

NEWSLETTER

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THE EARLY CAREER OF THOMAS LOWE, ORATORIO TENOR

English tenor Thomas Lowe (c.1719–83) is best known for his collaborations with Handel during the 1743 and 1748–51 oratorio seasons. Lowe premiered roles in *Samson*, *Joshua*, *Alexander Balus*, *Susanna*, *Solomon*, *Theodora*, and *The Choice of Hercules*. He performed in revivals led by the composer, including *Messiah*, and also likely participated in productions for which personnel remain uncertain, including *Esther*, *Alexander's Feast*, *Saul*, *L'Allegro*, *Hercules*, *Belshazzar*, and *Judas Maccabaeus*. Beyond the oratorios, Handel wrote for him songs, such as “From scourging rebellion” (HWV 228₉) and “Stand round, my brave boys” (HWV 228₁₈), as well as solos in the Peace Anthem (HWV 266) and Foundling Hospital Anthem (HWV 268). He further performed Handel’s music in the principal Dublin theaters, London’s pleasure gardens, and various regional theaters and country estates. In 1751, after just under a decade of near continuous activity, Lowe’s professional collaboration with Handel ended, although the tenor continued to perform Handel’s music throughout his career.

Lowe’s reputation has been discolored by assessments of theater historians, however. Charles Dibdin observed,

Lowe was a great favourite and perhaps had a more even and mellow voice than Beard; and, in mere love songs when little more than a melodious utterance was necessary, he might have been said to have exceeded him [...] Lowe lost himself beyond the namby pamby poetry of Vauxhall; Beard was at home ever where.¹

¹ Charles Dibdin, *A Complete History of the English Stage* (London, 1800), 5:364.

HANDEL’S USE OF FUGUE IN *ALEXANDER’S FEAST*

Before Handel threw himself wholly into the composition of biblical oratorios, he took up two poems by England’s late poet laureate, John Dryden (1631–1700). *Alexander’s Feast* (1736) and *Ode for St. Cecilia’s Day* (1739) as composed by Handel were performed during his lifetime without the accoutrements of the stage. Both works were penned by Dryden on commission in honor of St. Cecilia’s Day, the patroness of music. Upon close examination, however, both works potentially reflect covert cynicism regarding the influence of music and of particular musical instruments on civilization. Nevertheless, it seems Handel used these poems by England’s venerated poet and satirist as subject matter for his early oratorio-like performances to expand the proprietary boundaries of Lenten entertainment.¹

Handel’s overtly religious works were relatively immune from contemporary debate that considered the necessity of Lenten public entertainment to be instructive in both moral and religious capacities. Handel’s non-staged secular works (of which *Alexander’s Feast* served as a seminal model), though structured formally and musically within the context of his later religious oratorios, addressed topics that were seemingly antipathetic with the tenor of his religious works. These works, however, were performed in similar venues as Handel’s religious oratorios and were hailed as examples of how the conjoining of great poetry with great music could produce an ideal art form. This essay will discuss the way in which Handel may have attempted, through the use of a choral fugue, to strategically circumscribe *Alexander’s Feast* as a religious piece, despite the subject matter of Dryden’s poem bearing little resemblance to what Handel’s audience might expect in a biblical oratorio suitable for Lent.

Alexander’s Feast, commissioned in 1697 for the London St. Cecilia Day festival (a phenomenon which lasted a mere 20 years) was subsequently regarded so highly that it was referred to as the equivalent of England’s national epic. Robert Manson Myers observes that it “was recognized as a lyric of unusual merit” and he comments on the wide distribution as well as praise of the poem.² Myers quotes Joseph Wharton’s criticism of the poem as exemplary of its success:

¹ Dryden’s choice of pejorative adjectives in his reference to instruments in the Ode and his opaquely rendered narrative of Alexander’s court scene raise serious doubts as to the author’s true sentiments regarding the place of music in society. See Ruth Smith, “The Arguments and Contexts of Dryden’s *Alexander’s Feast*,” *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 18/ 3 (1978): 465–90. Smith notes that Dryden “keeps the reader alert to the moral implications [of Alexander’s actions] by continually refusing opportunities to probe the intentions behind the actions he describes” (p. 472).

² *Handel, Dryden and Milton* (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1956), 23–4.

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Charles Burney observed a degree of complacency, remarking on Lowe's position within Handel's oratorio cast.

