

NEWSLETTER of The American Handel Society

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VINCULUM SOCIETATIS
OR THE
Tie of good Company.



The images are from *Vinculum societatis, or the tie of good company. Being a choice collection of the newest songs now in use. With thorough bass to each song for the harpsichord, theorbo, or bass-viol* (London, 1687). From the Rita Benton Music Library Special Collections at the University of Iowa Libraries.

REPORT ON THE 2015 MEETING OF THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY, IOWA CITY, IOWA

On April 23–26, around 100 members of the American Handel Society and the Society for Seventeenth-Century Music convened in Iowa City for a joint meeting. Scholarly presentations were divided between plenary sessions involving both societies, and paper sessions pitched for one society or the other. The embarrassment of riches that plagues all joint meetings was true here: one simply cannot be two places at once. This report will therefore focus on the Handel related events.

The conference opened with a Thursday evening plenary session that cut beautifully across the two societies' lines and focused on biographical studies. Beth Glixon (University of Kentucky) offered an overview of the life and artistic activities of Vittoria Tarquini, providing a fresh look at not only what has been written about the singer's rumored liaison with Handel, but also a range of new primary materials about her marriage with French concertmaster Jean-Baptiste Farinelli and her movements around Europe. John H. Roberts (University of California, Berkeley) also unveiled newly discovered primary sources, including a signature by Johann Rosenmüller and other records that clarify that the composer did not, as has often been claimed, find his

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MIRTH, MELANCHOLY, AND THE FUTURE MRS. MONTAGU

Elizabeth Robinson (1718-1800), who under her married name of Montagu became one of the key figures in the so-called Bluestocking Circle during the second half of the eighteenth century, was a prolific letter writer even in an age of letter writers.¹ Unlike many of her female contemporaries, however, she had received an extensive education. With her sister Sarah, who was three years younger and called Sally by the family, she was presumably introduced to classical and English literature by Dr. Conyers Middleton, a noted Cambridge classical scholar and their grandmother's second husband, during extended childhood visits to Cambridge.

During the same period she was also introduced to Margaret Cavendish Harley (1715-1785), daughter of the Second Earl of Oxford. They remained close and after Margaret became Duchess of Portland upon her marriage to William Bentinck in 1734, Elizabeth lived part of each year with the Bentinck family either in London or at Bulstrode Hall in Buckinghamshire; the rest of the year she lived with her own family at Mount Morris near Hythe in Kent. This pattern continued until Elizabeth's own marriage to Edward Montagu in 1742.

Although Elizabeth was not especially devoted to music, being more interested in the theater and literature, a number of her letters make mention of Handel and one strand of her correspondence connects the composer with Milton's poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*; I have highlighted the quotations from Milton in bold in what follows. In an undated letter to her sister Sally, which must have been written on Saturday, February 7, 1741, Elizabeth reported "...I am to go to the 'Penseroso and Allegro' to-night. The music of the 'Penseroso' some say is best, 'but **Mirth with thee I choose** [Milton: **mean**] **to live.**' Adieu." (published from an unidentified source in E. J. Climençon, ed., *Elizabeth Montagu, The Queen of the Bluestockings: Her Correspondence from 1720 to 1761*, vol. 1 (London, 1906/R2011), p. 65) It is clear that both she and her sister were familiar with Milton's two poems before she heard Handel's setting, and presumably this was also true of a substantial portion of his audience.

In a letter to Sally dated "Whitehall Feb ye 10th" Elizabeth wrote:

1 A selection of Mrs. Montagu's letters was published by her nephew and heir Matthew Montagu in four volumes (1809 and 1813). A larger selection was published by Matthew's granddaughter Emily J. Climençon as *Elizabeth Montagu, The Queen of the Bluestockings: Her Correspondence from 1720 to 1761*, 2 vols. (London, 1906) and a later selection was edited by Reginald Blunt as *Mrs. Montagu, "Queen of the Blues": Her Letters and Friendships from 1762-1800*, 2 vols. (London, 1923). The bulk of her correspondence, which had been owned by Miss Climençon, is now in the Huntington Library, and I am grateful for permission to quote from it. The Handel references in this article will be included by Donald Burrows in volume 3 of *Handel Documents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), and I am grateful to him for calling my attention to this exchange of letters. A fully annotated electronic edition of Mrs. Montagu's complete correspondence is being prepared by the Montagu Letters Project under the direction of Dr. Elizabeth Eger (<http://www.elizabethmontaguleters.co.uk/the-project>).

