



COMMUNICATION: CONFERENCE REPORT

Thirteenth Handel Institute Conference

The Bridewell Centre and the Foundling Museum, London, 17–19 November 2023

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The Thirteenth Handel Institute Conference commemorated the tercentenary of Handel's acquisition of his house in Brook Street, London, and marked its recent renovation and reopening as a museum in the spring of 2023. Presenters explored the conference theme of 'Places and Spaces' by discussing how real and fantastic spaces converged. Ruth Smith (Handel Institute) examined the curiously detailed description of the temple in the libretto of *Solomon*, connecting it convincingly to a model of the temple of Solomon that was exhibited in Hamburg while Handel worked there and was subsequently sold to London, to be shown at the Haymarket theatre from 1724. The inspirational potential of real-world models such as these was examined by Joseph V. Nelson (College of the Holy Cross), who proposed a connection between Queen Caroline's desire to place herself into an Arthurian lineage and Handel's preoccupation with magic in his three operas based on Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (*Orlando* (1733), *Alcina* (1735) and *Ariodante* (1735)). These, together with Henry Giffard's revival of the 'dramatick opera' *King Arthur* (1735), fitted neatly with the allegorical displays of statues in 'Merlin's Cave', at the Royal Gardens in Richmond, that the Queen had built during her reign. Joseph Lockwood (Newcastle University) focused on the impact of Handel's music across the Atlantic, as part of the United States' project of national self-definition after the Revolutionary War. While some traditions from Britain – particularly that of standing during the 'Hallelujah' chorus of *Messiah* – persisted, they were nevertheless reinterpreted in alignment with the new republic.

Handel's music also permeated private spaces. Ina Knoth (Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg) gave a fascinating overview of Handel's appearances in the lavish and inimitable prints of George Bickham's *Musical Entertainer* (first published in 1737–1739), concluding that the publications took pains to present Handel as a thoroughly English composer, despite the fact that most of the pieces used in the series stemmed from Italian operas. A paper by Jack Comerford (University of Southampton) on the printing of Handel's oratorios during his lifetime underlined this view of selective public and private reception: the oratorios were more often published as excerpts in anthologies or in series of 'selected songs' rather than as complete scores.

Speakers also examined the working methods of Handel and his librettists. Theresa Ramer-Wünsche (Händel-Haus Halle) investigated the libretto of *Parnasso in Festa*, which borrows twenty vocal numbers from other oratorios. She concluded – based on rhythmic patterns in the libretto – that the as-yet-unidentified librettist must have known early on which numbers would be adapted and in which order. Meanwhile, Adriana de Feo (independent scholar, Vienna) examined the changes that were made to Apostolo Zeno's librettos for Handel. These often consisted of renaming characters, shortening scenes and reducing philosophical overtones, while virtually always retaining the all-important original affect. Multiple papers reminded attendees that temporal and cultural distance must always be taken into account when working with cultural products of the eighteenth century. Minji Kim (independent scholar, Andover, MA) showed that the 'cloudy red'

sky from Samson's final aria in the eponymous oratorio, a text sourced from Milton's poem 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity', anticipates his own self-sacrifice; this analysis used a wide array of contemporary sources as well as Handel's setting itself. Konstanze Musketa (Händel-Haus Halle) gave an account of the diary of Johann Andreas Manitius, a Protestant missionary from the *Institutum Judaicum et Muhammedicum* in Halle, which was thought to contain information about performances of Handel's 'oratorios' in London. It turned out, however, that the promising document referred not to Handel, but to a German preacher with the same surname resident in London at the same time who was offering public lecture-plus-prayer sessions. An altogether different kind of 'oratory' was considered by Cathal Twomey (Dublin City University), who spoke about the different stress patterns on the word 'Hallelujah', not only in Handel's music, but in English-language settings more broadly. What emerged was that the variable and often 'wrong' stresses on certain syllables were not a sign of incompetence by various composers, but rather entirely deliberate.

Another theme that ran through the conference was that of performance practice and the performers of Handel's music. Olive Baldwin (independent scholar, Brentwood) and Thelma Wilson (independent scholar, Brentwood) shed light on the (mostly unauthorized) use of Handel's music as entr'acte entertainment throughout London in the eighteenth century, discernible today mostly through advertising from the time. The musical and dramaturgical aspects of Handel's composition of the part of Emilia in *Flavio, re di Longobardi* for Italian soprano Francesca Cuzzoni were explored by Yseult Martinez (Université d'Angers), who showed how the composer played to his creative strengths while considering the character at hand. Francesca Greppi (Opera Education www.operaeducation.org) presented an exemplary study of how this practice existed in eighteenth-century opera more widely, in her discussion of Margherita Durastanti and Diamante Maria Scarabelli, two sopranos active at the same time. Greppi showed that though they were often cast together, their voice types, dramatic preferences and thus casting types virtually never intersected. Durastanti's being consistently assigned to morally more grey roles might have contributed to her more negative public perception compared to Scarabelli, who typically embodied the 'lover' character type. Public reception, particularly that of famed Italian castrato Francesco 'Senesino' Bernardi, was also the topic of a paper by David Vickers (Royal Northern College of Music). In London this reception often oscillated between disapproval and absolute reverence, tied not only to Senesino's singing, but also to his often scandalous behaviour. Many of Senesino's detractors took issue with his nationality, a favourite gripe of theatre critics well into the nineteenth century. This was the theme that Luke Howard (Brigham Young University) focused on in his talk 'Favouring the "Foreign Talent": Nationalism and the Critical Reception of Soloists in Nineteenth-Century Performances of Handel's *Messiah*', which discussed the Handel festivals that began at the Crystal Palace in 1857. The political and national undertones latent in the topics of many of the papers on the places and spaces mentioned above had by this time become nationalist.

Robert G. Rawson (Canterbury Christ Church University) shed light on the work of Johann Christoph Pepusch at Cannons (home of the Duke of Chandos) before, during and after Handel's time there, using newly discovered manuscripts to demonstrate that Handel, when he entered that place and encountered its existing practices, was indeed influenced by Pepusch. Handel's lasting influence and immediate afterlife, in turn, were demonstrated by two papers. Sarah Clemmens Waltz (University of the Pacific) traced the musical career of William Herschel (1738–1822) – the part-musician part-astronomer who would go on to discover Uranus – and particularly the performances of *Messiah* he put on in Bath as an example of early Handel reception. Graydon Beeks (Pomona College) focused on Sir Watkin Williams Wynn (1749–1789), who, among other pursuits, amassed an extensive collection of printed and manuscript music that included performance material of Handel's works. Long thought to have been destroyed but in fact preserved in part, the collection could offer valuable insight into the reception history of the composer's music.

Besides two full days of papers, the conference included several special events. It opened on the evening of Friday 17 November with a reception and visit to the Foundling Museum, followed by a concert by Ensemble Molière. The performance, called ‘The Dancing Star’, celebrated Marie Sallé (1707–1756), one of the first female choreographers, and the programme included works by Handel, Rameau and Rebel. The following evening, delegates were treated to a private viewing of the Handel Hendrix House, the former residence of both these famous musicians. These activities, together with an impressive set of papers, made for a successful conference that demonstrated the diversity of approaches one can take to researching Handel and his time, as well as related areas that are still underexplored.

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