

NEWSLETTER of The American Handel Society

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Spring 2019

2019 AMERICAN HANDEL FESTIVAL

Nathan Link, Centre College



On February 7–10, 2019, the American Handel Society held its biennial American Handel Festival at Indiana University Bloomington. The conference was exceptionally well-run, in large part thanks to the efforts of Ayana Smith, local events coordinator, with the support of Dana T. Marsh and the Jacobs School of Music Historical Performance Institute, IU's Department of Musicology, and the AHS program committee: Norbert Dubowy (chair), John Roberts, and Sarah Van der Laan (Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at IU).

After a tour of the Musical Arts Center and Opera Theater, the conference opened Thursday night with the Howard Serwer Memorial Lecture, presented by Ellen Rosand (Yale University). Her paper, "Handel's 'Music,'" explored the fascinating topic of the rare moments in Handel's operas and oratorios in which the characters within the story are actually singing—that is, when the singing heard by the performers and audience is perceived as literal song by the characters within the story, as opposed to the speech, thought, or emotion that operatic and oratorio arias usually represent. Rosand pointed to several markers by which actual song within operas and oratorios are demarcated as such, and discussed the profound impact the presence of real music within a story can have upon the plot.

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HANDEL'S *SEMELE*: THE ENGLISH CONCERT AT CARNEGIE HALL, APRIL 14, 2019

Mark Risinger, New York, NY



Front left to right: Elizabeth DeShong (Ino), Soloman Howard (Cadmus), Brenda Rae (Semele), and Christopher Lowrey (Athamas) singing the quartet "Why dost thou thus untimely grieve" in Part I with Harry Bicket directing The English Concert. Back: The Clarion Choir. Photography by Steve J. Sherman.

The opportunity to hear excellent performances of Handel's music by The English Concert has become a regular feature of the Carnegie Hall season. In recent years, *Rinaldo*, *Ariodante*, and *Radamisto* have figured among the concert offerings, almost always with outstanding casts of singers and players. This spring's choice was *Semele*, and it was perhaps the most successful of the series thus far. Harry Bicket assembled a marvelous cast of singers, leading The

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Friday's first paper session, "The Eighteenth-Century Narrative," chaired by Massimo Scalabrini (Indiana University), opened with my paper on the portrayal of human subjectivity in Handel's *Giulio Cesare*. In it, I examined the competing claims that Handel's operas either have fully "realistic," "living, breathing" human characters or that they are "not populated by characters at all," using Descartes's and Locke's models of human subjectivity to examine the opera's characters, and focusing especially on Cleopatra and Sesto. The following paper, by Matthew Gardner (University of Tübingen, Germany) explored the concept of female virtue in Handel's oratorios composed between 1732 and 1735, each of which featured women as their title characters. Gardner noted the popularity in eighteenth-century London of examining the difference between virtue and pleasure, and established connections between this discourse and the choices of these figures as subjects for Handel's oratorios. Alison C. DeSimone (University of Missouri-Kansas City) presented work on the topic of Handel's place in Britain's culture of musical miscellany, noting the use of his music in variety concerts throughout the eighteenth century, as well as appearances of his arias (sometimes relatively unchanged; sometimes significantly altered) in songbook miscellanies and broadside publications. To close the session, a joint-authored paper by Matthew Boyle (University of Alabama), Nathaniel Mitchell (Princeton University), and Paul Sherrill (University of Utah), examined the journey of a single aria, Pergolesi's "Se cerca, se dice." In this very impressively well-researched paper, the authors showed how this piece reappeared throughout the eighteenth century, explaining how the formal changes in the aria by the end of the century illustrated the move toward nineteenth-century dramatic and musical structures.



Paper Session II on Friday, February 8
in the Oak Room, Indiana Memorial Union.