Lowe had sometimes a subordinate part given him; but with the finest tenor voice I ever heard in my life, for want of diligence and cultivation, he never could safely be trusted with any thing better than a ballad, which he constantly learned by his ear; whereas Mr. Beard, with an inferior voice, constantly possessed the favour of the public by his superior conduct, knowledge of music, and intelligence as an actor.²

Two principal indictments emerge from these accounts. First, Lowe was equipped to sing only frivolous and uncomplicated music, and second, he could not bear comparison to contemporary tenor John Beard. The latter charge, especially, continues to resonate within modern Handel scholarship. Lowe receives coverage in *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, *Grove Music Online*, *Cambridge Handel Encyclopedia*, *Das Händel-Lexikon*, and various biographies and monographs. In every instance, the reader traverses no more than a few paragraphs – no more than a single sentence, in some instances – before encountering an unflattering comparison with Beard. In this way, criticisms leveled after Lowe's death tarnish all parts of his career.

In an effort to dissociate early career activity from posthumous criticism, this article serves as a microbiography of Thomas Lowe, narrowly focused on his performance activity, public reception, and musical skillset from his professional debut through his earliest collaboration with Handel (i.e., Autumn 1740–Spring 1743). During this period Lowe served as a principal tenor at Drury Lane, headlining mainpieces on occasion, starring in afterpieces, and singing between acts.³ He also expanded his repertoire – in both number and variety of songs and roles – performed demanding music composed by leading composers, enjoyed positive feedback in various forms from colleagues and audiences, and ultimately established a track record that challenges Dibdin and Burney's remarks.

Lowe's career began at Drury Lane during the 1740–41 season, in which he served as principal tenor. On September 11, 1740, he debuted in Charles Coffey's farce *The Devil to Pay*. He portrayed Sir John Loverule, to which he appended John Galliard's "With Early Horn," a song with which he would be closely associated throughout his career. Other noteworthy contributions include *The Beggar's Opera* (Macheath), *As You Like It* (Amiens), Thomas Arne's setting of Joseph Addison's *Rosamond* (King Henry), Arne's masque adaptation of *Comus* (Bacchanal), and Robert Dodsley's afterpiece *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green* (Welford). Lowe's first known performance of Handel's music occurred during this season: he sang "Happy Pair" from *Alexander's Feast* between acts of the comedy *The Country Wife* (May 9, 1741).

Lowe returned to Drury Lane in 1741–42. Further additions to his repertoire include *Cato* (Marcus), Arne's *Judgment of Paris* (Mercury), *Merchant of Venice* (Lorenzo) with newly composed songs, musical contributions in *Macbeth*, and new entr'acte songs. Lowe now shared principal singer duties with John Beard. The two men shared roles, such as Macheath and Amiens, as well as entr'acte songs. They also shared the stage on several occasions. In *Judgment of Paris*, for instance, Beard portrayed Paris while Lowe portrayed Mercury. In *The Rehearsal*,

the two appeared in "the Representation of a Battle of the Two Operatical Generals Per gli Signori Giovanni and Tomasino detti Beard and Lowe." They sang an unnamed duet numerous times (November 9, January 22, March 1), and on April 27, both men were listed as performers in the entr'acte song "Bumper Squire Jones."

Lowe's activity at Drury Lane in 1742–43 followed closely the previous season. He added several songs, including Handel's "Let me wander not unseen" from *L'Allegro* (September 25), Henry Purcell's duet "Let Caesar and Urania live" (sung with Beard on April 15), and a cantata by John Stanley (April 20).

Lowe spent summers performing in various provincial theaters. In August 1740, before his Drury Lane debut, he may have appeared at Cliveden (estate of Frederick, Prince of Wales) in a production of the masque *Alfred* with music composed by Thomas Arne. In summer 1741, Lowe performed at Bristol Theatre.⁴ In summer 1742, Thomas Lowe likely traveled to Dublin with Thomas Arne and his wife, Cecilia, although performance activity remains uncertain and interaction with Handel, also in Dublin at the time, cannot be substantiated.

Lowe's growing popularity attracted attention within London's musical community. On September 30, 1742, *Daily Advertiser* announced "A grand concert of vocal and instrumental musick" at Lord Cobham's Head in Cold Bath Fields.⁵ The advertisement included no repertoire save "the favourite songs of Mr. Lowe." These were further itemized: "The happy pair," "Bright author of my present flame," "Let me wander not unseen," and "several favourite songs in Comus." Whether or not Lowe himself participated is unclear, as Drury Lane advertised for the same day his appearance in *The Beggar's Opera*. In either case, the advertisement suggests even the name "Lowe" was a commodity of appreciating value within London musical circles. Furthermore, it affords a glimpse of the repertoire for which Lowe was becoming increasingly well known.

