

# NEWSLETTER

of

## The American Handel Society

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### Charles Handell, Esq. (? – 1776)

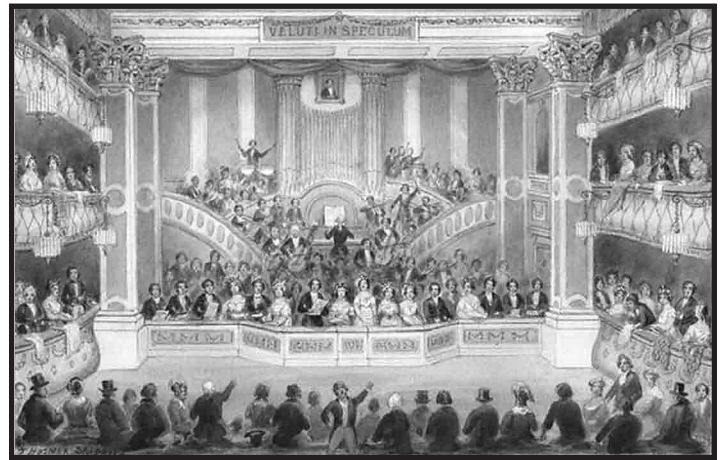
Information about Handel's personal circumstances comes in low and erratic supply. Royal protection, loyal friendships, and, above all, a conservative lifestyle secured the privacy of Britain's most celebrated composer from gossipmongers and posterity alike. It makes double the pleasure, then, for us to come across documentary wild cards, such as this:

A few Days since ["Sunday last"] died at Brenchley in Kent, Charles Handell, Esq; a Relation of the great Musician Handell.  
(*The Public Advertiser*, Tuesday 5 March 1776, [3].)

At least four other London newspapers printed identical reports (with minor adjustments) between March 5 and 7, 1776 (*The St. James's Chronicle*, *The Middlesex Journal*, *The Morning Post*, and *The London Evening-Post*). Their accuracy is tentative, of course, as fact checking was hard to expect in those frontier days of journalism. Until archival research is able to throw light on the deceased, we can entertain some guesses about his identity.

Charles Handell could have been (1) a German relative of the composer who had moved to England before or after 1759. Although his name does not appear in Burrows' genealogical tree of the composer,<sup>i</sup> he might have been a distant relative of George Frideric (perhaps a descendant of "Cousin Christian Gottlieb Handel, of Copenhagen," a grandchild of Handel's half-brother Karl.<sup>ii</sup> The Hanoverian Succession created new opportunities for Germans in England; and Handel's legendary career in London inspired not a few musicians to cross the Channel in search of fortune and glory (the Mozart family). On top of that, the cash bequests of Handel to relatives in Germany in 1759 could easily have motivated one among them to seek financial and social advancement on English soil. Another possibility is that Charles was (2) an English relation of Handel, perhaps a natural or adopted son. We know that at least one foundling at the celebrated London hospital was named after the composer (Maria Augusta Handel, born in 1758).<sup>iii</sup> As a London celebrity, a theatrical legend, and (in his last decade) a rich man, Handel must not have lacked opportunities for sexual relief. On the other hand, London was never short of illegitimate children in need of adopted names or generous patrons. A final possibility is that Charles was (3) a stranger who exploited his uncommon name or the period's spelling inconsistencies to partake of Handelian glory. (In the absence of further evidence, a skeptic might even consider the report a hoax and question the very existence of Mr. Charles.)

Whoever Charles Handell, Esq. might have been, his demise, as reported above, offers two useful clues for Handelians. The first concerns his geographical affiliation. Brenchley, Kent, is only six miles east from Tunbridge Wells, the renowned spa that Handel often visited during summer. The popular view that health reasons led him there may not be entirely accurate. A number of prominent Handelians had strong ties with Tunbridge Wells and its



Covent Garden before 1808, watercolor by Thomas Hosmer Shepherd.

### HANDEL AT PRINCETON 2007

On behalf of the Princeton University Department of Music and the Board of the American Handel Society, I am delighted to invite you to the American Handel Festival and meeting of the American Handel Society at Princeton University, April 19-22, 2007.

A number of exciting events are planned for the Festival, which will include concerts, recitals, exhibits, and paper sessions devoted to the music of Handel and his contemporaries. On Thursday evening, April 19, 2007, the Richardson Baroque Players, under the direction of Nancy Wilson, will present "Britannia's Invitation" at 8 pm in Richardson Auditorium. Featuring Laura Heimes (soprano), Daniel Gundlach (countertenor), and Curtis Streetman (bass), "Britannia's Invitation" will present the life and musical times of Handel as seen through the eyes of his friend Mrs. Delaney and other commentators, featuring works that are mentioned in contemporary letters, newspaper accounts, and fiction. The program will include excerpts from *Rinaldo*, *Ottone*, *Messiah*, *Alcina*, *Ricardo Primo*, *Messiah*, *Sosarme* as well as *The Beggar's Opera* (Pepusch), and a performance of Handel's Organ Concerto in Bb (HWV 294).

The Princeton University Library will also present a special exhibit of the James S. Hall Collection of George Friedrich Handel, held in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. The exhibit will also celebrate a project begun this year by the Arthur Mendel Music Library at Princeton University to digitize major manuscripts and printed materials from the Hall Collection.

On Saturday night, April 21, 2007 we will present a semi-staged performance of Handel's *Hercules*, conducted by Richard Tang Yuk, and featuring the Princeton University Glee Club and professional singers and orchestra.

Princeton University is located in central New Jersey, with easy access to Newark Liberty International Airport.