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primary occupation at the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice; it appears that he was likely more active as an opera man, traveling between Italian cities, than scholars have previously assumed, a fact that offers some new ways of considering the stylistic traits of his extant church music. Colleen Reardon (University of California, Irvine) brought the panel to a close with a study of the playwright and librettist Girolamo Gigli, who seized the Siennese operatic reins from the Chigi family in the 1670s; Reardon traced both Gigli's artistic contributions to the operatic tradition (including work in theater design to help singers better hear orchestras) and his business practices (including an introduction of the earliest known printed contract for an operatic singer).

For the remaining days, the AHS committee put together panels of remarkable coherence. The opening session focused on questions of interpretation. My own paper discussed the notion of heroics in Handel's late oratorios, positing two viable models for understanding heroism in the midcentury English mind: action heroism, exemplified most clearly by a study of the music and poetics of the title character in *Judas Maccabaeus*, and Christian heroics, a term that I drew from Richard Steele and Handel's religious contemporaries to show that a notion of moral and religious heroism was fundamental to the ways that these stories were treated, both poetically and musically (particularly in *Theodora*). One Saturday paper, by Kenneth Nott (Hartt School of Music), made a sympathetic argument with mine, drawing on a similar methodology: comparing the approaches in *Judas Maccabaeus* and *Jephtha*, Nott also traced a developing "synthesis of traditions, genres, and styles" in the work of Morell and Handel, culminating in their last work together, which (in Nott's words) integrated "victory narrative, realistic characterization, and spiritual depth." Finally, Regina Compton (Eastman School of Music) presented her latest work on *secco* recitative in Handel's operas, and what this often overlooked musical material can teach us about stage gesture, performance practice, and Handel's profound dramatic sensibilities. She persuasively showed examples from her catalog of connections between harmonic motion, musical gesture, and what she advocates to be evidence of onstage action, with implications for *tempo* and continuo realization for modern performers.

A Friday afternoon session turned to questions of migration. Rebekah Ahrendt (Yale University) once again bridged the gap between the societies through biographical studies, this time of Charles and William Babell (or Babel, as their name was spelled before moving to England). Through archival work, Ahrendt has corrected some misinformation about the Babells, showing that William was born in Hanover (not London, as has thus far been assumed), and that the family's conversion to French Calvinism in 1696 prepared the way for these instrumentalists to find their eventual home in England, where they were identified (rightly or wrongly) as Huguenot refugees. Stephen Nissenbaum (University of Massachusetts, Amherst) traced a different type of migration: the movement of the March from the third act of *Riccardo Primo* into the pages of Methodist hymnals, including the earliest such tune-book, *The Foundery Collection* (1742). Nissenbaum provided information on the sources that the Wesleys used, the origin of their title, "Jericho Tune," and poetic treatment. Finally, he posited a reason that this piece among all of Handel's work was the first to be appropriated for religious use: surmising that Charles Wesley probably attended a 1727 performance of *Riccardo*. Nissenbaum suggested that Wesley may have been impressed by a lavish scene of stage machinery, in which a walled city in Cyprus was brought down, making the association in the young Methodist's mind with the fall of Jericho.

Saturday's papers were focused more uniformly on source studies. Two papers discussed Handel's revision practices. First, Annette Landgraf reported about her work for the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe on the 1732 bilingual version of *Esther* and its revisions between 1735 and 1740. Through close inspection of the pencil annotations and extant evidence about gatherings in the Hamburg performance scores, Landgraf proposed a hypothetical order of the oratorio's movements in 1732 (with some differences from the reconstruction that David Vickers suggested at his presentation at the 2011 meeting of the AHS in Seattle). As with all Handel reconstructions, this is no small task; the 1732 *Esther* has no extant wordbooks, and many of the original folios are missing from the performance scores. Second, Matthew Gardener gave a report on the relationship between Handel's Italian oratorio *Il trionfo del Tempo e della Verità* and his 1757 adaptation of that work