The list of Lowe's favorite songs – or perhaps more accurately, songs for which Lowe was best known – is striking in several respects. It includes music composed by England's leading theater composers, Handel and Arne. It comprises songs in Lowe's repertoire since his first season at Drury Lane (i.e., "Happy pair," "Bright author of my present flame") as well as material he first performed publicly only days earlier (i.e., "Let me wander not unseen"). The list also encompasses songs of varied musical and expressive demands. John Travers's "Bright author of my present flame" is an aria in three parts; duple meter sections surround a middle section in triple meter. The central section (*Affettuoso*) is deceptively folk-like with a purely diatonic melody. The range spans one and a half octaves, however, and it moves freely and frequently through all registers of the voice. The melismatic writing of the first section (*Con spirito*) prefigures relentless coloratura in the final section, in which stepwise passagework, arpeggiated motives, and disjunct melodic motion combine in florid phrases stretching ten measures and longer. The song is a virtuosic showpiece and requires a singer with impeccable technique. In contrast, Handel's siciliana "Let me wander not unseen" demands intense emotional expression to convey an appropriately pensive mood. Sustained legato singing requires supreme breath control. Here, too, a wide melodic range demands a performer able to shift effortlessly through all registers.

Shortly afterward, in late autumn 1742, Handel integrated Lowe as an eleventh-hour addition to his upcoming oratorio season. His overall duties are instructive. He performed in *Samson*,

2 Charles Burney, *A General History of Music* (London, 1789), 4:667.

3 All references to Lowe's activity at Drury Lane taken from *The London Stage, 1660–1800*, ed. Arthur H. Scouten, pt. 3, 1729–1747 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), 2:847–1060.

4 Sybil Rosenfeld, *Strolling Players and Drama in the Provinces 1660–1765* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 213.

5 *Daily Advertiser*, September 30, 1742.

Messiah, and possibly *L'Allegro*. He sang no less than six arias, several preceded by substantive recitatives, including a lengthy messenger-speech in *Samson*, and if he sang chorus movements, additional music marked by counterpoint and lengthy melismatic passages. Additionally, he may have taken up the title role in *Samson* toward the end of the season, as John Beard was likely indisposed at some point during this time.⁶ As a late addition to the cast, Lowe's solo material in *Messiah* ("But who may abide," "He was cut off," "But thou didst not leave") constituted material re-assigned from other soloists. Such material did not exist in *Samson*, however, save the messenger-speech in Part 3, originally sung by the actor who portrayed Samson. Thus, Handel composed new music conceived specifically with Lowe's voice in mind: one aria for an Israelite man ("God of our fathers") and three arias for a Philistine man ("Loud as the thunder's awful voice," "To song and dance," and "Great Dagon has subdued our foe").

Lowe's *Samson* arias resemble in many respects the emotional and musical demands of those songs for which he was already well known. In Part 1, "Loud as the thunder's awful voice" features sustained coloratura stretching over an octave while blending conjunct, disjunct, and arpeggiated passagework. Save one *c#*, the range of the aria (*d* to *a'*) matches precisely the range of Travers's "Bright author of my present flame," mentioned above. The Israelite man's aria "God of our fathers" calls for a reflective mood. The range remains broad (*d* to *g'*), and florid passages persist, although at this slower tempo (*Larghetto*) melismas show off even delivery rather than bald virtuosity. A wide range and long stretches of coloratura persists in Lowe's final two arias, in which simple triple meter conveys the uncivilized quality of the Philistine man. In "To song and dance," specifically, numerous opportunities for *messa di voce* no doubt reminded early listeners of Lowe's performances of Galliard's "With early horn," in which similar opportunities abound in high and low registers.

Animosity between Drury Lane actors and theater manager Charles Fleetwood in spring 1743 prompted a strike (led by Charles Macklin and David Garrick) before the start of the 1743–44 season.⁷ Lowe left the company altogether, thus bringing to a close the first chapter of his career. He spent the following season performing in Dublin with Thomas Arne under the United Company.⁸ Arne intended to produce oratorio, both his own and those of Handel, with Lowe as principal tenor. Handel resumed composing music for Lowe on his return to London the following year, and the height of their collaboration came in 1748–51, during which time Lowe served as principal tenor in Handel's oratorios.