After a break for lunch, John Roberts (University of California, Berkeley) chaired the conference's second session, "Composition and Revision." David R. Hurley (Pittsburg State University) gave the first paper, a look into

what he terms Handel's "transformative compositional practices." In it, he examined two arias: "Ombre, piante" from *Rodelinda* and "Lament not thus," which was intended for inclusion in *Belshazzar*. Hurley traced the complex compositional history of these arias, including a self-borrowing in the latter case, and showed the dramatic ramifications of the process of compositional "progressive variation" identified in each. Natassa Varka (King's College, University of Cambridge) then explored the compositional history of *Belshazzar*. Giving special attention to the omission of the movement consisting of the soli and chorus "Tell it out" in the surviving set of part-book copies owned by the librettist Charles Jennens, Varka examined the early sources of *Belshazzar* and other oratorios in Jennens' collection in determining that the part-books in fact contain the librettist's own version of the work. Kenneth Nott (University of Hartford) explored post-1752 additions to Handel's oratorios, addressing the question of whether these "new songs" were indeed Handel's own. Taking "Happy Beauty" as a case study, Nott questioned Anthony Hicks's assertion that the late additions were musically "inferior" and were not by Handel but instead largely the work of John Christopher Smith the Younger. Nott considered the role of Handel's blindness in the context of his compositional process and suggested that he had significant involvement in the composition of these late arias. Mark P. Risinger (New York, NY) closed the session with a paper on the revival of *Semele* in 1762, comparing the libretto of this revival with the original version. Here, Risinger detailed the layer of revisions beyond the initial December 1744 revival, which included some alterations by Handel and Smith Jr. in preparation for the 1759 revival of *Susanna* along with others by Smith Jr. for the 1762 performance of *Semele*.

The Friday-night performance of *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (1724), presented by the Jacobs School of Music Opera Theater, was conducted by Gary Thor Wedow and stage-directed by Robin Guarino. This entertaining production, featuring IU's Chamber Orchestra, placed the opera in the eighteenth century during Napoleon's French campaign in Egypt, and was in general well-received by the audience. It featured a significant number of omissions, cutting several well-liked and arguably important arias (Cleopatra's "Venere, bella," for example, was a noteworthy omission), which, while understandable given the opera's length (some four hours without cuts), inevitably caused some disappointment among certain opera scholars and fans of the work.

The academic portion of the festival resumed Saturday morning with the conference's third session, entitled "Performers, Reception, Performance Practice," chaired by Norbert Dubowy (Mozarteum, Salzburg). Donald Burrows (The Open University) opened the session with a fascinating paper exploring the question of the chorus singers in Handel's London oratorio performances, addressing our gaps in the knowledge regarding the



Performance of *Giulio Cesare* on Friday, February 8
at the Musical Arts Center.

numbers, constitution, and stage arrangements of Handel's chorus singers for these works. Luke Howard (Brigham Young University) followed with a paper on Ebenezer Prout's 1902 edition of *Messiah*, which has been widely disparaged to the point of becoming a symbol for the overblown, bombastic productions of the work in the nineteenth century. Howard convincingly argued in favor of a reassessment of Prout's contribution, showing that Prout's goal was in fact to reign in some of the historically inappropriate orchestrational grandiosity which he has been so often accused of embodying and even amplifying. Teresa M. Neff (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) followed with a paper examining the Boston Handel & Haydn Society's early-nineteenth-century performance practices in the "Hallelujah" Chorus from *Messiah*. She reconstructed (in score and audio) the Society's adaptation of the chorus that reflected the New England church practice of placing the main melody in the tenor (thereby switching the soprano and tenor parts). A paper by Stephen Nissenbaum (University of Massachusetts at Amherst) closed the session by pressing forward with the theme of Handel in Boston, investigating the identities of the leaders of the Handel & Haydn Society from 1817–1819. In so doing, he focused on the professions, backgrounds, and histories of the thirteen men (four officers and nine trustees, none of whom belonged to Boston's patrician elite) behind the decision to program *Messiah* on its celebrated 1818 Christmas Day performance.