(with Thomas Morell) as *The Triumph of Time and Truth*. Gardener proposed different categories of revision, including those to suit singers (transposition, transferal of music from one allegorical character to another, simplifications or increases in virtuosity) and those that related more to questions of musical unity and other apparently composerly decisions (instrumentation, transposition of choruses). Gardener also suggested reasons why this particular work was adapted by Handel and his assistants: he both suggested that *Il trionfo* was more appropriate in a theatrical setting than the other possibility, *La Resurrezione* (which carried obvious problems with its Christ-centered content), and that it fit well with *The Judgment of Paris* and *The Choice of Hercules*, standing alongside them as a known generic specimen to English audiences. Finally, Donald Burrows offered an energetic presentation of some of his vast knowledge about the printed sources of *Messiah*. It is a history, in Burrows's words, of "publication and non-publication"—i.e., there was no full engraving by the Walsh firm until 1763–65 (overturning William C. Smith's earlier assertion that a Walsh score was printed in the 1740s). Through trying to work out dates of Walsh's acquisition of the *Messiah* score, the date of his firm's engraving, and the date of publication, Burrows has also unearthed new information about the relationship between Handel and Walsh and the contractual obligations that the composer may have been under to turn over scores shortly after performances. Something went wrong in the case of *Messiah*; Burrows pointed out that Walsh's catalog left a blank line in its list of available oratorios throughout the '40s, hinting that the "Sacred Oratorio" was intended for publication, but withheld for hazily understood legal reasons.

As a sort of dessert to all of these meaty scholarly presentations, we were treated to a personal reflection by Nicholas McGegan titled "Handel in My Lifetime." The talk was delivered with McGegan's characteristic wit and flair as he took us through forty-five years of Handel performance history. He reminded us of the beauty and sincerity inscribed in recordings by singers of Handel long before the Historically Informed Performance brought its waves of stylistic reforms, but also stressed the neglect that Handel's music has overcome since the conductor was a young man: as a college student, McGegan wrote student papers on Handel operas, he said, "without being able to hear a note of any of them." His talk traced the rise of Handel opera from such near obscurity at the midpoint of the 20th century to its presence in major opera houses and numerous annual Handel festivals in the 21st—due in part, of course, to McGegan's own efforts as a conductor and devotee of this repertoire.

The conference was graciously hosted by representatives from the University of Iowa and the greater community. Performances included a full-scale presentation of *Judas Maccabaeus* given by the Chamber Singers of Iowa City under the direction of David Puderbaugh. The complex of activities ran like a well-oiled machine due to the admirable efforts of Robert Ketterer (University of Iowa), who served as local organizer. He and the AHS selection committee set a high bar for the 2017 meeting, which we await with great anticipation.

— Jonathan Rhodes Lee (University of Chicago)

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)
- Reviews of performances and recordings of Handel's music
- News of awards and honors presented to members of the Society
- News of recent publications on Handel-related topics
- Abstracts for dissertations in progress on Handel-related topics

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

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

The Iowa Conference was a great success with more than 100 registrants, and members of both the AHS and the SSCM seemed equally happy with the event. Special thanks are due to Rob Ketterer and his University of Iowa colleague Christine Getz for supervising local arrangements, and to Wendy Heller for chairing the Program Committee made up of members from both societies. The conference was the occasion for the first Paul Traver Memorial Concert – a performance of *Judas Maccabaeus* by the Chamber Singers of Iowa City under the direction of David Puderbaugh with Mary Traver and other members of the Traver family in attendance. Those of us who were present were struck by how underrated the work is these days, and how successfully Handel was able to transcend the limitations of the libretto. A detailed report on the conference appears elsewhere in this issue of the Newsletter.

This is the first issue of the Newsletter to be edited by Minji Kim, and she has hit the ground running. She will always be happy to receive submissions from the members, whether in the form of news items, articles or reviews. In particular, she is hoping to highlight the achievements of AHS members, so please let her know if you have received an award or fellowship; have published a book, article or edition; taken part in or directed a significant performance; or distinguished yourself in some other way. As always, there is no guarantee that she will have room to publish everything she is sent.