Taken in sum, Thomas Lowe's duties as a leading vocalist at Drury Lane and elsewhere, his wide-ranging repertoire of songs and roles, and the demands of music composed specifically for him by Handel combine to contradict the historical record, which largely dismisses him as a single-dimensional performer incapable of complicated music. The actions of those who engaged Lowe early at the outset of his career – that is, England and Ireland's leading composers and theater managers – would appear to support this conclusion. While Dibdin and Burney's remarks may reflect more accurately a diminished capacity Lowe suffered later in his career – he continued to perform until shortly before his death in 1783 – their characterizations do not reflect the early achievement of Thomas Lowe. Minor alteration yields a more accurate assessment: during this period, at least, it seems Lowe

often "[found] himself beyond the namby pamby poetry of Vauxhall" ... "trusted with [m]any thing[s] better than a ballad."

— Andrew Shryock (Boston Conservatory)

CALL FOR PAPERS AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY CONFERENCE 2017

The Biennial Conference of the American Handel Society will take place at **Princeton University** on **April 6-9, 2017**. The Society invites submission of abstracts for papers on any topic connected with Handel's life and music. Abstracts of no more than 500 words may be sent by **October 1, 2016** to the Program Chair, Robert Ketterer at Robert-ketterer@uiowa.edu.

INTERNATIONAL HANDEL RESEARCH PRIZE 2017

In 2017 the *Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft* is to award for the third time the *International Handel Research Prize* to a young scholar who has completed a research project on the life or work of Handel and has presented the results in a formal research document. Research teams also may apply.

The International Handel Research prize is sponsored by the *Foundation of the Saalesparkasse*. It is valued at €2000 and entails the presentation of a paper to be read by the prize-winner at the scholarly conference to be held during the annual *Handel Festival in Halle* (an der Saale), June 6–7, 2017.

Applications may be made by graduates in musicology or related disciplines who have completed their Master's or Doctoral studies (or equivalent research) between 2014 and 2017. Historical-critical editions may also be submitted for the prize. Studies in English or German language are accepted.

Applications should be sent by **February 1, 2017** (postmarked) to:

Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft e.V.
Internationale Vereinigung
Geschäftsstelle
Grosse Nikolaistrasse 5
D-06108 Halle (Saale)

The application must include the scholarly work undertaken (in printed and in electronic form) and be accompanied by a brief curriculum vitae and an account of the applicant's career.

The selection of the prize-winner will be made by a panel from the *Foundation of the Saalesparkasse* and the *Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft*. The prize will be presented at the scholarly conference of the *Handel Festival in Halle*, June 2017.

For the PDF file please go to <http://haendel.de/Gesellschaft/haendel-forschungspreis>

⁶ Donald Burrows, "Handel's Performances of *Messiah*: The Evidence of the Conducting Score," *Music & Letters* 56/3-4 (1975): 326.

⁷ Todd Gilman, *The Theatre Career of Thomas Arne* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2013), 193–202.

⁸ John C. Greene and Gladys L. H. Clark, *The Dublin Stage, 1720–1745* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1993), 359.

If Dryden had never written any thing but his Ode [*Alexander's Feast*], his name would have been immortal...it is difficult to find new terms to express our admiration of the variety, richness and melody of its numbers; the force, beauty, and distinctness of its images; the succession of so many different passions and feelings; and the matchless perspicuity of its diction...
*No particle of it can be wished away, but the epigrammatic turn for the four concluding lines.*³ (emphasis mine)

Wharton's reference to the final lines of the poem betrays both the pleasure *Alexander's Feast* gave readers through its overall vivid narrative and variety of meter as well as the discomfort they may have felt by virtue of the ambiguity of tone Dryden used to equate both the religious and mythological characters of St. Cecilia and Alexander's musician, Timotheus. These lines read as follows (inserted comments mine):

Let old Timotheus yield the Prize / Or both [Timotheus and Cecilia] divide the Crown; / He rais'd a Mortal [Alexander] to the skies, / She drew an Angel down [by inventing the "sacred organ," a phrase used earlier in the poem by Dryden].

These lines disallow any clear moral lesson or exemplar to be extracted from the previous account of Alexander's excesses prompted by Timotheus's lyre. While Dryden suggests that Timotheus, Alexander's mythical musician might give up his place in history in favor of Cecilia's art, he also encourages his reader to consider that both musicians might well deserve consideration as winners of the (ambiguously adjudicated) musical crown.

Ruth Smith notes that contemporary critical views on tragedy in the theater considered the genre efficacious if it could be shown that "providence" was "firmly in control."⁴ *Alexander's Feast* appears as an exception in this respect with Dryden's painting the monarch as a pawn in the hands of an ambiguous "list'ning crowd," and also by his courtesan Thais and his musician Timotheus. In fact, the degree to which the work was acknowledged as a literary masterpiece in Dryden's time, and later became more popular after Handel's setting, suggest that its purpose as a moral instructive may have been a secondary product of its dissemination, if it functioned as one at all.