The last full session of the conference, "Handel in History, Histories of Handel," was chaired by Robert Ketterer (The University of Iowa) on Saturday afternoon. This session opened with a paper by Luca Della Libera (Conservatorio di musica Frosinone, Italy) examining the dispatches of the Nunziatura Apostolica of Florence from 1705 to 1707, and offering new insights into Handel's time in Florence and into Florentine musical life generally during those years. Thomas McGeary (University of Illinois) followed with a paper on the impact of the War of the Spanish Succession upon Handel's early career. In this paper, McGeary explored the question of Handel's assumed

allegiances during this time and explored the interplay between these allegiances and the composer's choices of patrons, which would no doubt have affected, among other things, the texts he chose to set. Ellen T. Harris (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) then examined the implications of the discovery of an account held by Handel at the Bank of England in 1721. Transactions detailed in this account, Harris showed, hold important information regarding a number of aspects of Handel's biography, including his financial relationships with the Royal African Company and the significance of his South Sea Annuities Account, thereby potentially informing our understanding of Handel's financial arrangements with both the Royal Academy of Music and the "Second Academy." Closing the session, Sandra Dolby (Indiana University) offered a reading of John Mainwaring's *Memoirs of the Life of the late George Frederic Handel* as a forerunner of folkloric biographical traditions, suggesting that viewing Mainwaring's anecdotes more as folklore than as historical fact can lead to a greater appreciation of their function among Handel's social circle.

Jeffrey Thomas led the Jacobs School's Baroque Orchestra and Voices of Cententus Saturday evening in a thoroughly delightful performance of Handel's three-part serenata *Parnasso in Festa* (1734) at the Auer Hall, in what was arguably the festival's musical high point. This work, offering another viewpoint on Mount Parnassus and its muses (Cleopatra's "V'adoro, pupille" from *Giulio Cesare* the night before providing the first), depicts an elaborate ceremony in which the inhabitants of Mount Parnassus celebrate the wedding of Prince Peleus to the sea nymph Thetis.

On Sunday morning, a short session, "Contemporaries and Contexts," was chaired by AHS president Graydon Beeks (Pomona College). Ashley A. Greathouse (University of Cincinnati) began with a paper considering the Roubiliac statue of Handel, first erected in Vauxhall Gardens. Greathouse's work examined Handel's association with royalty and the tremendous popularity he enjoyed during his lifetime, in the process analyzing the increased variety of venues in which public entertainments took place as further evidence of the commercialization of leisure in the mid-eighteenth century. As snow began to fall outside, Robert Ketterer and Donald Burrows closed the conference by leading a captivating lecture/performance on Dr. Musgrave Heighington's *Six Select Odes of Anacreon in Greek and [Six] of Horace in Latin*. These pieces, which Handel received as a subscriber, were discussed in the context of performance and publication history as well as the selection and arrangement of their ancient poetry. Interspersed with this discussion were lovely performances of some of the ode settings—four by Anacreon and two by Horace—by an excellent ensemble of IU musicians. These performances, which constituted the conference's Paul Travel Memorial Concert, provided an excellent conclusion to an altogether successful and thoroughly enjoyable festival.

English Concert with his usual incisiveness and vigor, and the superb singing of The Clarion Choir (led by Steven Fox) ensured that the choruses were on a par with the solo singing. Two of the smaller roles, the Priest of Jupiter and Apollo, were in fact sung by Joseph Beutel and Brian Giebler respectively, members of the chorus who stepped down from the choral ranks to deliver their parts on the front of the stage.

Having complained in rather curmudgeonly tones last year in these pages about some of the abuses *Semele* has suffered in other staged or semi-staged productions, I take great pleasure in reporting that this rendition did exactly what one hopes for: it presented the music on its own terms, allowing the serious nature of the drama to come through unimpeded, while also allowing the lighter, more humorous moments a chance to relieve the sense of impending doom. Soprano Brenda Rae, in the title role, sang with a lustrous tone that seemed at moments slightly overbalanced by the players, but only in her middle and lower registers. Her gleaming top range and impressive facility rendered virtuosic moments such as “The Morning Lark” and “Myself I shall adore” a complete thrill to hear. At the same time, her treatment of Semele’s more tender passions was arresting—I honestly have little expectation of hearing “O Sleep, why dost thou leave me” sung (or played) more beautifully in this lifetime. Mezzo-soprano Elizabeth DeShong threatened at moments to steal the spotlight from the *prima donna*, performing double duty as both Ino and Juno. The richness of her sound is immensely satisfying, her acting of both roles was entirely convincing, and she proved her technical authority with what might be the fastest - but also most terrifyingly accurate—rendition of “Hence, Iris, hence away” ever attempted. When soprano Ailish Tynan made her entrance as Iris, huffing and puffing and carrying a large folding map, the comedic

