

NEWSLETTER of The American Handel Society

Volume XXXIII, Number 1

Spring 2018

LONDON HANDEL FESTIVAL 2018 AND CAMBRIDGE HANDEL OPERA REVIVED

Ellen T. Harris

Spring may have been slow to arrive this year in much of the Northern Hemisphere, but the London Handel Festival (LHF) sprang to life right on schedule (March 17–April 16). Concurrently, the Cambridge Handel Opera (CHO) had a resurrection. During my little more than a week in London, I was able to take in LHF performances of Handel's *Amadigi* and *Esther* (as well as the LHF annual performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in St. George's Hanover Square as part of a Good Friday Vespers service) and, in Cambridge, the final dress rehearsal of *Rodelinda* by the revived CHO. Here I will report on the three large works by Handel.

Under the aegis of Festival Director Samir Savant the 2018 Festival chose "Handel in London" as its theme with the specific purpose of "finding" Handel all around the London he would have known. For example, two performances of the Foundling

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Graydon Beeks

As spring finally arrives and much of the country attempts to thaw out after a very hard winter, it is time to plan for Handelian activities in the coming year. The annual festivals in Göttingen and Halle lead off the summer, followed over Thanksgiving weekend by the triennial conference hosted by The London Institute, focusing this year on Handel's music for his patrons. This will be followed next February by the biennial AHS Conference to be held at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. Please see the announcement of the conference elsewhere in this issue of the Newsletter, as well as the Call for Papers.

Also in this issue of the Newsletter you will find an announcement of the recipient of the 2018 J. Merrill Knapp Fellowship. The ability of the AHS to support research by means of this Fellowship is dependent on the generosity of the members of the Society, and this will serve as a reminder to those of you who have not yet paid your membership dues for 2018. Please remember that there are always opportunities for additional giving, either by way of elevated membership categories or through donations either earmarked for specific projects or left unspecified to be used for the ongoing expenses of the Society.

The Secretary/Treasurer has asked me to stress that she needs to receive payments in dollars for membership in our affiliated societies by June 1, 2018 in order to make it possible to settle accounts efficiently. Please be aware of the new arrangement by which AHS members who are members of the G.F. Händel Gesellschaft, may also become members of the Göttingen and/or Karlsruhe Handel Societies by paying membership fees reduced by 50% either to the other societies directly or to the AHS in dollars. These new possibilities of dual and triple memberships are contained on the Membership Form as well as on the new AHS Website.

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Anthem took place at the Foundling Museum with a lecture in between by Katherine Hogg on Handel's philanthropy; three of the Chandos Anthems were performed at St. Lawrence, Little Stanmore; and a talk by Charles Bonney on Handel's health was given at the Royal Society of Medicine with, appropriately enough, a drinks reception following. I was honored to be asked to speak at the Bank of England on Handel's investments, which gave me a chance to present some new material I'm now writing up: a newly-discovered bank account for Handel, although not connected to the inter-related accounts already known, has led me to a revised interpretation of the origin and purpose of those accounts. I also had the opportunity to lead a walking tour in "Handel's Mayfair," taking in the site of Lord Shaftesbury's house on Grosvenor Square, and the houses of Mary Delany, Bernard Granville, Joseph Goupy, Elizabeth Palmer, and Anne Donnellan, as well as important historical buildings along the way, an event unexpectedly blessed with sunshine in the midst of a very rainy day.

The first thing to say about the Handel performances I heard is how lucky London is to have such a deep pool of fine young singers trained or still studying at its conservatories. And the London Handel Festival deserves kudos for the success of its Handel Singing Competition, begun in 2002. All three performances benefited from the participation of previous prize winners, including the first place winners from 2008 (Erica Eloff in the title role of *Esther* and as Melissa in *Amadigi*), 2015 (Josep-Ramon Olivé as Haman in *Esther*), and 2016 (William Wallace as Ahasverus in *Esther* and Grimoaldo in *Rodelinda*), as well as from 2015 the second place winner (Maria Ostroukhova as Dardano in *Amadigi*) and finalist (Alice Privett in the title role of *Rodelinda*). All of the singers had fine voices, but I was concerned that some were pushing too hard (especially in the upper registers) and overusing octave displacement ornamentation and cadences. I particularly dislike aria cadences taken up an octave for a bravura close, and this was much too frequent (although I'm sad to report that the British audiences seemed to love it).