Given the (non-Christian) subject matter of *Alexander's Feast*, Handel may well have realized that the Alexander narrative would require some substantial musical shoring-up in order to establish it as an acceptable form of Lenten entertainment. In addition to the insertion of choral fugues, Handel seemed to have banked heavily on Dryden's authorship of the poem (subtitled "The Pow'r of Musik") in making the decision to set it to music. The risk paid off handsomely.⁵

Handel's use of fugue and fugal textures seems to have served him well in the years leading up to his setting of Dryden's poems, particularly in opera overtures and other instrumental music. His renown as a contrapuntalist was documented by

Pierre-Jacque Fourgeroux, a Frenchman writing from London to a patron in France in 1728. Fourgeroux specifically points out Handel's skill in inserting fugal-style instrumental overtures in his operas (he attended *Tolomeo*, *Siroe*, and *Admeto* that season).⁶ But Handel must have been equally aware of his colleague Johann Mattheson's argument, paraphrased by Paul Walker that "techniques [of fugue and canon] were scarcely suitable for vocal music because they caused the words to be obscured."⁷ Mattheson's theory was countermanded by the Dresden *Capellmeister* Johann Christoph Schmidt who held that the elements of oratory – i.e. rhetoric – provided a structural basis for a fugue.⁸ Walker summarizes Schmidt's conclusion: "Not only was the theme of a vocal fugue 'explained' and elaborated upon through its many varied statements, but the technique was [considered] an appropriate vehicle for text setting because it allowed the theme's text to be similarly 'explained' through its various repetitions."⁹ It appears that the concept of fugue as a medium for vocal exposition in the form of rhetoric was already an object of debate by the time Handel took matters into his own hands and began composing vocal fugues. Handel's choice of text upon which he composed fugues may shed light on what he felt was the main "theme" of a work, a point which needed to be highlighted or "explained" in a fugally-repetitive fashion.

Handel chose to insert vocal fugues in the final choruses of a number of biblical oratorios as well as at the end of Dryden's poems, often, in the case of the former, at phrases which elaborated upon the triumph of the Hebrew nation.¹⁰ In *Alexander's Feast*, a decidedly non-biblical narrative, Handel incorporates choral fugue in two instances. The final verse of Dryden's poem describes Cecilia who "enlarg'd the former narrow bounds and added length to solemn sounds." Handel then launches into a fugal setting of the following words which describe Cecilia's means: "with nature's mother-wit and arts unknown before." Handel composes a strict fugue on this text without deviating to a homophonic texture until the final bars. The fugue subject of this chorus involves an interval of a diminished fourth followed by a diminished fifth, thus accentuating with imperfect intervals the hitherto "arts unknown before." In the following chorus beginning "Let old Timotheus yield the prize," however, Handel applies a fugal subject to each of the four phrases of the text, more than hinting at mimesis and clearly delineating the ambiguous moral and instructive elements in Dryden's poem which vexed at least one critic (and which should have potentially rendered the poem unsuitable for English Lenten audiences according to contemporary scruples). The phrase which alludes to "Old Timotheus" opens with a bass voice in a low register intoning the character of perhaps a now elderly mythological figure, after which a tenor takes on the fugue subject of the phrase "or both divide the crown." Because the word "crown" implies reward for musical excellency, Handel sets that word to a sparkling two-measure melisma. The alto voice then enters with a (predictable) ascending scale on the phrase "he rais'd a mortal to the skies" while a soprano, just as predictably, sings "she drew an angel down" in descending quarter notes. Each of these four subjects is clearly heard throughout this final chorus, intersecting at infrequent intervals to create *stretto* effects and duets in parallel thirds or sixths.

3 Ibid., 24-5.

4 Ruth Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 57. See also chapter 2, "The purpose of art."

5 That *Alexander's Feast* received 25 performances during Handel's lifetime, many of them during Lent, attest to his cunning in labeling the work as an oratorio. See Joel Sachs, "The End of the Oratorios," in *Music and Culture: Essays in Honor of Paul Henry Lang*, eds. Edmond Strainchamps and Maria Rike Maniates (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 171. In the earliest 1936 advertisements for *Alexander's Feast*, Dryden's authorship of the work often overshadows Handel's as composer.

6 See Donald Burrows, *Handel*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 460-62. Appendix E: "A London Opera-goer in 1728," 461.

7 Paul Walker, "Fugue in the Music-Rhetorical Analogy and Rhetoric in the Development of Fugue," in *Bach Perspectives 4: The Music of J. S. Bach: Analysis and Interpretation*, ed. David Schulenberg (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 169.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 170.

