

NEWSLETTER of The American Handel Society

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AMERICAN HANDEL FESTIVAL 2017: CONFERENCE REPORT

Carlo Lanfossi

This year, Princeton University (Princeton, NJ) hosted the biennial *American Handel Festival* on April 6-9, 2017. From a rainstorm on Thursday to a shiny Sunday, the conference unfolded with the usual series of paper sessions, two concerts, and a keynote address. The assortment of events reflected the kaleidoscopic variety of Handel's scholarship, embodied by a group of academics and performers that spans several generations and that looks promising for the future of Handel studies.

After the opening reception at the Woolworth Music Center, the first day of the conference was marked by the Howard Serwer Memorial Lecture given by John Butt (University of Glasgow) on the title "Handel and *Messiah*: Harmonizing the Bible for a Modern World?" Reminding the audience of the need to interrogate the cultural values inherent to the creation of *Messiah*, Butt structured his keynote address around various topics and methodologies, including an analysis of Handel's "uncanny" ability to harmonize the Bible, and the philosophical influence of the early modern idea of "self" (especially through the lens of Shaftesbury's writings) in shaping both Handel's approach to the oratorio and our own "harmonization" as listeners.

Friday featured three sessions devoted respectively to "Text, Music & Rhetoric," "Oratorio," and "Singers." It was the occasion to listen to both young graduate students and renowned faculty sharing the stage of the Taplin Auditorium in Fine Hall. The first session began with a close look at one of the two Spanish cantatas that Handel set to music during his Italian residency. Andrés Locatelli (Università degli Studi di Pavia, Italy) shed new light on the circulation of Spanish texts in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Rome through a detailed analysis of the cantata text *No se emenderá jamás* with philological insights into the sources and the attribution of the text to Antonio Hurtado de Mendoza. The session continued



with the exploration by Fredric Fehleisen (The Juilliard School) of the network of musical associations in *Messiah*, highlighting musical-rhetorical patterns through Schenkerian reductions and a request for the audience to hum the accompanying harmony of "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Finally, Minji Kim (Andover, MA) reconstructed an instance of self-borrowing in the chorus "I will sing unto the Lord" from *Israel in Egypt*, tracing the musical lineage to the incipit of the English canon "Non nobis, Domine" through its use in the Cannons anthem *Let God Arise* and the *Utrecht Te Deum*. The session devoted to the oratorio focused both on the influence of the Italian *opera seria* on the 1748 oratorio *Alexander Balus* (Kenneth Nott, University of Hartford) and on the ongoing contemporary discussion of the role of the clergy during Handel's time and its reflection in the portrayal of priests in his English oratorios (Ruth Smith, Handel Institute). The session on singers started with Farinelli and the investigation on the use and misattribution of the aria "Son qual nave" in his 1734 debut with *Artaserse*. Randall Scotting (Royal College of Music) argued that the composer Giovanni Antonio Gaj was behind much of the music for the London version. While David Vickers (Royal Northern College of Music) explored the repertory performed by Giulia Frasi in England after her arrival in 1742 (with cues to the changing styles of English music), Lawrence Zazzo (Newcastle University) gave a few hints as to who might have sung the Italian arias that Handel inserted in the 1744 revival of *Semele* (potential candidates: Filippo Rochetti as Athamas and a certain "Miss Robinson" as Juno).

The rest of Friday was dedicated to the performance of an intriguing selection of pieces from the 1741 Dublin version of *Messiah*. At Trinity Church (crowded to its full capacity), the concert was first introduced by Malcolm Bruno, who curated the autograph edition. Bruno summarized the intricate editorial story of *Messiah*, its orchestration and textual conundrums, up to the history of the German translation of the libretto by Johann Gottfried Herder. Thus, the concert featured pieces from *Messiah* both in English and German. John Butt conducted the Princeton University Chamber Choir and Nassau Sinfonia with precision and nuance.