Esther, under the auspices of the LHF, was performed in Wigmore Hall (Thursday, March 22) by twelve singers, eight taking the solo roles (some doubling) with the addition of a four-voiced "chorus" (SATB), the entire group of twelve performing the choruses as the solo voices would have done when the work was first performed (although Wallace as Ahasverus seems to have been given a pass, perhaps

because he was about to take on Grimoaldo in Cambridge). Adrian Butterfield, concertmaster, led the London Handel Orchestra. In a performance that overall tended toward a monochromatic, loud dynamic, I was particularly disappointed that Eloff, who has a lovely voice, would choose, or be directed, to sing "Flatt'ring tongue, no more I hear thee!" as a violent rage aria that in places became shrill. I can hear Esther as morally righteous, but not as ruthlessly vengeful. Haman, of course, is ruthless while in power, and it is this character who instigates the action with the first aria, "Pluck root and branch," condemning the Jews to extinction, and who provides the moral in the final aria, "How art thou fall'n," before the celebratory conclusion. The role is essential to the success of the performance, and it was sung admirably here by Olivé. Stephen Mills, tenor (Mordecai/First Israelite) and Timothy Morgan, countertenor (Priest of the Israelites) impressed me with their musical phrasing and vocal finesse. Needless to say, I was unable to get "Tune your



Soprano, Erica Eloff

harps” out of my head for days afterward. One serious glitch that could have been prevented was a severe lack of programs, which meant that many did not have the performers’ names, a synopsis or libretto, or the fine program note by Ruth Smith. A pity.

Amadigi was performed (Saturday, March 24) at St. George’s, Hanover Square with the Orchestra of Opera Settecento led by Leo Duarte. Like *Esther*, it was a concert performance with individual (and uncoordinated) efforts at dramatic presentation. The soloists’ voices were extremely well suited to their characters with clear vocal distinctions. Michal Czerniawski’s high countertenor easily managed the title role written for Nicolini both in long lines and rapid runs. Ilona Revolskaya’s lyric soprano matched the part of the faithful Oriana, while Eloff’s bigger sound encompassed the wide-ranging emotions of Melissa. Ostroukhova’s rich, full mezzo-soprano was perfect for Dardano, and I was only sorry that Duarte started “Pena tiranna” with an almost triumphant affect. The singers were placed in front of the orchestra, except that after Dardano’s death, his character reappeared very effectively behind the orchestra for his ghostly recitative. The company used this method also to deal with the problem of the fifth character, Orgando, who only appears at the very end of the opera. Here, following Melissa’s suicide, Eloff appeared behind the orchestra to sing the part of Orgando, having made a

slight change in her appearance. But it was perfectly possible to imagine that she, like Dardano, was now being forced to provide good news from beyond the grave. I thought it was a particularly effective solution.

Signaling the rebirth of the Cambridge Handel Opera (CHO) after a hiatus of five years, *Rodelinda* was fully staged in the Great Hall at The Leys, Cambridge. Formerly under the direction of Andrew Jones, the new CHO has been established under Julian Perkins as Artistic Director. In a piece of what could be called “luxury casting,” Peter Holman, musicologist and conductor (University of Leeds) and also Chairman of CHO, played second harpsichord. The stage direction (Max Hoehn) and costumes (Simon Bejer) took their cue, or so it appeared to the small group attending the dress rehearsal, from Jacobean tragedy, which seemed just about right for a story that derives from Corneille. The use of a unit set limited the scenic depiction, but there were at least some strokes of genius (as I only attended a rehearsal, I cannot fully judge the final product). For example, in the first Act, when the scene changes from the royal apartments of Rodelinda to a grove of cypresses in which one sees the sepulcher of Bertarido, the back curtain split open to show the monument (in this case, a full-length statue on a plinth) in bright light with the stage front in relative shadow. The effect was an instant transformation out of the palace.

