

NEWSLETTER

of the

American Handel Society

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Winter 2022

JUILLIARD OPERA: *ATALANTA* REVIEW

Mark Risinger

One of the happier developments for historical performance in New York City over the last ten years or so has been the creation of Juilliard415, a period instrument ensemble that performs early orchestral repertoire as well as accompanying the baroque repertoire of the Juilliard Opera. This fall's operatic production, Handel's *Atalanta*, promised to be an exciting opportunity to hear a work that had received only one previous New York performance; it had been selected on the recommendation and with the musicological consultation of Professor Ellen Harris. Sadly, the production was somewhat overshadowed by the tragic death of one of its orchestra members only a few hours before the opening night performance was scheduled to begin. Consequently, the Wednesday evening premiere was canceled, with only the two subsequent performances taking place on Friday and Sunday. Both the cast of singers and the orchestra are to be commended for their fortitude in carrying on



Mary Beth Nelson (Meleagro) and Shelén Hughes (Atalanta) in the Juilliard Opera production of Atalanta. Photo credit: Richard Termine.

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THEODORA BY PHILHARMONIA BAROQUE

Graydon Beeks



Countertenor Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen (Didymus) and Richard Egarr (conductor/harpsichordist) with the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and Chorale in the performance of Theodora. Photo credit: Frank Wing.

In October 2022 the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and Chorale, under the direction of Richard Egarr, presented four performances of *Theodora* in the Bay Area. I heard the last of these, given in the First Congregational Church of Berkeley on Sunday, October 23. Handel's only oratorio on a Christian subject, *Theodora* is notoriously long and experienced audiences approach it expecting a work on the scale of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. The version performed here, which came in at approximately 160 minutes including one intermission, was cut significantly. The

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in the face of considerable emotional distress. That said, conductor Gary Thor Wedow is a veteran of many baroque operas, and he knows how to deploy the instrumental forces of Juilliard⁴¹⁵ effectively. Much of his conducting is from the harpsichord, but there were only a handful of moments where coordination between the pit and stage seemed problematic. The players are accomplished and stylish in their delivery, and listening to them is always a pleasure.

Rather than portraying the bucolic woodlands and hunting grounds of Arcadia indicated by the libretto, director Omer Ben Seadia and scenic designer Ryan Howell set the action at a rock festival in the desert, reminiscent of Burning Man, with a large food truck and picnic tables on the left and the presumptive band's stage (complete with a drum set) on the right. A large archway crowned with the word "BACCHANALIA" dominated the scene at the outset but soon disappeared into the fly space above the stage as the action began. The backdrop of a music festival provided opportunities to bring instrumental soloists onto the stage in costume—a trumpeter in the Overture, a theorbo for "Care selve" (ignoring the barren desert landscape), a flutist for Irene's "Come alla tortorella langue," etc. As has become the case in a number of recent Handel performances, the director ignored Handel's act divisions, preferring instead to perform the work with only a single intermission. In this case, the break followed the duet "Amarilli? / Oh Dei, che vuoi?" between Meleagro and Atalanta in Act II, scene 3.

The selection of *Atalanta* was wisely based on the singers currently available in the Juilliard opera studio. As is often the case in student productions, all the roles were pleasingly sung, but comfort with baroque idioms was not uniformly audible in every singer. Much of the ornamentation, for instance, focused on being high and loud without being expressive or interesting. In the title role, soprano Shelén Hughes made a favorable impression, gaining warmth in her sound as the performance progressed. Atalanta, disguised as Amarilli, enters the action last of all the principles and must launch straight into a demanding pyrotechnical display. Her first big aria "Riportai gloriosa palma" was delivered with more enthusiasm than accuracy in some passages, though with a voice of ample size and beauty. Her plaintive rendition in Act II of "Lassa! ch'io l'ho perduta" was more successful. In many ways, the most satisfying performance of the afternoon came from mezzo-soprano Mary Beth Nelson as Meleagro. Her richness of tone and flexibility, along