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Saturday was devoted to “Scribes and Editors,” “Performing Matters,” “Opera,” and “Handel as Politics.” The four sessions ranged from extremely precise details of copyists’ handwritings to larger questions of the relationship between slave ownership and British society, attesting to the richness of present-day Handel studies. The first session was inaugurated by Donald Burrows (Open University) with a captivating survey of Handel’s copyists, calling for a scientific and definitive investigation over the matter, which led to a discussion about the possibility of a digital project devoted to it. Natassa Varka (King’s College) examined the scores owned by Charles Jennens for *Joseph and his Brethren*, arguing that the version in his collection should be referred to as the “Jennens’s version” because of its marked difference in words, music, and structure from the work Handel and his librettist, James Miller, produced. The session on performance practice featured Luke Howard’s (Brigham Young University) overview of tempo trends over the past 200 years of *Messiah* performances, and a fascinating re-telling and re-thinking of the story of the Welsh Harp and its role and usage in Handel’s music by the world-renowned performer and scholar Andrew Lawrence-King. The afternoon began with my own paper on the pasticcio *Catone* and its relation to discourses on authorship in early eighteenth-century London, while Elizabeth Lyon (Cornell University) explored sicilianas arias in Handel’s operas with a contextualization of feminine virtue through a close reading of “Ritorna, o caro” in *Rodelinda*. David Hunter (University of Texas at Austin) started the session on politics by delivering a compelling paper on the role of Handel’s music in the lives of slave owners and plantation-owning families, looking at their music collections and the economic implications of music circulation in such a problematic context. Joseph Lockwood (University of Oxford) analyzed the music for the coronation of George II to show how Handel’s setting engaged issues of representation of Hanoverian politics, while Stephen Nissenbaum (Underhill, VT) revisited his past argument about the *Messiah* libretto implicating Jennens’s Jacobite ideology, this time arguing that the “Hallelujah” chorus should be considered in relation to *Zadok the Priest*.

The long and exhilarating day was concluded in the beautiful space of the Chancellor Green, where cocktails and dinner framed an intimate and touching concert by countertenor Lawrence Zazzo, accompanied by students of the Early Music Princeton ensemble. The selected pieces reconstructed the genealogy of the aria “Ombra mai fu,” from Cavalli’s 1655 first version to its re-elaborations by Bononcini and Handel, as documented in the famous article by Harold Powers. Also performed that evening were Handel’s cantata *Vedendo Amor*, the Cello Sonata in D minor (Op. 5, no. 2) by Geminiani, and “Se in fiorito” from Handel’s *Giulio Cesare*.

With a spectacular view of the campus from Professors’ Lounge on the top floor of Fine Hall the Members’ Business Meeting was held on Sunday Morning, before a special session led by Ruth Smith and Matthew Gardner on the possibility of a website for Handel’s oratorios. Smith and Gardner discussed the potential contents (libretti, sources, secondary documentations) as well as technical resources necessary to accomplish the work. The project would involve Handel’s scholars from all around the globe, but for now it is still in the early stage of preparations for a grant application. The discussion also raised the question of whether a similar project would be fruitful for Handel’s operas.

The final session on Sunday was devoted to “Handel and the British Audience.” Jonathan Rhodes Lee’s (University of Nevada, Las Vegas) stimulating paper explored the question of sentimentality and political allegory in *Joseph and his Brethren*, which was then followed by Matthew Gardner’s (Goethe

University Frankfurt) detailed account on benefit performances of English oratorios between 1732 and the 1770s. Nicholas Lockey (The Benjamin School) and John Burkhalter (Princeton University) gave a geographical and historical context for the circulation of music in the West Country (1730–1780), while Beverly Jerold (Princeton, NJ) closed the conference with a paper on Johann Friedrich Reichardt’s reviews of Handel concerts during his trip to London in 1785.