tone seemed just right. The clever use of the map and a magazine to acquaint Juno with Semele’s location and newfound happiness perhaps touched on the boundary of good taste but without actually crossing the line into farce. In the same way, the use of a large, elegant hand mirror in Juno’s scene with Semele in Part III was perfectly appropriate—an essential prop that was used without calling too much attention to itself.

The men in the cast were equally impressive in their roles, particularly bass Solomon Howard as Cadmus and Somnus, and tenor Benjamin Hulett as Jupiter. In lyrical moments such as “Where’er you walk,” Hulett demonstrated flexibility of tone and incredible beauty of sound that seemed ideally suited for the part. His chemistry with Rae was excellent in their fiery exchanges over Semele’s desire to become immortal, but his finest moment was undoubtedly the lament over his own folly after swearing the oath, “Ah! whither is she gone.” Countertenor Christopher Lowrey made an appealing Athamas, singing and acting with a straightforward sense of style.



Brenda Rae (*Semele*) and Benjamin Hulett (*Jupiter*).
Photography by Steve J. Sherman



Brenda Rae (*Semele*) singing “Myself I shall adore” in Part III.
Photography by Steve J. Sherman

Maestro Bicket, conducting largely from the harpsichord, has a penchant for extremely fast tempi in the *allegro* numbers, but his pacing of the slower music is equally impressive and communicative, heightening the sense of drama without excess. Some of the most powerful moments of the afternoon occurred in the choral singing, especially in impassioned moments such as “Avert these omens” and the celebratory ones like “Bless the glad earth.” The Clarion Choir particularly distinguished itself in the aftermath of Semele’s demise, singing “Oh, terror and astonishment” with conviction and clarity.

The only disappointments of this performance were sins of omission: an unfortunate decision to cut the *Gavotte* from the Overture, the loss of “Hymen, haste” for

Athamas, a truncated and transposed rendition of “Turn, hopeless lover” for Ino, and so forth. But the effect of these minor deviations on the arc of the performance as a whole was thankfully minimal, particularly since they almost all occurred in Part I, leading to a performance of Parts II and III that was virtually beyond reproach.

Opera Philadelphia has announced a fully staged production of *Semele* next September, directed by James Darrah of *Breaking the Waves* fame. A co-production with Opera Omaha, it would do well to follow the lead of The English Concert and center its focus on the score, thus avoiding the mistakes of many other presenters. The more promising news is that Harry Bicket will be bringing The English Concert back to Carnegie Hall next May for a concert performance of *Rodelinda* that promises to be another remarkable and memorable experience for Handelians.

FROM THE PRESIDENT’S DESK

Graydon Beeks

AHF Bloomington was a great success and although February seems a long time ago, Nathan Link’s Report elsewhere in this issue of *Newsletter* captures well the spirit of the event. I want to second Nathan’s thanks to Ayana Smith and her colleagues at Indiana University Bloomington for having been such wonderful hosts, and to the Program Committee, chaired by Norbert Dubowy, for assembling such a compelling program. And I would like to thank all the participants, whose contributions made the Festival so memorable.

With spring comes the annual reminder to members of the Society who have not yet paid your membership dues for 2019. 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, 2019 in order to make it possible to settle accounts efficiently. Payment may be made directly to the Secretary/Treasurer by check or through the Society’s PayPal account by credit card. Instructions and forms are available on the AHS website and in your copy of the *Newsletter*.

Finally, let me call your attention to the announcement, also printed elsewhere in this issue of the *Newsletter*, of the J. Merrill Knapp Fellowship, which will be awarded in 2020. This is a tangible way in which the AHS supports scholarship, and the list of previous recipients on the AHS website makes an impressive reading. Please encourage eligible scholars to apply.