The singing was also fine. Performed in an English translation by Andrew Jones with some adaptations, the diction was excellent. (I was told there



Alice Privett (*Rodelinda*) and William Wallace (*Grimoaldo*).
Photography by Jean-Luc Benazet.



From left to right: Nicholas Morris (*Garibaldo*), William Towers (*Bertarido*),
Alice Privett (*Rodelinda*), and William Wallace (*Grimoaldo*).
Photography by Jean-Luc Benazet.

CALL FOR PAPERS: AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY CONFERENCE 2019

The Biennial Conference of the American Handel Society will take place at **Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University** in Bloomington, Indiana on **February 7–10, 2019**. The conference will include performances of Handel's *Giulio Cesare* and *Parnasso in festa*. 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, 2018** to the Program Chair, Norbert Dubowy at norbert.dubowy@gmail.com

2018 J. MERRILL KNAPP RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT

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 2018 is **Alison C. DeSimone**, assistant professor of musicology, Conservatory of Music and Dance, University of Missouri–Kansas City. The fellowship will support a research trip to the United Kingdom for work on her monograph-in-progress, “The Power of Pastiche: Musical Miscellany and the Creation of Cultural Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century England.” She plans to work at the British Library, National Archives of the United Kingdom, the Foundling Museum, the Fitzwilliam Museum, and the Bodleian Library.

The Board congratulates Professor DeSimone, 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, Ellen Harris (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, emerita) and Robert Holzer (Yale School of Music), for their diligent and thoughtful work. The Knapp Fellowship will next be awarded in Spring 2020, with a call for applications appearing in due course.

— Roger Freitas (Eastman School of Music)

would be supertitles, but they seemed unnecessary to me.) Wallace, in the role of Grimoaldo, came fully into his own. Although Ahasverus (in *Esther*) and Grimoaldo are similar roles, portraying a king badly served by an evil, self-serving minister, only in the longer *Rodelinda* does the character get the chance to reflect upon his actions. In fact, the mirrors on the stage seemed to point specifically to the need for reflection and self-awareness among all the characters. Nicholas Morris (bass) played the evil minister Garibaldo with single-minded precision: at one point he physically moved Grimoaldo across the stage in an attempt to make him behave in cruel fashion. I've probably seen more theatrical productions of *Rodelinda* than any Handel opera, but I've never seen the character of Eduige (sung by Ida Ränzlöv) so fully inhabit her early role as one of the co-conspirators with Grimoaldo in the downfall of her brother Bertarido and then, regretting her earlier actions, join with Rodelinda to effect his restitution. Rodelinda (Privett) was regal and fearless in her dealings with Grimoaldo and Garibaldo, while Bertarido (played by countertenor William Towers) made poor decisions, jumped to false conclusions, and needed to be guided in his actions by his friend Unulfo.

I was very sorry that the decision was taken to have a single interval in the middle of Act II (as happened also in *Amadigi*). It seems that performances today are forced to fit into a pre-ordained length, so that a choice must be made on how to use a precious twenty minutes of that time: for a second interval or more music. As a result, the first part of *Rodelinda* ended with the only aria allowed Tom Scott-Cowell in the reduced role of Unulfo: “Fra tempeste” (or “These dark storm-clouds” in English translation). The musical highlight of my entire week, however, was the *mesa di voce* with which Towers, as Bertarido, began his first aria, “Dov'è sei” (“Oh, where are you”). Beginning pianissimo, Towers made a slow crescendo, never losing the purity of the note, and then, miraculously, an equally long decrescendo back to the original volume, and still without a break, continued the full phrase to the end. I was not expecting this, and time seemed to stand still.

I wish I could have heard one of the actual performances, but from what I did experience at the dress rehearsal, I can only say, “Welcome back, CHO!” As with LHF's *Esther*, Ruth Smith provided a wonderfully informative program note and synopsis. I only hope this time that there were enough copies for all.

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS: INTERNATIONAL HANDEL RESEARCH PRIZE 2019

In 2019 the Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft is to award for the fourth time an International Handel Research Prize to a young scholar who has completed a research project on the life or work of George Frideric 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 (3–5 June 2019).