The infallible organization of the conference team (represented by the Chair of the Program Committee, Robert Ketterer; the Chair of the Princeton Music Department, Wendy Heller; and the organizer and *factotum* Ileri Chávez-Bárcenas) contributed to an engaging program and enlivening experience for all those who attended these beautiful four days in Princeton.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- Aspden, Suzanne. “Disseminating and Domesticating Handel in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain.” In *Beyond Boundaries: Rethinking Music Circulation in Early Modern England*, ed. Linda Phyllis Austern, et al. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017, 207–222.
- Burden, Michael. “From London’s Opera House to the Salon? The Favourite (and not so “Favourite”) Songs from the King’s Theatre.” In *Beyond Boundaries: Rethinking Music Circulation in Early Modern England*, ed. Linda Phyllis Austern, et al. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017, 223–237.
- Burrows, Donald. “Organs and organists at the Foundling Hospital, 1750-1800.” In *A Handbook for Studies in 18th-Century English Music*, ed. Katharine Hogg and Colin Coleman, vol. 20 (2016): 1–26.
- Compton, Regina. “The Tyrant’s Wife and the Continuo Player: Using Recitative to Read Handel’s Operatic Characters.” *Journal of Musicological Research* 35/3 (2016): 200–232.
- Gardner, Matthew. “Review: The Lives of George Frideric Handel by David Hunter.” *Music and Letters* 97/3 (2016): 507–509.
- Gribble, Rebecca. “‘Purchasing poverty’: the wages of eighteenth-century performers in London and Bath theatres.” *A Handbook for Studies in 18th-Century English Music*, ed. Katharine Hogg and Colin Coleman, vol. 20 (2016): 56–81.
- Jerold, Beverly. *Music Performance Issues: 1600-1900*. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon, 2016.
- . “The appoggiatura breve in Domenico Scarlatti’s Sonate.” In *The Early Keyboard Sonata in Italy and Beyond*, ed. Rohan Stewart-MacDonald. Turnhout: Brepols, 2016.
- Range, Matthias. “Handel, Croft and music for the Peace of Utrecht.” *A Handbook for Studies in 18th-Century English Music*, ed. Katharine Hogg and Colin Coleman, vol. 20 (2016): 27–55.

SPRINGTIME HANDEL FLOWERING

Ellen T. Harris

The last week of April and the first week of May brought an efflorescence of Handel to the East Coast corridor between Boston and New York. The profusion began with the performance in Boston of *Giulio Cesare* by Boston Baroque on April 21 and 23. Lawrence Zazzo as Caesar and Susanna Phillips as Cleopatra led a very strong cast (see Zazzo's reflections on the performance elsewhere in this Newsletter). Boston Baroque is well-known in Boston for its semi-staged productions of Handel and Monteverdi. This performance, with the early music band led by Martin Pearlman on center stage, seemingly fit that profile, but in actuality it was closer to being fully staged. And some of the direction was as good as I've seen. The Parnassus scene was particularly effective with Cleopatra on a platform behind the orchestra and initially hidden from Caesar's view by the slatted, gold "wings" of her two attendants. Alas, however, the decision was taken to skew the libretto around Cleopatra rather than Caesar, perhaps because Phillips has become a Boston Baroque audience favorite—and not without merit: her "Se pietà" was exquisitely sung. But this demotion of the role of the title character (Cleopatra was even given the final bow) distorted the libretto in odd ways and lost us the opportunity to get full value from Zazzo's rich and dramatic countertenor voice.

Two weeks before this performance, Zazzo presented a solo recital to the American Handel Society that showed how powerfully expressive Handel's music can be when it is allowed to do its work (Saturday, April 8). In addition to giving the gathered Handelians the opportunity to hear and compare the related settings of "Ombra mai fu" by Cavalli, Bononcini, and Handel (itself an uncanny demonstration of how well Handel, like a rock musician, "covers" Bononcini's tune), Zazzo also previewed one of his arias from *Giulio Cesare*. In "Se in fiorito," he dueted more effectively with the obbligato violin (played here by Princeton graduate musicology student Ambra Casonato) as the little bird flitting among the meadow flowers than in the Boston production where he was upstaged (as was the violin) by Cleopatra literally playing hide and seek with him. In the continuo cantata *Vedendo amor*, the aria "Camminando lei pian piano" (Treading very softly) offered Handel an early opportunity to explore some musical ideas that form the basis of Caesar's wonderful aria with horn obbligato, "Va tacito." And Zazzo had a better opportunity to depict Eurilla and Cupid's stealthy (tip-toe) hunting of him in the cantata, than the direction of the Boston production gave him of presenting the image of a deceitful hunter moving "silently and stealthily." During the aria, Caesar and Tolomeo sat side by side with Caesar unsuccessfully plying Tolomeo with wine and finally drinking it all himself. (I have always taken this aria to represent Caesar's acknowledgment of the danger Tolomeo presents to him; the direction in the Boston Baroque production turned Caesar into the deceitful hunter.)