The Secretary/Treasurer, Marjorie Pomeroy-Kelly, would like to take this occasion to renew her call for payment of dues. The Board of Directors at its meeting in Iowa City decided to make available some additional giving opportunities. The first of these is a plan, inspired by our sister organizations the SSCM and the London Handel Institute, to provide grants to assist graduate students and independent scholars to attend conferences. The exact details of these grants and the application procedures will be determined at the next AHS Board Meeting in November, but we have already received a generous gift from one of the Board members to kick off the fundraising.

The new Membership Form, both online and in printed form, will also allow members to designate gifts of 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.

Members of the Society will be saddened to hear of the death of longtime member Andrew Porter on April 3, 2015 in London. Renowned as a music critic, scholar, organist and opera translator and director, Andrew cast his net astonishingly wide. Handel was one of his loves, and he gave the Howard Serwer Memorial Lecture when the AHS Conference was held at Princeton in April 2007.

— Graydon Beeks

SPECIAL OFFERS FROM THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY

The American Handel Society is offering sets of back issues of the *Newsletter* for the price of \$10 per year (three issues each), going back to the first year, 1986. All volumes are available, but some numbers are in short supply. We reserve the right to supply photocopies of individual numbers where necessary. For further details, contact the *Newsletter* Editor.

THEODORA ON THE LEFT COAST

Cities in the Pacific Northwest have been rediscovering Handel lately, with the American Handel Festival in 2011; *Semele*, *Il trionfo del Tempo*, and *Acis and Galatea* over three seasons by Pacific Musicworks; and *Israel in Egypt* at the Vancouver Early Music Festival in 2013.

Most recently (April 2015), Alexander Weimann conducted a stunning three-city production of the oratorio *Theodora*. Weimann says he likes *Theodora* for its “strong dramatic narrative. It doesn’t resemble the borrowings and self-referential writing that Handel used in some of his earlier oratorios. The orchestral writing has a rich contrapuntal texture, the plot is unique, and the music is unique, as well.” Or, as Donald Burrows says in his biography *Handel*, “*Theodora* is serious and introspective without any of the tub-thumping that had been an integral part of *Judas Maccabaeus*, *Joshua*,...and *Solomon*.”



Alexander Weimann conducting Seattle's Early Music Guild, Early Music Vancouver, and the Early Music Society of the Islands. Photo by Markdavin Obenza.

Theodora is a long work, and Burrows says the key is to maintain a leisurely pace. Weimann's pacing worked beautifully. Instead of rushing, he managed the excessive length by making judicious cuts in recitatives and some arias (without dropping the B sections). Soloists Nathalie Paulin, Lawrence Zazzo, Zachary Wilder, Matthew Brook and Krisztina Szabó were uniformly outstanding, and the combined Vancouver-Victoria-Seattle orchestra treated the audience to some of the best playing Seattle has heard in years.

This was a first-ever collaboration by Seattle's Early Music Guild, Early Music Vancouver, and the Early Music Society of the Islands (Victoria). Weimann was just named Music Director of the Seattle Baroque Orchestra.

— Marty Ronish (Seattle, WA)

HANDEL INSTITUTE CONFERENCE, LONDON

“Handel and His Eighteenth-Century Performers”

21-22 November 2015

Foundling Museum

40 Brunswick Square

London, WC1N 1AZ

Dear Sister

Hence Loathed Melancholly of Cerberus & blackest Midnight born In Stygian Cave forlorn; Tho' Accompany'd with fine Musick [sic] I still prefer'd the chearfull [sic] sound of Mirth & **sport that wrinkled care derides** with [Milton: **and] laughter holding both his Sides**, I told you when I wrote last that I was just going to the Penseroso & Allegro where I was very well intertain'd [sic] **with many a bout, of lincked [sic] sweetness long drawn out**, the musik [sic] follow'd the sense extreamly [sic] well in both the grave & chearfull strain but the Singers were vile, I can compare them to nothing that will not set your teeth on Edge. A little English Girl is the best & the true Brittons in the Upper Gallery never fail of giving her more a National than a Critical applause, The Nightingale Song pleased me much it was **most Musical most Melancholly**, the Curfew bell sounded almost as dismal to us as it did to the enslaved Saxons at its institution by William the Conqueror, it was finely mix'd with the Musick but these things are better imagin'd than represented, however all the images were as well brought to the imagination as mere sound could do & I dare say a fine Ear must find them very strongly. It is happy for the Lovers of Musick to be thus led to Poetry for I think it has been the misfortune of the Musical as it was the Curse of the Jews to have Ears to hear & not to understand... (Huntington Library, MO 5602)