UPCOMING HANDEL EVENTS

HALLE HANDEL FESTIVAL 2019

May 31–June 16, 2019

June 1: Festival Lecture by Dr. Silke Leopold, “From A(thalia) to Z(enobia): Handel’s Gallery of Strong Women” (in German only).

At Stadthaus am Markt

June 3–5: International Academic Conference:

“Between Alcina and Theodora: Female figures in the works of Handel and his contemporaries.”

At Händel-Haus, Halle (Saale)

www.haendel.de

7TH ANNUAL HANDEL ARIA COMPETITION

Friday, June 7, 2019 at 7:30 p.m.

Mills Concert Hall, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Mead Witter School of Music

455 N. Park St.

Madison, WI 53706

www.handelariacompetition.com

THE J. MERRILL KNAPP RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

The Board of Directors of The American Handel Society invites applications for the J. Merrill Knapp Research Fellowship to support scholarly projects related to Handel and his world. One or more fellowships may be awarded in a calendar year up to a total of \$2,000. Requests for funding may include, but are not limited to, purchase of microfilms, travel for research, and production expenses for publication. This fellowship may be used on its own or to augment other grants or fellowships.

In awarding the Knapp Fellowship, preference will be given to graduate students, scholars in the early stages of their careers, and independent scholars with no source of institutional support.

The deadline for applications will be March 2, 2020. There is no application form. Each applicant should submit an outline of the project, a budget showing how and when the funds will be used, and a description of other funding for the same project applied for and/or received. In addition, applicants should have two letters of recommendation sent directly to the Knapp Fellowship Committee. Electronic submissions are preferred; letters of recommendation as well as the application itself can be emailed to Ellen T. Harris (eharris@mit.edu). Paper submissions can also be mailed to Professor Ellen T. Harris, Massachusetts Institute of Technology 4-246, 77 Massachusetts Ave. Cambridge, MA 02139. All applications must arrive by March 2, 2020.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Lanfossi, Carlo. "Ghosting Agrippina: Genealogies of Performance in Italian Baroque Opera." *The Journal of Musicology* 36/1 (2019): 1–38.

McGeary, Thomas. "Vice Chamberlain Thomas Coke and Italian opera in London: new documents." *Early Music* 46/4 (2018): 675–681.

Pinnock, Andrew. "The Rival Maids: Anne Killigrew, Anne Kingsmill and the making of the court masque *Venus and Adonis* (music by John Blow)." *Early Music* 46/4 (2018): 631–652.

White, Bryan. *Music for St Cecilia's Day: From Purcell to Handel*. Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2019.



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)

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Renew your membership for 2019 today!

Go Green! Opt to receive the Newsletter electronically!
Please contact the editor at minjik@gmail.com.

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THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY

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Life	500	400	450
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Regular	75	-	65
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Student*	23	-	17.5
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Regular	93	-	80
Regular (with <i>Göttinger Händel Beiträge</i>)	108	-	92.50
Student	30	-	24
Student (with <i>Göttinger Händel Beiträge</i>)	45	-	36
TOTAL REMITTANCE			

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

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

Those paying in dollars should make their checks payable to THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY and mail them to Marjorie Pomeroy Kelly, Secretary/Treasurer, THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY, 49 Christopher Hollow Road, Sandwich, MA 02563. Those wishing to pay in Euros should remit to Stephan Blaut, Treasurer, Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft, Gr. Nikolaistrasse 5, 06108 Halle (Saale), Federal Republic of Germany, and indicate that the payment is for the account of the AHS. Friends of the Handel Institute, London may also pay their AHS dues in sterling by making their checks payable to THE HANDEL INSTITUTE and mailing them to Ms. Sylvia Levi, Hon. Treasurer, The Handel Institute, 254A Kew Road, Richmond TW9 3EG, United Kingdom, with the appropriate annotation. Please do not send checks in Euros or sterling directly to the AHS as we are no longer able to process them.

Online payment options are available at 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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