For more information on the festival, please see <http://www.music.princeton.edu/Handelfestival>

Wendy Heller  
Princeton University

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surrounding area, in the form of countryseats (Sir Wyndham Knatchbull, Lord Guernsey ["Aylesford Collection"], and Sir George Amyand), ecclesiastical appointments (John Upton), or visits that may or may not have included meetings with Handel (Bernard Granville, John Upton, and John Baker). Remarkably, most of them were members of the James Harris circle, as relatives, friends, and correspondents. The fact alone that Amyand, who died in Tunbridge in 1766, had professional ties with Hamburg throws light on his role as co-executor of Handel's will. Is it unthinkable that a German relative of the composer would have settled in the area, given the strong presence of Handelians and the intense social life of this fashionable health resort?

The second pointer relates to Handel's image. The demise of Charles was newsworthy only because of his (assumed or actual) relation to a composer who had been dead for 17 years. At a time when Britain was facing its worst internal crisis since the Civil War, Handel's cultural presence was getting stronger. Chronologically, Charles' death is framed by significant events: the creation of the "Concert of Antient Music," a hothouse of Handelian cult;<sup>iv</sup> the appearance of Charles Burney's first volume of *A General History of Music*; and the exciting debut of the Linley family in London oratorios with crowd pleasers like *Acis and Galatea* (February 23 and March 8) and *Alexander's Feast* (March 1 and 15). If Charles had derived any benefit from sporting a famous name during life, he certainly received posthumous attention thanks to George Frideric Handel, whose image was fermenting until the cultural explosion of the 1784 Commemoration Festival. The death notices from March 5-7, 1776 provide, then, a timely reminder that, in 1759, Handel had lost a life but secured another one.

An expanded and fully documented version of this report will appear shortly. I can only hope, meanwhile, that Handelian forces across the Atlantic will mobilize for the documentary apprehension of Charles Handell, who, after two and a half centuries, still remains at large.

Ilias Chrissochoidis  
Stanford, California

<sup>i</sup> Donald Burrows, *Handel* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1994), 4-5.

<sup>ii</sup> Otto Erich Deutsch, *Handel: A Documentary Biography* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1955), 691, 776, 788-89.

<sup>iii</sup> F. G. E., *The Musical Times* 43 (1902): 310.

<sup>iv</sup> William Weber, *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-Century England: A Study in Canon, Ritual, and Ideology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 173-177, 205, 248.

## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK (SPRING 2006)

Elsewhere in this issue you will find information on Handel at Princeton and also a formal Call for Papers to be presented at the concurrent AHS conference. I hope many of you will be able to join us next April for what promises to be an exceptionally stimulating event. Settling on the details took longer than anticipated, which means that this issue of the Newsletter is appearing later than planned. In changing the designations of the Newsletter numbers from April, August, and November to Spring, Summer, and Fall at its meeting last November, the Board of Directors anticipated this sort of flexibility. I can assure you that, as I write this in mid May, the weather in Southern California gives every indication that it is still spring.

Many of you will have seen Alex Ross's article in *The New Yorker* of May 8, 2006 entitled "Handel Time," in which he reviews several performance in New York, makes note of significant recent recordings, and ponders why Handel's music seems so appealing in our time. These are, indeed, exciting times for Handelians, with performances of both famous and little-known works turning up in what might seem to be unlikely places. Who can honestly say that as recently as ten years ago they could have anticipated seeing *Rodelinda* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York? For my part, I am looking forward to seeing *Imeneo* staged in Warsaw at the end of July. Let us continue to do all we can to support this revival. Remember that jumping on the bandwagon is not always a bad thing to do – especially when the music being played on that bandwagon is by Handel.

Graydon Beeks

### FURTHER DOWN THE TRAIL

A couple of further additions to my article about the word-books for Samson in the AHS Newsletter for December 2005. There is a further copy of the Tonson word-book dated 1758 (see footnote 10 of the article) at Birmingham Central Library: Birmingham Central Libraries 821.4725 Milton Collection. It is identical to the two other copies with this date. It has also come to my attention that the text of the watermark in the early copies of the 1743 wordbook reads "STAMP OFFICE [sic]." In addition to the credits listed in the article, I am grateful to Kathryn James for confirming that the undated copy at the Beinecke Rare Book and Music Library, Yale University, is an example of one of the late editions by Tonson (footnote 2).

Donald Burrows

### HANDEL-L

HANDEL-L is a discussion list open to everybody wishing to discuss the music, life and times of George Frideric Handel and his contemporaries. Subscribers are welcome to initiate or respond to a wide variety of topics. "Lurkers" are welcome to monitor proceedings anonymously.

All Handel enthusiasts, at any level of specialisation, are encouraged to provide reviews and feedback concerning recordings, opera productions, concerts, and literature. HANDEL-L combines this appreciation of Handel's music with comments, short reports, and discussion from scholars, performers, and journalists who maintain a serious interest in the composer and his world: the discussion list is a valuable source for breaking the latest Handel news around the world.

To join HANDEL-L visit

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/handel-l/>

### CALL FOR PAPERS – HANDELFEST 2007

The American Handel Society invites submissions of abstracts for papers to be given at the American Handel Festival, to take place at Princeton University, April 19 - 21, 2007. Festival concerts will include a semi-staged performance Handel's *Hercules* and a chamber concert organized around the theme of "Handel's London". We invite papers on any topic connected with Handel's life and music, but especially encourage submissions related to the music being performed, such as Handel's treatments of myth, masculinity and heroism; the secular oratorios; Handel's chamber works and arrangements for London; or his London circle of friends and colleagues.

Abstracts of no more than 500 words may be sent by December 15, 2006 to Robert Ketterer, AHS Program Chair. Electronic submissions are preferred, and may be sent to [robert-ketterer@uiowa.edu](mailto:robert-ketterer@uiowa.edu). Surface mail may be sent to Prof. Robert Ketterer, Department of Classics, 210 JB, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52245.