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KEISER'S *OCTAVIA* AT BOSTON EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL 2025

Kenneth Nott



*Emőke Baráth as Octavia in the BEMF production of Keiser's Octavia.
Photo by Kathy Wittman.*

In 1702 seventeen-year-old Handel was at a career crossroads. Having outgrown the limited opportunities of his hometown Halle, he carefully considered his next professional move. Given his newfound love of opera, Italy seemed the most logical, long-term destination. But, as John Mainwaring memorably put it, Handel needed a “longer purse” to make that journey possible. The Prussian court in Berlin was one obvious, closer option, but Handel chose Hamburg, a free city (thus no court) with a thriving musical and operatic culture that attracted young, ambitious musicians like himself.

The dominant musical figure in Hamburg was Reinhard Keiser (1674–1739), probably one of the best-known and least-known figures in the history of Baroque Opera. He is well known because, for a little over two years, young Handel played in his Hamburg opera orchestra and composed his first operas for the company. Keiser also employed Johann Mattheson and was friends with Telemann. Yet, try to find a modern recording of even one complete Keiser opera and you will come up empty handed (see below for a remedy). Until a few years ago, one also had to go to Handel sources for Keiser's scores: either a supplementary Händel-Gesellschaft volume edited by Friederich Chrysander or more recently published

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REPORT FROM HALLE 2025

Graydon Beeks

The Handel Festival in Halle took place from June 6–15, 2025, which marked a return to its earlier format of a single week bookended by two weekends. This year's festival was planned by Bernd Feuchtnier, Interim Director of the Festival and the Handel House since 2023, who died unexpectedly in February. In his brief time in Halle, he earned respect for his leadership and made many friends; he will be much missed. The festival was supervised by the new permanent Director, Florian Amort, who began his duties on April 1. Amort, though relatively young, brings with him extensive relevant experience and a fund of ideas and enthusiasm, which should serve him well.

The theme of the festival was “A Fresh Wind: The Young Handel in Italy” and the first concert, on Thursday, June 5, consisted of *Il convito d'Alessandro*, a shortened version of *Alexander's Feast* sung to an Italian translation. It was first performed in Florence in April 1768 under the sponsorship of George Clavering, 3rd Earl Cowper, who over the next four years arranged for the first Italian performances of *Messiah*, *Acis and Galatea*, and *Judas Maccabaeus*. This evening's performance was a qualified success. The Handel Festival Orchestra played very well under the direction of its music director, Attilio Cremonesi, although I thought that several movements were just a bit too fast for the venue. The MDR-Rundfunkchor sang with confidence but from where I was sitting its diction was not clear, which may have been a result of the difficult acoustics of the Dom. Soprano Silvia Porcellini sang sweetly but her voice too often lacked a core, while the singing of tenor Luigi Morassi was unrelievedly loud.

After the concert, the Handel Prize of the City of Halle was presented to the Handel Festival Orchestra in honor of its contribution to the Handel Festival and to the understanding and enjoyment of Handel's music. In his Laudatio, Axel Köhler reviewed the founding of orchestra in 1993 as an early instrument ensemble within the Staatskapelle Halle, the modern instrument concert and opera orchestra, and stressed

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