1803).

2 "Excerpts from Parke's Musical Memoirs," *The Musical World* 62/30 (1884): 469.

3 "The Oratorios," *The Harmonicon* 5/4 (1827): 78.

4 "York," *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* 7/28 (1825): 437.

5 "Miscellaneous: Critical Acumen," *The Musical Journal* 2/43 (1840): 270.

6 "York," 422.

7 William H. Cummings, "The Mutilation of a Masterpiece," *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, 30<sup>th</sup> session (1903–04): 117. Rockstro and others had reported the quote, only without the attribution to Lind, as early as 1883. Bridge also attributed this quote to "a deceased singer" in 1899. It wasn't until 1903 that Cummings identified Lind as the source of the quote.

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## BIRMINGHAM BAROQUE 2021 CONFERENCE REPORT

Fred Fehleisen

The Birmingham Baroque 2021 (19th Biennial International Conference on Baroque Music) may have been delayed for a year, but it was certainly worth the wait. Over three days, July 15–17, more than 120 presenters had opportunities to share and discuss their pre-recorded video "papers" in more than 30 real-time chaired sessions. Registered participants were able to view presentations online prior to, during, and after the conference. Even after a year of Zoom fatigue, the coming together of such a wide-ranging group of colleagues in real time made the conference a major success. Carrie Churnside, chair of the organizing committee, and her team did an outstanding job. Teamwork, an enormous amount of hard work, often done in isolation, and a strong sense of community made it all possible.

Following the highly successful American Handel Society 2021 Conference online, the experience of this conference leads me to believe that we are all engaged in something new that has set us on the right track. Even the process of compiling this report involved something new: *revisiting* the conference online! Registered attendees can re-view conference videos via links in the program booklet and reprocess the information they contain. A wide variety of techniques and approaches were used by presenters in creating their videos, and all of them are worthy of further consideration.

Handel and his music were well represented in several sessions during the conference. On Thursday, there was an entire session devoted to Handel, chaired by Colin Timms. In a fascinating presentation entitled "Guarini, Tragicomedy, and Rinaldo," **Bill Mann** argued that Handel's *Rinaldo* (1711) and earlier Italian operas staged in London owed much to the influence of the *Il Pastor Fido* tragic-comedic tradition. **David Vickers** explored the idea of delving into Handel's creative process through versions of pieces that he "rejected" prior to performances. He examined alterations ranging from internal compositional choices and revisions to external ones related

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