10 See, for example, the final chorus of *Esther* (1718), "Ye sons of Jacob sing a cheerful strain"; *Saul* (1738), "Retrieve the Hebrew name"; and *Jephtha* (1751), "So are they blessed who fear the Lord."

Handel's use of fugue in other oratorios shows that, in general, the composer reserved fugal choruses for finales in which morality and the leadership of a worthy leader triumphed. In neither the *Ode for St. Cecilia* nor *Alexander's Feast* is there a lead character to champion or who has been glorified throughout the work – except, ostensibly, that of music. Perhaps Handel felt that the cause of music, a subject at the crux of both poems, warranted a return to an archaic form of composition. The final moments in *Alexander's Feast* in which the composer demonstrated his command of the (rhetorical) fugue served to stamp upon it elements of sobriety and religiosity, two of the highest virtues that England, with its recent Puritan history, could embrace. At the moment in *Alexander's Feast* when the fugues commenced, audience members who had relished the tawdry tale of Alexander might have been compelled to sit up straighter and perhaps even shift uneasily, realizing the potential religious connotations imbued in a fugue, particularly as performed within a theater setting.¹¹

Handel's astute sense of the English taste in music seen through the composition of his many oratorio choruses allowed him a certain degree of latitude in choosing the topics of his oratorios. Whatever the narrative, be it Alexander the Great or King Saul, a chorus would most often have the final say in the form of a fugal climax. Fugal choruses, predominant in the final moments of Handel's settings of Dryden's two odes, ultimately assisted in positioning these quasi-religious works among Handel's overtly-sacred English masterpieces.

— **Helen Farson** (Ventura, CA)

¹¹ For a clearer sense of the context and content of both St. Cecilia day odes by Dryden, see James Anderson Winn, *John Dryden and His World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

THE J. MERRILL KNAPP RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP ANNOUNCEMENT

The J. Merrill Knapp Research Fellowship—named for one of the founders of the American Handel Society—supports scholarly projects related to Handel and his world. The winner of the Knapp Fellowship for 2016 is **Carlo Lanfossi** (Ph.D. student, University of Pennsylvania), for travel to view *in situ* the sources of numerous *pasticci* that involved Handel in some way. These *pasticci* are the subject of his dissertation, tentatively titled “Handel as Arranger and Producer: Listening to Pasticci in Eighteenth-Century London.”

Because Mr. Lanfossi's proposal did not exhaust the available funding this year, the Board of Directors decided to award partial support to a runner-up for the fellowship, **Matthew Gardner** (Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main, OPERA program). Prof. Gardner plans to travel to view *in situ* the many and complex sources of the oratorio *Deborah* as he prepares the critical edition for the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe. The Board congratulates both recipients, who emerged from an uncommonly strong pool of applicants. As chair of the Knapp Fellowship Committee, I would especially like to thank my colleagues on the committee, Nathan Link (Centre College) and Reginald Sanders (Kenyon College), for their diligent and thoughtful work. The Knapp Fellowship will next be awarded in spring 2018, with a call for applications appearing in due course.

— **Roger Freitas** (Eastman School of Music)

HANDEL'S SAUL AT BOSTON'S SYMPHONY HALL



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Under the direction of the internationally-acclaimed conductor Harry Christophers, the Boston-based Handel & Haydn Society Chorus and Period Instrument Orchestra, together with a stellar cast of soloists, gave a remarkable performance of Handel's oratorio *Saul* at Boston's Symphony Hall on Friday, April 29, 2016 (with a repeat performance on Sunday, May 1). Being brought to stage just less than a year after Glyndebourne's wildly extravagant, staged production of the oratorio (Summer 2015) that some readers might remember, the H&H performance proved the effectiveness of the work to bring the story to life through words and music alone (as Handel intended), without costumes, sets, or choreography. The performance impressively filled the audience's mind with vivid imaginations of dramatic scenes replete with love, hate, anger, envy, honor, mourning, and more.

The countertenor Iestyn Davies who played the role of David at Glyndebourne notably took up the same character at the H&H performance. His warmly radiant and pure vocal tone was ideal as young David in both productions, but he clearly demonstrated at Symphony Hall that he did not need the aid of props to convincingly portray his character. He, along with other cast of soloists, rightly deserved Christophers's high recognition as “text-led singers who inflect every word, every nuance, and every mood” (program book). These included: bass-baritone Jonathan Best as Saul, soprano Joëlle Harvey as Michal, tenor Robert Murray as Jonathan, and soprano Elizabeth Atherton as Merab, all of whom were very well-suited to their roles.