The same weekend as the *Giulio Cesare* performances by Boston Baroque, Andreas Scholl presented a solo recital for the Society for Seventeenth-Century Music (SSCM) in Providence, Rhode Island, and repeated it at Old South Church in Boston on Sunday, April 23. Geared to the SSCM, as Zazzo's recital had been to the AHS, the repertoire of Scholl's concert, entitled "Desiring Beauty," featured music by late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century composers, including Robert Johnson, Giulio Caccini, and John Dowland. It ended with a full performance of Handel's Neapolitan continuo cantata *Nel dolce tempo*, the context and history of which Scholl explained to the audience before singing it. In the reverberant acoustic of the Old South Church, Scholl's voice

rang out beautifully, and he enunciated the English and Italian texts with amazing clarity. Unfortunately the church setting in Boston did not favor the seventeenth-century style accompaniment of lute, theorbo, and viola da gamba, which was often swallowed up in the enormous space.

The next weekend (Saturday, April 29), the Schola Cantorum of the Yale Institute for Sacred Music, conducted by David Hill, performed the very rarely heard (at least in the U.S.) *The Occasional Oratorio*. I thought it was a terrific performance (see Mark Risinger's review of the New York performance elsewhere in this Newsletter). The concert was organized as a culminating event for the exhibit "Enlightened Princesses: Caroline, Augusta, Charlotte, and the Shaping of the Modern World" at the Yale Center for British Art. A better musical work could hardly have been chosen, as our interest in these three Hanoverian princesses largely depends on the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 having been put down, an event *The Occasional Oratorio* prays for and prophesizes. The hefty exhibition catalogue is well worth exploring; it includes, among many others, articles by Donald Burrows and Berta Joncus. (British readers take note: this fine exhibit on the "wide-ranging intellectual, social, and political interests" of Caroline, Augusta, and Charlotte will be at Kensington Palace from June 22 to November 12.)

While still in New Haven, as it were, I need to give a shout-out to the fully-staged production of Cavalli's *Didone* by the Yale Baroque Opera Project (YBOP) the same weekend as *The Occasional Oratorio* (opening night was Friday, April 28). *Didone* was the eleventh production of YBOP, inaugurated ten years ago by Ellen Rosand. I had never before managed to catch one of these performances and was amazed by the success of working with undergraduate singers, many of whom are not majoring in music and most of whom do not plan a career in music. Of course there is a range of talent and experience, but the coaching must be extraordinary. The production staff is professional, and they successfully manage to transmit stylish seventeenth-century singing and stage mannerisms to the amateur cast. Kudos to the director, Toni Dorfman; Grant Herreid, Music Director; and Scott Neale, Set Designer.

For me the weekend concluded with the concert performance of *Ariodante* at Carnegie Hall with The English Concert conducted by Harry Bicket (Sunday, April 30). This represented, I believe, the fourth in a series of Handel operas The English Concert has brought to Carnegie. *Rinaldo* has been announced for 2018. Joyce DiDonato led the cast of *Ariodante* in the title role. The few bits of action that are necessary to the plot (such as Polinesso's meeting of Dalinda/Ginevra at her private door) were deftly managed, but in general this was a concert performance in which the music was the drama (see Risinger's review). DiDonato had to withdraw from the European performances of *Ariodante* for medical reasons and was replaced by Alice Coote.