with her impeccable Italian and agility on stage, made her characterization the most expressive and sympathetic overall. As Aminta, the shepherd / food truck proprietor, tenor Richard Pittsinger made a favorable impression as well. This production was the first chance I've had to hear him since his days as a star treble in the renowned choir of St. Thomas' Church, where he recorded Fauré's *Requiem* alongside his father, the bass-baritone David Pittsinger. As a tenor, the younger Pittsinger now has an attractive sound within a limited range, though in his cadenzas he showed a tendency to push a bit beyond advisable limits in both range and volume. He delivered his most impressive coloratura in "Di ad Irene, tiranna" while chopping an onion in his food truck, no mean feat in itself. As the title of that aria implies, his beloved Irene, portrayed by mezzo-soprano Maggie René, spends most of her time tormenting the man who loves her and pining after Meleagro / Tirsi, who loves Atalanta. Ms. René seemed right at home as the scheming shepherdess, combining a commanding stage presence with a voice whose timbre is reminiscent of the young Marilyn Horne. In the role of Irene's father Nicandro, bass-baritone Donghoon Kang sounded underpowered in the house but invested his portrayal with tender paternal concern. When the long-awaited band takes the stage at the end of the opera, the "act" turns out to be baritone Jared Werlein's Mercurio, presented in a gender-bending turn that made him a sort of Lady Gaga *ex machina*. Oddly enough, it worked. There were other questionable directorial choices—I could have done without the simulated copulation of Aminta and Irene in the food truck, in time to the music, during Atalanta's and Meleagro's final duet of reconciliation—but on the whole, the unconventional production concept maintained enough internal consistency to be credible.

A couple of weeks after seeing *Atalanta*, I had the opportunity to attend a song recital by members of the Juilliard Institute for Vocal Arts in Merkin Hall, a group of singers that included Shelén Hughes, who had sung Atalanta, as well as mezzo-soprano Natalie Lewis, who had appeared in the ensemble wearing a white cowboy hat and heart-shaped sunglasses. While Ms. Hughes once again acquitted herself honorably with performances of Canteloube and Wolf, the real sensation of the night was Ms. Lewis. Her selections from Mahler's Rückert-Lieder, accompanied by Institute director Brian Zeger, were the highlight of the evening. Hers is a thrilling voice joined to a charismatic stage presence—definitely a singer to watch.

most damaging of these cuts was the elimination of Theodora's first scene, which introduces her as the leader of the Christians and establishes her unyielding character in the aria "Fond, flatt'ring world, adieu!"

Also damaging was Egarr's tendency to drive the music too fast and punch the accents—his, not Handel's—too hard. In addition, at least from where I sat, the volume seemed too often to be louder than necessary, with the orchestra not always accommodating the solo singers. The Chorale, which sang consistently well, was less affected by the orchestra's volume, but while they succeeded in showing the overall stylistic difference between the Heathen and Christian choruses, the omission of "For ever thus stands fix'd the doom" deprived them of the chance to portray the crueller side of the former group.

The young French soprano Julie Roset displayed a lovely voice that was perhaps a size too small for the role of Theodora. She sang sensitively and musically without forcing her tone. In that she was well matched by her Didymus, the young American countertenor Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen, the Grand Prize winner of the 2017 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, who is clearly a rising star. Their duet, "To thee, thou glorious son of worth," was breathtaking. The English mezzo-soprano Helen Charlston, who won the London Handel Singing Competition in 2018, is another up-and-coming singer with an arresting voice. She clearly reveled in Irene's music, which is of consistently high quality, and her ability to project the character's sincerity and commitment was impressive.

The other two soloists were faced with less rewarding tasks. Septimius, the loyal Roman soldier who also sympathizes with Didymus and the Christians to whom he is drawn, is tricky to portray both musically and dramatically. The tenor Thomas Cooley did not seem comfortable enough with his music to justify retaining so much of it. Valens, the President of Antioch and unbending upholder of Roman law, does little beyond bluster and threaten. Bass-baritone Dashon Burton did both effectively. The Orchestra played up to its own very high standards.