After describing several people she met at the opera and subsequently at Lady Shadwell's assembly, Elizabeth concluded the letter: ...I am in good health & Spirits & of the Train of Euphrosine call'd by **Men heart easing Mirth**, Oh may I **live with her & live with thee in unproved pleasures free**. I am most affectionately yours, E. Robinson

Elizabeth heard one of three apparently bilingual performances of *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* in January and February 1741 involving a mixed cast of Italian- and English-speaking singers, although she made no mention of the mixture of languages. The principal singers were the sopranos Elizabeth Duparc ("La Francesina") and Signora Monza, the high castrato Andreoni (who sang in Italian), the tenor Joseph Corfe, and the basses Reinhold and Savage. The "little English Girl" was a "Miss Edwards," who sang some of L'Allegro's music; she also sang the roles of Clomiri in *Imeneo* and Achille in *Deidamia* that season and is described elsewhere as "belonging to Mrs. Clive" (i.e. the actress Kitty Clive). The "Nightingale Song" refers to "Sweet Bird," the famous coloratura aria with flute obbligato sung in this performance by La Francesina. The curfew bell appears in the soprano aria "Oft on a plat of rising ground."

The experience of hearing Handel's setting of the Milton poems seems to have awakened a theme within Elizabeth and her correspondents. She remained with the Duchess of Portland until the beginning of April 1741, when she traveled to Mount Morris. Potential disaster struck shortly after her arrival when Sally came down with smallpox. Elizabeth, who had not been inoculated, had developed an almost pathological fear of the disease, and there was reason for serious concern. Her father sent away all the servants who had not had smallpox and moved Elizabeth to Hayton Farm, a family property leased to a yeoman farmer named Smith. There she was isolated from both her family and friends; as she wrote to the duchess, "...for my part, I am in the case of poor David, my friends and kinsfolk stand afar off; and when I am to return home I don't know." (Huntington Library, MO 296 A: "Wednesday, April 8th, 1741.")

By April 10 Elizabeth could report to her friend Anne Donnellan that her sister was out of danger. As for herself, she noted, "I am now enjoying the wish of the Penseroso, By **the side of some Hoar Hill**, While the winds are **echoing** still. I am forced to go back to my former Ages for my Companions. Cicero and Plutarch's Heroes are my only company ... my best friends among the living are a Colony of Rooks who have settled themselves in a Grove by my window..." (Huntington Library, MO 815). Ironically, Elizabeth confused the source of her reference, for it is L'Allegro who wishes to be:

Oft list'ning how the Hounds and Horn
Chearly [sic] rouse the slumbering morn,
From the side of some Hoar Hill,
Through the high wood echoing shrill.

This surely means that she was citing and/or paraphrasing Milton's poems from memory, without having the text before her.

On April 15 Anne Donnellan responded, "I wish in your rural amusements you could [sic] teach one of your Rooks (a creature I love mightily) the way to Bond Street, for I neither like posts nor Hobgoblins, & fancy the honest rook bird in Woods far from **the busy hum of men** will perform his commission with more faithfulness & I am sure with more alacrity, let him give one Caw at my dressing room window he shall be received like the Dove into the Ark." (Huntington Library, MO 751) Elizabeth replied on April 20, "...I thought you would despise my rooks because they cannot sing. I had rather **the Lark would at my Window bid good morrow** and the bird of Night in her **sweetest saddest plight** sing me to sleep, but I am very fond of my Cawing Neighbours." (Huntington Library, MO 816 A)

On the same day Elizabeth wrote to her cousin-by-marriage Rev. William Freind, son of Rev. Dr. Robert Freind, Headmaster of Westminster School, to report:

My sister is well again and once more I possess my soul with tranquility [sic]. I believe you will guess I suffered great and terrible anxiety when I was

RECENT PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE

Feldman, Martha. *The Castrato: Reflections on Natures and Kinds*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015.

Hunter, David. "Handel and friends." Review of Ellen T. Harris, *George Frideric Handel: a Life with Friends*. *Early Music* 43/1 (2015): 156-159.

