



COMMUNICATION: CONFERENCE REPORT

American Handel Society Conference

Indiana University, 11–14 March 2021

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The Covid-19 pandemic prevented the 2021 biennial conference of the American Handel Society from taking place in person. The challenges of hosting the event online via Zoom were dealt with admirably by Ayana Smith and the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University. Proceedings began with the Howard Serwer Memorial Lecture, delivered this year by Berta Joncus (Goldsmiths, University of London), who gave a rich account of Handel's self-fashioning as a celebrity in Rome and London. Taking up a suggestion made by Ellen Harris in her *Handel as Orpheus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001, 45ff), Joncus offered what she called 'Handel's first ever organ concerto' – the 'Sonata' from Part 1 of *Il Trionfo del Tempo*, HWV46a (1707) – as an example of the way the composer from this time on frequently makes himself, as keyboard virtuoso, a '*dramatis persona* addressing the audience'. Joncus suggested that Handel's practice of performing organ concertos alongside his oratorios, from the mid-1730s onwards, was an attempt to recreate this dynamic at a turning-point in his London career. As she deftly demonstrated, this was a moment of commercial instability for Handel – exacerbated by a number of bad business decisions – and one fraught with the danger of the composer's being eclipsed in the celebrity stakes by the castrato Senesino, who had joined the Opera of the Nobility, rival to Handel's operatic operation, in 1733. The lecture concluded with an intriguing suggestion about Roubiliac's Vauxhall Gardens statue of the composer (1738) – which, as Suzanne Aspden has described, was an important part of Handel's journey from 'outsider' to 'British worthy' ('Fam'd Handel Breathing, tho' Transformed to Stone': The Composer as Monument', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55/1 (2002), 44). The statue, Joncus argued, may have been commissioned by Handel himself, rather than by Jonathan Tyers, proprietor of the gardens, as is generally held to be the case.

The next day began with a panel of three papers on performances and performance practice. Beverly Jerold (independent scholar, Plainsboro, New Jersey) presented a valuable collection of quotations from eighteenth-century sources on the analogy, ubiquitous at the time, between music and musicians and oratory and orators. Music was understood, in humanistic fashion, as a fundamentally communicative and persuasive medium, and performers, contemporary treatises stressed, should always attend to this quality. They should aim to 'express Sentiments, strike the Imagination, affect the Mind, and command the Passions', as Handel's frequent collaborator Francesco Geminiani wrote in 1751 (*The Art of Playing on the Violin* (London), Preface, 1). Luke Howard (Brigham Young University) spoke about the creation and early reception of the edition of *Messiah* prepared by German composer Robert Franz (1815–1892), first performed by the Boston Handel and Haydn Society in 1876. 1868 had seen the publication of a photolithograph of the autograph score by London's Sacred Harmonic Society, which prompted a widespread reassessment of the various 'reinforcements' to Handel's orchestral writing that had accrued in successive revivals and which were habitually employed in contemporary performances. Franz's edition, though still based on Mozart's 1789 reorchestration, was, Howard showed, the first nineteenth-century edition to cut away such material rather than add more. It thus represents one of the

starting-points of a recognizably modern tradition of Handel editing and scholarship which sought to recover the texts of works as they were performed in the composer's lifetime.

My paper (Joe Lockwood, University of Oxford) explored two *Messiah* performances in New York City in 1770, the first of any oratorio in anglophone North America. These performances were directed by a transatlantic migrant, the church musician William Tuckey (1708–1781), and each represented initial moments of the transatlantic transfer of distinct British Handelian traditions. The first took place in the long room of the City Tavern, Broadway, replicating the model of organizations such as London's Anacreontic Society. The second took place in Trinity Church, a bastion of colonial Toryism, and followed the model of British charitable festival performances by incorporating *Messiah* into a Matins service. I examined the sermon preached before the performance in order to shed some light on the political significance of the performance for New York's Loyalists.