The next week, I had the chance to catch the final dress rehearsal of Handel's *Semele* on Thursday, May 4 (the performances were May 5 and 7) by the Handel & Haydn Society, conducted by Harry Christophers. I don't believe one can fairly evaluate a performance from a dress rehearsal (especially when some of the soloists are marking, i.e. not singing in full voice), but some things do become very clear. The Handel & Haydn Society under Christophers offers a first-rate baroque band and chorus, and this performance gathered as well a fine group of soloists. Two singers really stood out for me: Matthew Brook and Paula Murrihy. Brook sang the dual roles of Cadmus and Somnus, investing each with vocal shading and presentation to portray the drama. Cadmus, father of Semele and Ino, needs to vacillate between joy and concern, first, as one daughter resists a propitious marriage and the other is inexplicably unhappy, and, then, as Juno and

Jupiter offer conflicting responses to the sacrifice. As Somnus, he sings one of Handel's funniest, but still very beautiful, arias, as the god of sleep resists waking up (and misses out the correct baroque form of his aria) but becomes fully alert and rather frisky when promised the nymph Pasithea. Brook used his deep and rich bass/baritone to convey fully each of these emotions, making him (as he was also in the role of the King in the English Concert performance of *Ariodante*) the barometer by which the emotion of the drama could be gauged. Murrihy, taking on the dual roles of Ino and Juno and singing with gorgeous tone and impeccable pitch, also used her voice to inhabit two very different roles. I was reminded of having heard her voice for the first time ten years ago when, as a Lorraine Hunt Lieberman Fellow, she sang the title role of *Ariodante* for Emmanuel Music in Boston (January, 2007). Although this was her first Handel opera, she was magnificent, and it was already clear that hers was a voice one would hear, and hear gladly, again. At that performance, at the end of her rendition of "Scherza infida," the person sitting next to me (who told me she had never previously heard a Handel opera) had tears streaming down her face. (By contrast, DiDonato's recent performance, with even the A section of the aria at times tinged with an anger the text certainly *can* convey, lacked the total desolation I hear in the music.) Sarah Tynan, taking on the role of Semele for the first time, held back for a good part of the rehearsal, but threw herself into "Myself I shall adore," which I take it must be a favorite recital piece for her. I assume this will have had an electric effect on the concert audiences as well.

Amusingly enough, I am told that at the Sunday afternoon performance of *Semele*, at the moment when Jupiter denies the sacrifice, the altar sinks, and thunder rolls, the fire alarms and attendant laser flashes went off in Symphony Hall, sending everyone out onto the street. Perhaps never before has an entire audience needed to heed the Priests' advice to "Begone, and fly from Jove's impending rage!" Happily, there was no fire ("again the sickly flame decaying dies") and all was resumed in short order.

IN REVIEW: *ARIODANTE* AND *THE OCCASIONAL ORATORIO*

Mark Risinger



Michelle V. Agins

New Yorkers enjoyed a thoroughly Handelian Sunday on April 29, with two major performances occupying the afternoon and evening hours. Harry Bicket and the English Concert returned to Carnegie Hall in the afternoon with *Ariodante*, continuing their series of remarkable Handel performances, which in recent years have included *Radamisto*, *Alcina*, *Theodora*, and *Orlando*. This year's performance featured a superb cast headlined by Joyce DiDonato (*Ariodante*) and featuring Christiane Karg (Ginevra), Mary Bevan (Dalinda), Sonia Prina (Polinesso), David Portillo (Lurcanio), Matthew Brook (King of Scotland), and Tyson Miller (Odoardo). Happily for those who were unable to attend, the performance was streamed live on the internet and remains available for viewing until July 30 at www.medici.tv.