Hurley, David Ross. Review of Sarah McCleave, *Dance in Handel's London Operas*. *Journal of Musicological Research* 34/1 (2015): 81-84.

Lee, Jonathan Rhodes. "From Amelia to Calista and Beyond: Sentimental Heroines, 'Fallen' Women and Handel's Oratorio Revisions for Susanna Cibber." *Cambridge Opera Journal* 27/1 (2015): 1-34.

McGeary, Thomas. "Handel as Orpheus: the Vauxhall statue re-examined." *Early Music* 43/2 (2015): 291-308.

Händel-Jarhbuch 61 (2015) [select articles in English]:

Beeks, Graydon. "Non-Handelian Changes to the 'Cannons' *Te Deum*, HWV 281."

Burrows, Donald. "The British royal family, the London opera companies and Handel's performances, 1732-1743."

Gardner, Matthew. "The Preference of the Hanoverians for Handel, 1727-1821."

Roberts, John H. "'Blooms of Youth': A Solomonic Addendum."

forced to leave her to a dreadful distemper, whose terrors received great additions from my particular fears of it, and tenderness to her. ... though great is the change, you will say, from London and lolling on the velvet sofa of a Dutchess [sic], to humbly sitting on a three-legg'd cricket in the country. I am in a civil sober family, of middling rank, whose company adds nothing to my pleasure, and takes little from my solitude. I am in general alone in my chambers which is just according to the Penserosos [sic] desire, By **the side of some Hoar Hill**, while the winds are **echoing still**, a shade of old oaks

**Hides me from day's garish eye,
While the bee with honied [sic] thigh, &c.**

A grave society of rooks caw just over my head; ivy round my window tempers the little light that comes through the trees, so that I have not beheld the gaudy sun since I came into it. And here, far from **the busy hum of men**, and all that the world you live in calls business and pleasure, I am like to remain for some time... (Huntington Library, MO 1014 A)

By this time the game of referring to Milton's twin poems had been taken up by others among Elizabeth's correspondents. On April 23 Mrs. Pendarves (later to become Mrs. Delany) wrote to Mrs. Dewes from Jermyn Street, London, "This will be the last letter I shall date *from hence*, for next Saturday I remove from dust, noise, and hurry to sweet air, tranquility, and leisure; all *these delights* Northend *can give*, and *with them I choose to live!* [Milton: **These delights if thou can'st give, Mirth, with thee I mean to live**] Where the Penseroso and Allegro will be blended, and set off each other so as to make it a life of perfect harmony..." (Augusta Waddington Hall, Lady Llanover, ed., *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany*, vol. 2 (London, 1861), p. 149).

Finally, on May 9 Elizabeth reported to her cousin Rev. Freind that she had moved the previous Thursday to a farm much closer to Mount Morris where she could visit with her sister three or four times a day without entering the big house, of which she was still afraid. She continued,

I remember we have held many arguments concerning the Region of happiness; you was reasonably for placing it in the Mean, I was ambitiously seating it in the high Extreame [sic]; but I find it is every where, from the Rafter'd Roof of the Duke to the thatched Cottage of the farmer. I find Content my companion in this the worst lodging I was ever in: while it is my Guest I shall never complain of my habitation. Indeed, I find with Satisfaction that Equipage is only Attach'd to our fancy; that we move as well without it, and are in all places the same. It is not consistent with the dignity of our minds, and that spark of divinity we call our Soul, to be Alter'd by every little change of situation. Virtue is guard enough in a Croud [sic], and Comfort enough in a Desert; I mean for a short time. It will sustain us alone, tho' it bids us seek Society and bless it. (Huntington Library, MO 1015)

Elizabeth found one more occasion to refer to *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. On May 13 she wrote to the Duchess of Portland from her new lodgings, "...here is neither vice nor Novelty, and consider if news and Scandal are out of the question what a drawback it is upon Conversations; if I could **sit and rightly Spell of every herb that sips the Dew** &c I might indeed be a very good Correspondent...." (Huntington Library, MO 300)

— Graydon Beeks

NEW DISSERTATION

Compton, Regina. "The *Recitativo Semplíce* in Handel's Operas for the First Royal Academy of Music, 1720-28." Ph.D. Dissertation in Musicology. Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, 2015.