The day concluded with a lecture-recital given by Jonathan Salomon (Yale University). The technology held up well, allowing Salomon to illustrate his excellent analysis of William Babell's 1717 transcription of 'Vo' far guerra' from *Rinaldo*, HWV 7a (1711), at the harpsichord. This revealed how the movement's virtuoso passagework elaborates some of the voice-leading schemata identified by Robert O. Gjerdingen in *Music in the Galant Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). The question of whether Babell's transcription accurately reflects Handel's improvisations during *Rinaldo*'s initial run – supported by Salomon but disputed in the past by Anthony Hicks, among others – was the subject of lively debate after the session.

The following day's panel was on the theme of the 'Intellectual and Cultural Contexts of Handelian Opera and Oratorio'. Miguel Arango Calle (Indiana University) explored the orientalist depiction of Egypt and its inhabitants in *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, HWV17 (1724), through two of its most striking visual tableaux, the garden scenes of Act 2. In the former, Cesare meets Cleopatra for the first time in 'A Garden of Cedars, with Prospect of Mount Parnassus', where she attempts to seduce him. The cedars, it was shown, were associated with the Near East, as they are now; and the reference to Parnassus suggests contemporary representations of Hercules at the crossroads, a story about the virtue of resisting temptation. The interaction between 'Eastern' sensuousness and solid Roman *virtus* plays out in this space, as Cesare controls his passions and does not attempt to consummate the union then and there. This was contrasted with the second garden scene, in the seraglio of King Tolomeo: Arango Calle explored the relationship between the libretto's description of this garden and accounts of Ottoman seraglio gardens by contemporary 'Western' travellers. In this scene Tolomeo tries to force himself on the Roman widow Cornelia, succumbing to the passions that Cesare had resisted. Contemporary understandings of racial difference as precipitated by climate were surveyed as a potential explanation for the significance of the garden settings of these key scenes.

Handel's depiction of angels was the focus of the contribution from Mark Risinger (independent scholar, New York): he discussed contemporary theological and philosophical views on their function and existence, the dramatic role of angels in librettos and the remarkable consistency in Handel's musical depiction of these beings across his career, from *La resurrezione* (HWV47) in 1708 to *Jephtha* (HWV70) in 1751. The panel's final paper was delivered by Minji Kim (independent scholar, Andover, Massachusetts) on the aria 'Total eclipse' from *Samson*, HWV57 (1742). *Samson*'s libretto was adapted by the Irish writer Newburgh Hamilton from Milton's drama *Samson Agonistes* (1671). Between the composition of the source and the adaptation, major new scientific discoveries on the nature of eclipses had been made by Edmond Halley, offering a naturalistic explanation for their occurrence and challenging the traditional view of eclipses as supernatural omens. These developments were used to explain the different emphases in Hamilton's libretto, in particular his replacement of the eclipse itself as a portent with more generalized allusion to the language of the biblical Day of the Lord. This allowed Kim to compare Handel's musical response to the text of 'Total eclipse' with his settings of a broader range of texts dealing with suffering and divine

judgment as well as darkness, with the use of enharmonic modulation emerging as a common thread running through these examples.

That afternoon an informative panel discussion on the availability of digitized primary and secondary sources for Handel research during the pandemic, led by Ellen Harris (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and John Roberts (University of California Berkeley), was followed by a memorable invited lecture from Bruce Alan Brown (University of Southern California). The lecture presented some of the fruits of archival work in Tuscany, shedding light on the training of castrato singers in eighteenth-century Italy. Records of the hospital in Pescia, near Lucca, in 1733–1734 show prescriptions of gargling medicine for a thirteen-year-old castrato, Lazzaro Paoli, who would go on to have an operatic career in Rome in the 1740s. The prescriptions were signed off by the *spedalingo* (administrator) of the hospital, Bartolomeo Nucci (1695–1779), who was also Paoli's singing teacher. Evidence from later in Nucci's career suggests it is likely that Nucci also arranged for Paoli's castration. This provides archival evidence to corroborate a trend anecdotally reported elsewhere: that the teachers of castratos were often as involved with monitoring their pupils' health as they were with their musical development. The undoubted highlight of the lecture involved Brown preparing and using, live on Zoom, a pungent-sounding gargle recipe from the archives (sal ammoniac, elderflower water and strong brandy were all involved).