Ariodante belongs to a fruitful period in Handel's career that nevertheless posed challenges, due to competition from the so-called *Opera of the Nobility* and the declining popularity of *opera seria* in London. The title role, composed for the castrato Carestini, remains a highly-coveted gem of the lyric mezzo-soprano repertoire. While each of the singers rendered a committed portrayal, DiDonato demonstrated from the opening bars of her first arioso, "Qui d'amor, nel suo linguaggio," exactly why she has risen to the forefront of the world stage: effortless production of a sound that blooms to fill the entire hall, text rendered with tremendous clarity and expression, and a voice that possesses generous amplitude without merely being loud. Conductor Harry Bicket led his band of 21 players unobtrusively from the harpsichord, with his back to the soloists throughout. His tempi in *Allegro* arias often pushed both players and singers to their technical limits, yet the sense of ensemble never wavered. The performance as a whole seemed to catch fire for the first time with *Ariodante*'s aria "Con l'ali di costanza" (presented in its shorter form, following cuts in the performing score) as DiDonato showed us that her voice can do anything she wants it to, at any pitch or dynamic level. As impressive as her displays of velocity and virtuosity were, it was no surprise that her greatest moment came in Act II with "Scherza infida," a languishing aria lasting almost 10 minutes. The opening words seemed to be dragged with effort from the depths of her soul, and the beautifully sensitive

NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY

The Newsletter is published three times a year (Spring, Summer, and Winter). The Editor welcomes submissions in the following categories for future issues:

- Short articles (1500-2000 words);
- News of recent Handel-related events, presentations (special lectures or conference papers), and concerts organized and/or performed by members of the Society;
- Reviews of performances and recordings of Handel's music;
- Information about awards and honors presented to members of the Society;
- News of recent publications;
- Abstracts for dissertations in progress on a Handel-related topic.

Please submit your contributions to the Editor, Minji Kim (minjik@gmail.com)

and transparent playing of the orchestra made it a remarkable listening experience.

In the role of Ginevra, soprano Christiane Karg sang beautifully, particularly in the aria “Il mio crudel martoro” near the end of Act II. Karg possesses an opulent sound that made her Ginevra an excellent match for DiDonato’s Ariodante. Contralto Sonia Prina stormed the stage as Polinesso, making a striking impression both visually and vocally. At times, one could imagine a Polinesso with a more sinister and seductive affect and less bravado; in her aria “Se l’inganno sortisce felice,” she made alterations to the color of her sound on the word “detesto” that were deliberate, but with an effect that was more comic than dramatic. Nevertheless, hers was among the more memorable portrayals of the afternoon. Mary Bevan’s Dalinda was pleasing, if a bit bland at times. Her voice lacks the evenness in the top register heard from most of her colleagues. She nonetheless made a strong impression in moments such as her Act II arioso “Se tanto piace al cor,” as Dalinda capitulates completely in her affection for Polinesso.

Bass-baritone Matthew Brook brought a warm, generous sound to his portrayal of the King of Scotland. He was particularly affecting as he lamented the reported death of Ariodante in “Invida sorte avara,” masterfully using alterations in the return of the A-section to intensify the emotion of the text, just as they should. In his portrayal of Lurcanio, tenor David Portillo showed a bright, appealing sound that gave his characterization a noble sincerity. Tyson Miller sang well and made a fine impression as Odoardo, despite his limited involvement in the proceedings.

Like all of the previous English Concert offerings, this performance makes a strong case for semi-staged opera by placing a premium on excellent singers and players rather than theatrical production costs. The clever use of the stage door for the one essential bit of staging – the clandestine arrival of Polinesso at Ginevra’s door, where he is admitted by Dalinda in disguise – worked perfectly well, and the remainder of the stage business was easy enough to imagine. In an era of shrinking opportunity for large-scale productions of Handel’s operas in the U.S., we are most fortunate to enjoy such authoritative and stylish playing and singing of a spectacular score.

The second concert took place in the evening at St. Bartholomew’s Church on New York City, a performance of *The Occasional Oratorio* presented by the Yale Schola Cantorum, under the direction of David Hill. The Schola comprises 28 singers, most of whom are graduate students in the Institute of Sacred Music, and its concert repertoire provides solo opportunities for the Yale Voxtet, eight Master of Music students in the ISM’s program in Early Music. This excellent group has collaborated in recent seasons with Juilliard 415, though the orchestra on this occasion was a core group of Yale students augmented by New York-based players.

Performances of *The Occasional Oratorio* are a rarity, so despite the length of *Ariodante* in the afternoon, attending the evening concert felt essential. The New York performance was actually an encore, the premiere having occurred the night before in New Haven, Connecticut where it was preceded by a lecture from Prof. Ellen T. Harris. When Prof. Harris questioned her audience, only one man reported having heard this work performed live – in London, naturally. American audiences, being less familiar with the Jacobite rebellion and the Battle of Culloden, have had limited opportunities to experience this music in concert.