Best's commanding bass voice firmly upheld the kingly authority of Saul—even as he burst into jealous rage over David, deceitfully devised murderous plans, shamefully admitted to his own faults, and illegally sought the counsel of the witch. Harvey was stunning as Michal. Her clear and glowing soprano voice perfectly reflected her character's innocence and beauty. The blending of her voice with Davies's in their duet “O fairest of ten thousand fair” was simply glorious. Atherton and Murray, likewise, gave compelling performances as haughty—yet eventually softening—Merab and loyal Jonathan, respectively.

Christophers's conviction that “words are of the essence and ... [his singers and instrumentalists] need to be constantly theatrical in [their] approach to Handel's oratorios” (program book) was evident in the orchestra and the chorus. Choral movements and instrumental sinfonias were full of dramatic

impact. Just to highlight a few: the chorus “Envy, eldest born of hell” (Act 2) was particularly horrifying in its depiction of Envy; the chorus “Oh, fatal consequence” at the end of Act 2 so forcefully projected Saul’s destruction that the audience was left with no doubt as to its certainty; and the “Dead March” in Act 3 was beautifully solemn and imbued with dignity befitting of a royal funeral.

If there were any regrettable moments, the concert started off with a shaky performance of the organist (Ian Watson) in the organ concerto movement of the overture. This was unfortunate given the music’s unique reference to Handel’s own performance on the instrument. Moreover, the first soprano aria, “An infant raised by thy command,” which should have been sung by an unnamed Israelite woman, was illogically assigned to Merab. It was inconsistent with her character, given her disdain for David and his humble origin in the next scene, to first appear endorsing him in an aria that celebrates his empowerment by God. The most significant alteration was the omission of Act 2, scene 2 (likely following Winton Dean’s tenuous suggestion), which is the only full scene where Jonathan and David interact directly. This diminished the opportunity for the audience to appreciate the strength of their friendship. The music of the High Priest was also left out (as it is commonly done following Chrysander’s removal of the role and placement of the music in the Appendix) and smaller parts of Abiathar and Abner were assigned to other characters. While there was, in fact, a “High Priest” in the performance, he did not sing any of the music written for the character but instead sang two movements in Act 3, “Oh, let it not in Gath be heard” and “Ye men of Judah,” originally assigned to an unidentified tenor and Abiathar (also a priest), respectively. The reassignment worked fine but the disconcerting part was seeing Stefan Reed (tenor) in the role of the noble High Priest after having associated him with the diabolic Witch of Endor a couple of scenes earlier.

The performance uniquely featured a Welch triple harp played by Frances Kelly. Her main solo movement following David’s aria, “O Lord, whose mercies numberless,” was ethereally beautiful, but she oddly remained on stage throughout all three acts, doubling the harpsichord and the archlute, albeit to no audible effect as the instrument was too soft and delicate to pierce through the orchestra. There was also a special appearance by the Young Women’s Chamber Choir, an ensemble of high school girls (part of the Vocal Arts Program in the H&H’s Education Program). Their inclusion added an appropriate and creative touch to the scene in Act 1 where they marched down the isles as “the daughters of [Israel],” celebrating Saul and David’s victory, twirling streamers, and singing “Welcome, welcome, mighty king.”

The H&H concluded their 201st season with the group’s premiere of this oratorio. The performance heightened the aural discernment of the audience as they were lead to visualize the unfolding of the story on their own without the imposed view of a stage director. The musicians convincingly drew the listeners into the troubled mind of Saul as well as into the distressed lives of all other characters affected by his tragic decline. The strong collaboration between the soloists and the H&H chorus and orchestra arguably brought one of the best performances of *Saul* to Boston.

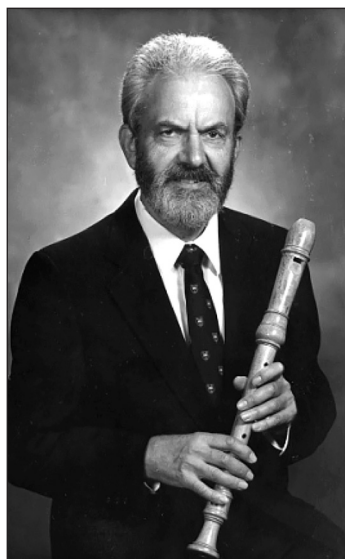
— Minji Kim (Andover, MA)

FROM THE PRESIDENT’S DESK

I am happy to announce that the next Conference sponsored by The American Handel Society will take place from April 6-9, 2017 at Princeton University. Wendy Heller has agreed to serve as host, and the Society once again owes her a great debt of gratitude. There is a Call for Papers elsewhere in this issue of the *Newsletter* and other details will be forthcoming.