Applications may be made by graduates in musicology or related disciplines who have completed their Master's or Doctoral studies (or equivalent research) between 2016 and 2018. Historical-critical editions may also be submitted for the prize. Studies in English or German are accepted.

Applications for the International Handel Research Prize should be sent by **November 30, 2018** (postmarked) to the:

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. Reports can be enclosed.

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 Halle in June 2019, during the scholarly conference of the Halle Handel Festival.

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

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NEW DISSERTATION

Miller, Lisabeth Kettledon. *A Lyric Soprano in Handel's London: A Vocal Portrait of Francesca Cuzzoni* (DMA Dissertation: University of Connecticut, 2017).

ABSTRACT

Francesca Cuzzoni (1696–1778) was part of Handel's brilliant cadre of Italian opera singers at the Royal Academy of Music in London between 1723 and 1728. Already one of the most famous singers in Europe, her arrival in London was highly anticipated, and the press followed her performances, personal life, and social activities closely. She was renowned for her superior portrayal of pathos, her rendering of laments and cantabile arias, and for the sheer beauty of her voice.

Handel wrote eleven opera roles for Cuzzoni during her tenure at the Royal Academy, most notably Cleopatra in *Giulio Cesare* and the title role in *Rodelinda*. This dissertation offers a vocal profile of the singer through a statistical analysis of the aria types, keys, tessituras, phrase constructions, meters, and tempi of the seventy-three arias. This analysis is combined with close readings of the descriptions of her singing by contemporaneous writers, and a comparison of Cuzzoni's roles with canonical roles from subsequent operatic repertoire for the soprano voice. Lastly, this study serves to organize known information and establish a chronology of the singer's life, travels, significant performances, and other events.

HANDEL CONFERENCES AND FESTIVALS

Göttingen International Handel Festival
May 10–21, 2018

For more information, go to:
www.haendel-festspiele.de/en

Halle Handel Festival

May 25–June 10, 2018

For more information, go to:
www.haendelfestspiele-halle.de

The International Scholarly Conference (Halle)

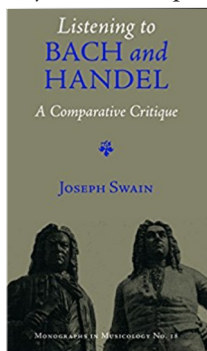
"Migration Movements in Music. Music and Musicians from Foreign Lands 1650–1750"
May 28–29, 2018 at Händel-Haus,
Große Nikolaistraße 5 D-06108 Halle (Saale)

The Handel Institute Conference (London)

"Handel and His Music for Patrons"
November 24–25, 2018 at The Foundling Museum,
40 Brunswick Square, London, WC1N 1AZ

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- Booth, Colin. "Handel's 'Harmonious Blacksmith': Some observations concerning its first note." *The Consort* 73 (2017): 49–59.
- Chapman, Brian. "Carl Linnaeus, Philip Miller and the librettist of Handel's *Solomon*." *Musical Times* 158/1941 (2017): 71–74.
- Harris, Ellen T., ed. *The Librettos of Handel's Operas: a collection of seventy-one librettos documenting Handel's operatic career*, 12 vols. (New York: Garland, 1989-). *OPEN ACCESS now available at *Hathi Trust* <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100886957>
- Jerold, Beverly. "Reichardt's Review of Handel Concerts in London," *Handel News*, The Newsletter of the Friends of the London Handel Festival 71 (Jan 2018): 14–19.
- . "Performance conditions, standards and Bach's chorus," *The Musical Times* 158/1941 (2017): 55–70.
- Marx, Hans Joachim. "On the authenticity of Christoph Platzer's Handel portrait (c.1710)." *Early Music* 45/3 (2017): 459–65.
- McGeary, Thomas. "Handel, not by Hogarth." *Early Music* 45/3 (2017): 467–69.
- Swain, Joseph P. *Listening to Bach and Handel: A Comparative Critique* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2018).



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)

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THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY

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† 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).

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Online payment options are available at www.americanhandelsociety.org/join

Payments in dollars for GFH or HI memberships must be received before June 1.

The American Handel Society

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