The first of the final day's two panels explored the representation of women on the operatic stage and in eighteenth-century culture more broadly. Regina Compton (independent scholar, Chicago) considered the implications of the replacement of the aria 'Se'l mio duol' with 'Ahi perché, giusto ciel' in the first revival of *Rodelinda*, HWV19. Developing Aspden's work on the 'connection between public image and private persona' of Handel's London singers (*The Rival Sirens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 24), Compton noted that Francesca Cuzzoni, who played the title role in both the premiere of February 1725 and the revival in December of that year, was visibly pregnant during the latter. In this context, the change of aria to one stressing Rodelinda's affection for her son Flavio created an especially rich opportunity for Cuzzoni to display her widely admired 'pathetic' style in a depiction of virtuous motherhood. Compton's conclusions might, however, need to be nuanced in the light of Rodelinda's actions elsewhere in the opera, in particular the daring gambit of Act 2 Scene 3, where Rodelinda demands that Grimoaldo kill her son before she will marry him. (She hopes, of course, that he will lack the ruthlessness to do so, but it is quite a gamble, nevertheless.) Paula Maust (University of Maryland) surveyed a variety of examples of the often shockingly vicious invective directed towards Cuzzoni and two of Handel's other London singers, Margherita Durastanti and Anna Maria Strada, in contemporary writing in various genres and in visual art. While Maust acknowledged that long-standing British traditions of anti-Catholic prejudice and moralistic anti-theatricalism stood behind much of this material, she also proposed that some of the examples could be understood in the light of the 'climate theory' of racial difference, widespread in European eighteenth-century thought, as discussed in the previous day's panel.

The two papers of the second panel were linked by a consideration of the challenges posed for researchers on eighteenth-century musical culture by primary sources. Alison DeSimone (University of Missouri–Kansas City) demonstrated the difficulty of locating the material and documentary traces left by female musicians and impresarios of the eighteenth century. This is due in part to the general constraints contemporary society imposed on women's agency and participation in public life, and in part to the biases of the archival record: as one writer noted in 1710, 'Women, unless they had enjoy'd an equal Share of Power and Greatness with the Men, will not be found upon Record for their Excellencies so much as the latter, tho' they had exceeded them in every Virtue' (*The Female Tatler* 88 (1 February 1710)). Nevertheless, DeSimone demonstrated that all hope was not lost by drawing out a variety of case studies of female performers, musical 'entrepreneurs' and impresarios to set alongside examples better known to scholarship, such as Regina Mingotti's eventful tenure in charge of London's King's Theatre in the 1750s and 60s.

The conference's final paper was delivered by Graydon Beeks (Pomona College) on the identity of the mysterious 'Overtures to be plaied before the first lesson' mentioned by Handel's patron James Brydges, First Duke of Chandos, in a letter of 25 September 1717. Multiple possibilities were considered. First, that these were the 'sonatas' preceding the anthems Handel wrote for Cannons (HWV246–256); second, that they have been lost, but that a trace of them remains in a movement preserved in a manuscript held by the British Library (R.M. 20.d.6); third, that Brydges was referring to the trio sonatas HWV386b, 388, 389 and 390a, published in 1731–1732 in Op. 2; and fourth, that 'Overtures' has been written in error, and what was meant was 'voluntaries', and that the movements in question are the keyboard fugues published in the 1720 *Suites de pieces pour le clavecin* and the 1735 *Six Fugues or Voluntaries*. Each possibility was carefully and thoroughly evaluated, with the last, on the whole, commending itself as the most likely.

The online format presented opportunities as well as difficulties, one of which was the chance to watch the performances associated with the conference on demand. On Friday attendees were offered a choice between two recorded performances, one of Indiana University Opera's 2013 production of *Xerxes* and the other of the IU Historical Performance Institute's *Il Parnasso in festa* in 2019. Saturday featured a live stream of the IU Baroque Orchestra's performance of opera arias and orchestral music by Handel and J. S. Bach, and Sunday a chamber recital by further IU HPI students of the rarely heard German arias HWV202–207 and 210 and a better-known trio sonata (HWV390).

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