The Secretary/Treasurer has asked me to remind everyone that membership in the AHS is by calendar year, and to urge any members who have not paid for 2016 to do so now. Payment can be made via PayPal on the AHS Website or by check sent to the Secretary/Treasurer. There is always the opportunity to give additional money to support specific projects as well as the ongoing activity of the Society.

Members of the Society will be saddened to hear of the passing of Dale Higbee this past December. Dale was a loyal and generous member of the Society who regularly attended AHS Conferences. A flute and recorder player of note, he was the Founder and Director of Carolina Baroque from 1988-2011, following a distinguished career as a clinical psychologist. During those 23 seasons the ensemble presented innumerable concerts and produced some 33 recordings. Dale also left a legacy of scholarly publications, and his collection of 18th-century recorders and 18th- and 19th-century flutes now resides at the National Music Museum in Vermillion, South Dakota.



Dale Higbee (1925-2015)

— Graydon Beeks

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)

MEMBERS' NEWS

Ellen Harris (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) was elected a member of *The American Philosophical Society*. The *American Philosophical Society*, the oldest learned society in the United States, was founded in 1743 by Benjamin Franklin for the purpose of "promoting useful knowledge." The current membership of the APS consists of 832 resident members and 162 international members. Current and past members are listed in www.amphilsoc.org.

Carlo Lafonssi (Ph.D. student, University of Pennsylvania) received the *Handel Institute Research Award 2016* for his work on his doctoral dissertation.

Robert Ketterer (University of Iowa) was a *Scholar in Residence* at the Newberry Library for the academic year 2015-2016 and received a *Delmas Foundation Grant* for research in Venice in May of this year.

Papers presented by the members of the AHS at the *Handel Festival in Halle* on May 30, 2016 included:

Graydon Beeks (Pomona College), "Restoring intellectual day: The Performance Tradition of *L'Allegro ed il Penseroso* after Handel's Death."

Donald Burrows (Open University), "Pomegranates and Oranges: James Harris's Philosophy and Handel's music."

John H. Roberts (University of California, Berkeley), "From Despair to Disdain: Handel's Recomposition of the Cantata 'Tu fedel? Tu costante?'"

Mark Risinger (New York, NY) sang the role of Abner in *Athalia* with the Harvard University Choir and the Harvard Baroque Chamber Orchestra, as part of their annual Arts First Festival in May 2015. This performance is available on YouTube. In July 2015, he returned to Boston and sang the role of Haman in *Esther* with the Handel & Haydn Society, as part of their 200th Anniversary celebration.

Joseph Darby (Keene State College) presented a paper entitled "Publishing Music by Subscription in 18th-Century Britain: an Exercise in Digital and non-Digital Musicology" at the 2015 *Joint Congress of the International Musicological Society and the International Association of Music Libraries, Archives, and Documentation Centres* at

The Juilliard School. He notes that Handel used the subscription method more than any other composer in 18th-century Britain (with 16 music subscriptions during his lifetime) and invites anyone interested in the topic to examine his research data and companion catalog at <http://www.keene.edu/site/directories/profile/facstaff/109/>.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Evans, Richard. "£21,000 turned into £2m: How to invest like George Frideric Handel." *The Telegraph* (May 23, 2016). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/special-reports/21000-turned-into-2m-how-to-invest-like-george-frideric-handel/> *Note: This is based on two articles by Ellen T. Harris on Handel and the Bank of England in *Music and Letters* (2004 and 2010).

Freitas, Roger. *Vita di un castrato: Atto Melani tra politica, mecenatismo, e musica*. Trans. Anna Li Vigni. Studi culturali, Supplemento no. 2. Pisa: ETS, 2015. An Italian translation of *Portrait of a Castrato: Politics, Patronage, and Music in the Life of Atto Melani*. New Perspectives in Music History and Criticism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009; paperback edition, 2014.

Harris, Ellen T. "Editorial." *Eighteenth-Century Music* 13/1 (2016): 5-9.

Haynes, Bruce and Geoffrey Burgess. *The Pathetick Musician: Moving an Audience in the Age of Eloquence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Hunter, David. "Worlds apart? – David Hunter links the slave trade, Handel and opera in 18th century London." *Opera* 66/12 (December 2015): 1546-50.

Kimbell, David. *Handel on the Stage*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Link, Nathan. "Review: *The Rival Sirens: Performance and Identity on Handel's Operatic Stage*, by Suzanne Aspden." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 69/1 (2016): 241-47.



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