Abstract:

This dissertation argues that the *recitativo semplice* in Handel's operas for the first Royal Academy of Music (1720-1728) contains communicative and compelling musical materials that contribute to the richness of his dramatic works. Chapter 1 describes the various elements of Handel's recitative, i.e., harmony, melody, and rhythm, as well as poetic devices and the ways in which they sometimes cue particular musical patterns. Chapter 2 explores the visual components of Handel's operas and envisages the relationship between simple recitative and the actor-singer's lexicon of theatrical gesture. Acknowledging this intersection of music, text, and theatrical gesture provides a firmer basis to interpret the large portions of the score where instructions for gesture are absent. Chapter 3 presents character studies of three operatic women: Polissena (*Radamisto*), Irene (*Tamerlano*), and Gismonda (*Ottone*). The recitative anticipates, complements, or sometimes contradicts the affects given in the arias; close reading of the recitative therefore informs our overall sense of characterization and—in the case of Polissena, Irene, and Gismonda—tells us something about the cultural resonances of Handel's female characters. To conclude, this dissertation positions Handel's recitatives along a complex historic-stylistic spectrum: Chapter 4 interprets the Academy recitatives as a synthesis of "early" and "late" baroque aesthetics. Handel's Academy recitatives, as compared with those composed during his tenure in Italy, exhibit a departure from, but also continuity with *seicento* tastes and compositional practices.

Simple recitative in the baroque era and especially in Handel's oeuvre has not received sufficient treatment in recent critical discourse, even though thinkers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries regarded it as a vital musical style. This dissertation shows that Handel's simple recitative is a sophisticated musical language, composed of expressive, but nuanced details that invite methodical study of the libretto and score. In contributing to our on-going discussion of and fascination with Handel, this study identifies strategies for analyzing, listening to, and performing *recitativo semplice*.

AWARDS AND HONORS

Graydon Beeks (Pomona College) received *Short-Term Fellowship* from the Folger Shakespeare Library.

The Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft presented the 2015 *International Handel Research Prize* to **Regina Compton** (Eastman School of Music) for her work on her dissertation "The *Recitativo Semplíce* in Handel's Operas for the First Royal Academy of Music, 1720-1728." Ms. Compton was also the recipient of the *J. Merrill Knapp Research Fellowship* from the American Handel Society in 2012.

Ellen T. Harris (MIT) was elected President of the American Musicological Society.

David Hunter received *Eva Judd O'Meara Award* from the Music Library Association for his review of the HHA edition of *Samson*.

Robert Ketterer was awarded *AMS-Newberry Library Short-Term Fellowship*.

John H. Roberts (University of California, Berkeley) was elected an Honorary Member of the International Association of Music Libraries, Archives and Documentation Centres.

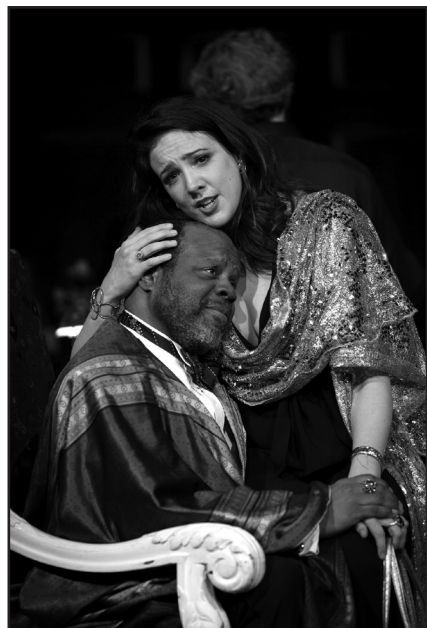
BOSTON BAROQUE'S PRODUCTION OF HANDEL'S *AGRIPPINA*

On April 24 and 25, Boston Baroque, under the baton of its founding (1973) director Martin Perlman, presented, in New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall, two brilliant performances of Handel's early and infrequently performed opera *Agrippina*. Handel composed it in Venice, Italy, at the age of 24; it was premièred in December 1709, and ran for an extraordinary 27 performances. The work established the composer's reputation across Europe.