The three Parts of the work were presented with one intermission in the middle of Part II, which disrupted the sense of textual continuity as arranged by Newburgh Hamilton. Part I centers around Psalm paraphrases by Milton, while Part II uses texts of both Hamilton and Thomas Morell (of *Judas Maccabaeus* fame). Part III contains large swathes of music adapted from *Israel in Egypt* and concludes with a truncated version of *Zadok the Priest*. In each of these sections, the chorus sang with an energetic and beautifully focused sound, despite the unflattering acoustics, and the orchestral ensemble was equally admirable. Among the soloists, tenor Daniel McGrew, soprano Addy Sterrett, and mezzo-soprano Adele Grabowski each sang with arresting tone and emotional response to the text. These are emerging artists whose further development Handelians will watch with great interest.

FROM THE PRESIDENT’S DESK

Graydon Beeks

AHS Princeton 2017 was a great success with outstanding papers and an excellent Howard Serwer Lecture by John Butt, who also conducted a fine performance of movements from *Messiah* in their autograph versions. The latter was designated as the second Paul Traver Memorial Concert, and Mary Traver and other members of the Traver family were in attendance. Special thanks are due to Wendy Heller and her team at Princeton for supervising local arrangements, and to Robert Ketterer and his Program Committee for selecting and organizing the conference. Thanks are also due to members of the Society who made designated gifts that helped to underwrite the event.

Members of the Society should start planning now to attend the next festival and conference in February 2019 to be hosted by the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. Details will appear in the Newsletter and on the website as they become available. The preliminary plans include a full-staged performance of Handel’s *Giulio Cesare*.

On behalf of the Secretary/Treasurer, Marjorie Pomeroy-Kelly, I would like to take this occasion to renew the annual call for payment of dues. It is especially important that members of the AHS who wish to pay for their 2017 memberships in the Georg-Friedrich-Händel Gesellschaft and/or the Friends of the London Handel Institute through the AHS, should get their payments in before June 1, 2017.

Let me also take this opportunity to remind everyone that the Membership Form, both online and in printed form, now allows members to designate gifts in any amount to support the J. Merrill Knapp Research Fellowship, the Howard Serwer Memorial Lecture, the Paul Traver Memorial Concert, and the ongoing activities of the Society. These options are not meant to replace the categories of membership – Contributor, Patron, Life Member – but rather to provide more options for targeted giving and/or flexible levels of giving. They will also provide a straightforward way for those of us who are Life Members to continue to support the Society monetarily. The AHS depends on the generosity of its members in order to carry on its work.

GIULIO CESARE, BOSTON BAROQUE, APRIL 2017

Lawrence Zazzo



Kathy Wittman/Ball Square Films

Dear fellow Handelians,

Lovely to see and talk with many of you in Princeton a few weeks ago. I've just come back from two performances of *Giulio Cesare* with Martin Pearlman and Boston Baroque at the New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall, my 11th outing with the opera if you include concert tours. Minji Kim has asked me to share some thoughts on the piece and my experience staging this production in Boston in the context of my other experiences singing and staging *Caesar* over the years.

Although it was heavily cut, I was impressed by young director Mary Birnbaum's efficiency in staging what was still a 3-hour opera in only 8 days. While I would make different cuts, the story arc was still intact, and I succeeded in horse-trading away the B section and da capo of "Non e si vago" in exchange for a full da capo of "Al lampo dell'armi," which Caesar really needs for dramatic mojo if he loses the missable "Quel torrente." Options for scene changes and sets were very limited, with the orchestra behind us on the petite, wing-free but acoustically generous Jordan Hall, and although he was behind me most of the time I never felt out of contact with conductor Martin Pearlman or the orchestra. Peter Holman was telling me this week that his research (forthcoming book) suggests that Handel "conducted" his Italian operas from the harpsichord facing away from the singers in the King's Theatre, and my experience in Boston suggested this was certainly practically possible.