In sum, then, a mixed response. *Theodora* is a great work, but it needs careful handling. On the evidence of this performance, it does not react well to insensitive cuts and overly driven tempos. The famous set pieces, such as Irene's aria "As with rosy steps the morn," were memorable, and the conclusion, with Didymus's aria "Streams of pleasure ever flowing" leading into his duet with Theodora "Thither let our hearts aspire" followed by the great Bach-like chorus "O love divine, thou source of fame," was appropriately moving. With more faith in Handel's musical concept, the performance of the oratorio as a whole could have been even more successful.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

At its November 2022 meeting, the Board of Directors of the American Handel Society enthusiastically approved the structure and content of the Society's first in-person conference since 2019. This will be held in Bloomington, Indiana from February 24–26, 2023. Details can be found elsewhere in this issue of the *Newsletter* and on the AHS website. The Program Committee is chaired by Roger Freitas and the local arrangements at the Jacobs School of Music of Indiana University are coordinated by Ayana Smith. The Howard Serwer Memorial Lecture, which begins the conference, will be given by AHS Vice President Nathan Link.

The Board also decided to continue structuring the membership of the Society on an annual basis. This means that renewals for next year will be due in January 2023, which is just a month away as I write this. I hope that many of the members will take advantage of the AHS website to renew online and pay with either PayPal or credit card. I did this for the first time last year using my new membership profile and found the process very intuitive. This option will be available beginning January 1, 2023. Those who still wish to pay by check may continue to do so by using the Membership Form found in every issue of the *Newsletter* and also downloadable from the website. Checks and completed forms should be sent to the AHS Secretary/Treasurer, Marjorie Pomeroy Kelly (49 Christopher Hollow Road, Sandwich, MA 02563).

I am aware that AHS members who are also members of the G. F. Händel Gesellschaft received their copies of the *Händel-Jahrbuch* very late this year. There were multiple reasons for this, most of which should not recur. The primary reason, however, was that many AHS members were very slow to pay their dues. In an effort to deal with the problem, the deadline for subscribing to the Händel Gesellschaft and either or both of the other German Handel societies through the AHS, will now be May 15 rather than June 1. This will allow the financial transactions to be completed in time for our colleagues in Halle to process the shipping of the newly published volumes while they have staff assembled during the annual Handel Festival at the beginning of June.

On a related topic, all of our overseas members who paid their AHS dues for 2022 through either the Händel Gesellschaft or the Handel Institute should now have membership profiles on the AHS website. Beginning with 2023, they will be able to pay their AHS membership dues either online through the website using a credit card or through their home society using local currency as in the past. It is hoped that this option will provide additional convenience and not additional confusion—something for which we can all wish in the coming year.

— Graydon Beeks

2023 AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY CONFERENCE: INFORMATION AND SCHEDULE

Message from the Conference Organizers:

“We welcome you to the 2023 American Handel Society Conference in Bloomington, IN. The conference will take place in person, with opportunities for online engagement, from Friday, February 24 to Sunday, February 26. We look forward to seeing you soon!”

REGISTRATION

Register for the conference online at <https://jacobsacademy.indiana.edu/descriptions/american-handel-society-conference.html>.

TRAVEL

Bloomington, IN is served by **Indianapolis International Airport** (IND), <https://www.ind.com>.

GO Express Travel (1-800-589-6004) offers shuttle service from the Ground Transportation Area to the conference hotel at the Indiana Memorial Union (Biddle Hotel). Reservations can be booked online, <https://goexpresstravel.com/bloomington-airport-shuttle>.

ACCOMMODATIONS

The **Biddle Hotel at the Indiana Memorial Union** is offering group rates for the American Handel Society.