The production featured the US début of Australian countertenor, David Hansen, in the role of Nerone (Nero), son of the title character from a previous marriage, with that title role sung by soprano Susanna Phillips, making her Boston Baroque début. Yet a third singer, bass-baritone Douglas Williams, was making his Boston Baroque début in the role of Pallante (Pallas), a freedman and one of the lovers, along with Nerone, Agrippina's current husband, the emperor Claudio (Claudius), sung by Boston Baroque regular, bass-baritone Kevin Deas, and Ottone (Otho), an army commander sung by French mezzo-soprano Marie Lenormand, of *Poppea*, sung by Boston Baroque regular, soprano Amanda Forsythe. Two other incidental characters, both sung by Boston Baroque regulars, complete the cast: Narciso (Narcissus), another freedman, sung

by mezzo-soprano Christa Rivers and Lesbo (Lesbus), a servant of Claudius, sung by tenor Mark McSweeney.

Staging an opera in Jordan Hall, which is semicircular, with the sides of the mezzanine and wrap-around balcony sloping down towards the stage as well as the main floor, and has no orchestra pit because it was designed and built in 1903 for recitals, is always a challenge, but one to which Boston Baroque's current Stage Director Mark Streshinsky always seems to rise very cleverly (at least for the two productions that he has done; I reviewed that of Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* last year for *Classical Voice North America*). The orchestra of



Susanna Phillips and Kevin Deas in *Agrippina*.
Photo by Kathy Wittman.

29 players (18 strings, 5 woodwinds, 2 brass, 1 timpani, 1 theorbo and 2 harpsichords), performing on period instruments, was positioned towards the back of the stage and in its center to allow the singers to move beside and in front of it. On either side in the foreground was a square revolving platform placed on a diagonal, with two large two-sided stretched-canvas backdrops in their center and furniture representing two different settings: a throne room and a garden – Claudio and Agrippina's realm – on the left (stage right) and a boudoir and bedroom – Poppea's domain – on the right. Stage hands in costume rotated them and locked them in position between scenes. Backdrops and furniture were a mix of Classical Roman (left) and Baroque (right) styles; costumes by Charles Schoonmaker were modern, with some, including the stagehands, suggestive of Roman military; there were no togas.

There was plenty of acting and movement, with soloists singing from seated and reclining positions, on a bench, a chair, an Empire-style chaise longue, and a bed, kneeling in a few instances as well; indeed, I wondered how some of them could get enough breath to be able to sing in the positions in which they contorted themselves. But sing they did, and gloriously! The voices were all outstanding, and appropriately modulated to suit the lines of the libretto by Vincenzo

Grimani. There was also a racy moment in the staging, when Nerone, in bed on stage with Poppea, as she, in a dressing gown, sings seated on the edge of the bed, uncovers himself and rises, wearing only red boxer shorts, taking along the top sheet to hide behind as he exits on the opposite side. All of the movements and the staging served extraordinarily well to grab the audience's attention and draw it in, and make the 300 year old work and the nearly 2000 year old story captivating. Some elements, like the somewhat aggressive shoulder massages that Agrippina gave to Poppea, were a bit campy, but none were inappropriate or seriously over the top. It was a lively and spirited performance and production, humorous but convincing, an engaging and memorable delight.

The printed program did not include a libretto, but translations, in modern colloquial English, so not always in sync with the Italian, sung with excellent diction, were displayed on two large LCD TV screens located on either side of the stage at the bottom of the proscenium, a solution much easier for the audience to see and read – it can keep its eyes on the singers at the same time – than supertitles above a proscenium's center. The music of the concluding scene, in which Giunone (Juno), character eliminated from this production, appears and speaks, was accompanied by texts about what happened to all the characters after the drama acted out ended, bringing the audience up to date.

Following the performances, Boston Baroque recorded the production in Mechanics Hall in Worcester, MA, for the Linn label; it will likely be released next spring in SACD format, as was last year's Monteverdi. That shoebox-shaped hall's acoustics are renowned, as I can attest from having heard live performances and heard and reviewed other recordings made there. Handel opera aficionados will want to watch for this release.

— Marvin J. Ward

Marvin J. Ward, Ph.D., is a retired teacher of French and translator and interpreter, and an erstwhile radio announcer, who has been writing about classical music, mostly for websites, for a decade and a half and enjoying it for over fifty years, with a particular interest in early music, period instruments, and historically informed performance. He lives in Western Massachusetts.

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