A series of revolving, free-standing silk-screened flats at each side allowed for rapid changes of scene and personnel and were in the end a more historically-informed solution than that of many other more generously-equipped venues and productions I've done elsewhere. Kudos also to a very well-prepared cast of excellent American singers, the majority of whom had never before performed their roles, and to the members of Boston Baroque, who played stylishly with a wonderful ensemble sound under Martin, and on much less rehearsal than I'm used to. So, this was certainly not a case of Handel's music triumphing "in spite of" the production or performers, and I left Boston again wondering why I sometimes spend 7 weeks rehearsing a Baroque opera.

Some thoughts and still unanswered questions:

1. *Tone*: With its adapted 17th-century libretto, is *Giulio Cesare*, like *Poppea*, a drama with a few lighter moments, or, like *La Calisto*, a comedy with suddenly profound or even eerie interludes? This is perhaps a Rorschach for audience, director, and performer alike: as I get older, I increasingly enjoy the lighter side of Caesar's character and encouraged Mary to explore this with me, whereas over ten years ago I remember being furious at Herbert Wernicke's droll Basel production (in Seville), where I was chased around the stage, a la Captain Hook, by a crocodile. My *Fach* gives me few chances to do comedic roles, so in Boston I became aware as never before that eliciting laughter from the audience can be addictive, but can also go too far—Caesar shaking sand out of his shoe during "Presti omai" is very funny, and elicited howls opening night, but in hindsight did it set the right tone for Caesar, a leader who, like Donald Trump, may be slightly ridiculous but still quite powerful and dangerous? Of all the productions I've done, David McVicar's Glyndebourne production in my opinion is the only one to get the mix of comedy and drama throughout the piece just right.

2. *Cultural/ethnic politics*: An imperial power subjugating a militarily weaker Other is no less relevant today than it was for Hanoverian Britain, and the production referenced this overtly—Achille was dressed like Che Guevara, and in "Va tacito" Caesar attempts to get Tolomeo to try a bottle of French wine while mocking the Egyptians' uniforms. Having an African-American Tolomeo—the wonderful mezzo countertenor John Holiday, who I think will stun as Xerxes this summer in *Glimmerglass*—added an extra layer of discomfort to Caesar's domineering in "Va tacito." Caesar sings of hunting prey, but of course this game is "tacito e nascosto" (quiet and hidden), and if there's no real danger, if Tolomeo and Achille are just naïve natives, there's no dramatic tension and Caesar just comes across as a snob or worse—but maybe he is and should? Cleopatra feeding a love-struck Caesar his speech lines after their final duet was a nice table-turning touch in this production, which I think enhanced the historical dramatic irony one feels at the end of this piece, as one does at the temporary *lieti fini* of *Agrippina*, *Poppea*, etc. In "Empio, dirò, tu sei," I took out a stage gun in the da capo, which Mary directed me never to point at the audience and which, by Massachusetts law, must be kept under lock and key until curtain—I wonder whether such precautions will begin to be the case in Europe, where I've handled and fired stage guns often and which have, until recently, elicited only exotic curiosity rather than experiential uneasiness from European audiences.

3. *When do Caesar and Cleopatra actually fall in love?* Since my first Caesar in Drottningholm in 2001 this simple plot point has eluded me. For Caesar, is it as early as meeting "Lidia" in "Non è si vago e bello"? As late as "Aure, deh per pietà" (you don't know you're in love until it's taken from you)? At some point during "V'adoro pupille"? For Cleopatra, this is clearer, as I think it hits her quite suddenly during the *accompagnato* after Caesar's exit following "Al lampo dell'armi" and in her following aria "Se pietà." The believability of this sudden shift from the seductress to the heartbroken really depends on how Cleopatra can convince us vocally with one of Handel's masterpieces (my Cleopatra, Susanna Phillips, succeeded wonderfully). I love that this opera, so dear to me after so many experiences with it, still resonates sympathetically with different times, countries, casts and conditions, and still keeps me guessing.

Yours,
Larry Zazzo

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