Indiana Memorial Union Biddle Hotel and Conference Center
900 E. Seventh Street
Bloomington, IN 47405

Group Rate: \$116.10—\$170.10 (+ tax per room, per night)

Hotel Block Code: HANDEL23 (expires January 23, 2023)

To Make Reservations: 1-800-209-8145 or 1-812-855-2536; <https://imu.indiana.edu/hotel/index.html>

Credit card number guarantees reservations.
Complimentary parking pass at check-in.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

The conference opens with the Howard Serwer

Memorial Lecture given by Prof. Nathan Link (Centre College). The conference will include two days of academic panels and two performances: a concert by the IU Baroque Orchestra (Historical Performance Institute) and the Paul Traver Memorial Concert.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24

Howard Serwer Memorial Lecture, by Nathan Link (Centre College) followed by Reception and Paul Traver Memorial Concert

Ford-Crawford Hall (Simon Center) | 7 pm

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25

Academic Panel I

Ford-Crawford Hall (Simon Center) | 9 am – 12 pm

Instruments

Peter Holman (University of Leeds, UK), “Handel’s Domestic Harpsichords”

Tomasz Górny (University of Warsaw, Poland), “Music Book Trade in Handel’s Halle”

Blake Johnson (University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory), “Handel’s Hautboys: A Comparison of Handel’s Obbligato Writing for Johann Ernst Galliard (1666–1747) and Giuseppe Sammartini (1695–1750)”

Graydon Beeks (Pomona College), “The Use of Cannons Material in Handel’s Op. 2 Trio Sonatas”

Academic Panel II

Ford-Crawford Hall (Simon Center) | 3 pm – 6 pm

Opera

Mark P. Risinger (New York, NY), “‘La Francesina’ as a Handelian Singer”

Louise K. Stein (University of Michigan), “‘An Old Idea Came into Handel’s Head’: Two Possible Scarlatti-Handel Connections”

Paul G. Feller-Simmons (Northwestern University), “*Opera Seria* Contrafacts, Handel’s *Esther*, and 18th-Century Dutch-Jewish Cosmopolitanism”

Anushka Kulkarni (University of California, Davis), “Colonial Encounter in Handel’s *Porro, re dell’Indie* (1731)”

Baroque Orchestra (Historical Performance Institute)

Auer Hall (Simon Center) | 8 pm

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26

Academic Panel III

Ford-Crawford Hall (Simon Center) | 9 am – 12 pm

Oratorio

Minji Kim (Andover, MA), “‘Curtain’d with a cloudy red’: The Sunrise Metaphor in the Aria ‘Thus When the Sun’ of Handel’s *Samson*”

Fred Fehleisen (Juilliard), “Iniquity, Shame, Spitting, and Some Sketchy Voice Leading: Thematic Connections between Two Distant Movements in *Messiah*”

Luke Howard (Brigham Young University), “‘We Most Heartily Wish to Never Hear It Again’: The Falsettist in 19th-Century Performances of Handel’s *Messiah*”

Donald Burrows (Open University, UK), “‘Glimpses of Notes Like the Catch of a Song’: A Review of the Early Sources for *Messiah*, Sixty Years On”



Photo credit: Laura Barisonzi

The American Handel Society would like to congratulate our honorary director **Nic McGegan** for his 1000th performance with the **Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra**! He returned to PBO as Music Director Laureate on November 16–20, 2022 for a program of French baroque dance music by André Campra, François Francoeur, and Jean-Philippe Rameau. Congratulations!

**CALL FOR PAPERS:
13TH HANDEL INSTITUTE
CONFERENCE, LONDON**

November 17–19, 2023

Bridewell Hall

14 Bride Lane

Fleet Street, London EC4Y 8EQ

In order to celebrate the refurbishment and the reopening in spring 2023 of the Handel House Museum at 25 Brook Street (Handel & Hendrix in London) and also the tercentenary of the composer moving into the property in 1723, The Handel Institute has brought forward its next conference to 2023. The paper sessions (November 18–19) will take place at Bridewell Hall; the conference committee is also planning to schedule a reception and tour at the Handel & Hendrix Museum, and an event at The Foundling Museum.

The committee now invites proposals for papers on any aspect of the life or works of Handel or his associates, while also particularly welcoming offers of papers on his relationships with countries, cities, churches, courts, theatres and other places or spaces that he knew. Abstracts of up to 300 words for papers lasting not more than thirty minutes should be sent to Dr Natassa Varka (natassa.varka.handel@gmail.com) by **May 31, 2023**. All applicants will be contacted as soon as possible thereafter. For further updates on the conference see <https://handelinstitute.org/conference/2023>.

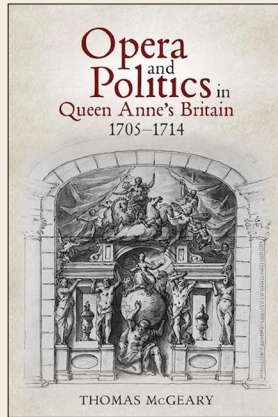
MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Renew your membership for 2023 today! To renew online, go to <https://www.americanhandelsociety.org/join>, or renew by mail using the membership form on page 7 of this *Newsletter*. Go Green and opt to receive the *Newsletter* via email.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Kim, Minji. "From Milton to Hamilton and Handel: Total Eclipse, Judgment, and Enharmonicism in *Samson*." *Journal of Musicology* 40/1 (2023): 34–70.

McGeary, Thomas. *Opera and Politics in Queen Anne's Britain 1705–1714*. Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2022.



Van der Merwe, Peter. "The Handelian Fourth." *The Musical Times* 163/1959 (2022): 77–112.

UPCOMING EVENTS

2023 American Handel Society Conference

February 24–26, 2023

Indiana University Bloomington

<https://www.americanhandelsociety.org/events>

International Handel Festival in Karlsruhe

February 17–March 3, 2023

Badisches Staatstheater, Karlsruhe

<https://www.staatstheater.karlsruhe.de/programm/haendel-festspiele>

Handel Festival in Halle (Saale)

"The Opera: Dispute over Tweedledum and Tweedledee"

May 26–June 11, 2023

<https://haendelhaus.de/en/hfs/homepage>

International Scholarly Conference at the Handel Festival in Halle (Saale)

"The Politics of Opera—Handel's Opera Academies 1719–1737"

May 30–31, 2023

<https://haendelhaus.de/en/hh/forschung/international-scholarly-conference>

13th Handel Institute Conference, London

November 17–19, 2023

Bridewell Hall

14 Bride Lane

Fleet Street, London EC4Y 8EQ

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Name _____ Date _____

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

I would like my copy of the Newsletter delivered: ☐ electronically ☐ by mail

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Regular	40	30	35
Joint (one set of publications)	50	38	44
Student or Retired	20	15	18
Rinaldo Circle	75	55	66
Cleopatra Circle	125	95	110
Theodora Circle	250	190	220
Messiah Circle (Lifetime membership)	500	400	450
Subscriber (Institutions Only)	48	36	42
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Student	15	10	-
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Regular	45	-	40
Student*	20	-	15
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Regular	75	-	65
Regular (with <i>Göttinger Händel Beiträge</i>)	115	-	95
Student	27	-	21
Student (with <i>Göttinger Händel Beiträge</i>)	56	-	46
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Regular	63	-	55
Student*	23	-	17.5
Triple Membership – Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft / Göttinger-Händel-Gesellschaft / Händel-Gesellschaft Karlsruhe			
Regular	93	-	80
Regular (with <i>Göttinger Händel Beiträge</i>)	125	-	105
Student	30	-	24
Student (with <i>Göttinger Händel Beiträge</i>)	60	-	48.5
TOTAL REMITTANCE			

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

† This organization has additional categories of Regular Membership that require a higher membership fee but provide additional benefits (see its website). Arrangements for these other categories may be made directly with Mrs. Pomeroy Kelly (see below).

Those paying in dollars should make their checks payable to AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY and mail them to Marjorie Pomeroy Kelly, Secretary/Treasurer, AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY, 49 Christopher Hollow Road, Sandwich, MA 02563. Those wishing to pay in Euros should remit to Stephan Blaut, 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 Handel Institute, London may also pay their AHS dues in sterling by making their checks payable to THE HANDEL INSTITUTE and mailing them to Ms. Sylvia Levi, Hon. Treasurer, The Handel Institute, 254A Kew Road, Richmond TW9 3EG, United Kingdom, with the appropriate annotation. Please do not send checks in Euros or sterling directly to the AHS as we are no longer able to process them.

Online payment options are available at <https://www.americanhandelsociety.org/join/>

Payments in dollars for GFH or HI memberships must be received before May 15.

American Handel Society

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