

# NEWSLETTER

of

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G.F. Handel, portrait used on Centre College Handel Festival program cover.

### MUSIC IN GOOD TIME AND THE HANDELIAN DISCORD IN 1745

In January 1745, a month short of his 60th birthday, Handel confronted the utmost challenge in his career. In an extraordinary statement, the closest he ever came to an artistic credo, he announced the suspension of his season (1744-45) and the return of three quarters of his subscribers' money.<sup>1</sup>

Several factors led to this outcome. Handel's excessive ambition should rank first (chronologically at least). Substituting a full opera season with unstaged dramas, mostly oratorios, was unsound business, as Charles Jennens rightly observed.<sup>2</sup> The late arrival to London of the Nobility and gentry, Handel's chief clientele, exposed the problem and suppressed much needed revenue for the winter. Thus any boycott on *Hercules* (5 January), the season's first peak, was likely to undermine the whole scheme.

### REPORT FROM HALLE

In 2009 the annual Handel Festival in Halle and its attendant scholarly conference were organized around the theme of "Handel the European." Both were expanded for this anniversary year which made it even more difficult than usual for one person to attend anywhere near all the events. The festival was particularly strong in staged productions of Handel's operas and oratorios! five in all! but all genres were represented. In addition, attention was paid to Purcell and Haydn, both also celebrating major anniversaries. There was also the opening of the new permanent exhibition in the spruced-up Händel-Haus, as well as special temporary exhibitions on the City of Halle around the Year 1700, Music and the University of Halle-Wittenberg, Handel in Halle's Theaters, and the Role of Orphanages in the Early Modern Period.

The Festival opened on Thursday, June 4 with the Festakt and Festkonzert in the G.F. Händel- Halle, as has become traditional in recent years. The singers of the Händelfestspielchor am Händel-Haus and the Händelfestspielorchester der Staatskapelle Halle, under the direction of Christopher Moulds, presented the third act of the *Occasional Oratorio* HWV 62, preceded by its Overture. The performance showed the benefit of efficient rehearsal, and the performers clearly enjoyed working with their young conductor.

Christopher Moulds returned the next evening to lead the premiere performance of *Floridante* at the opera house, using performing material from the new HHA edition by Dr. Dieter Clausen of Hamburg. Musically the performance was very strong, with excellent playing the Festspielorchester and outstanding singing from the mostly young cast of singers. The staging by Vincent Bousard was efficient but puzzling, with the action taking place in front of a giant mirror and around, under and on an oversized table. There was no attempt to make a political statement or to do anything other than tell the story of the opera, but I had the curious sense that the singers, as well as they performed the music, never quite inhabited the drama. Perhaps

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Handel did face organized opposition in that period, as the documentary record amply shows (to claim the opposite one would need counter evidence, not hermeneutic revolutions). Its predominantly female cast naturally invites feminist scrutiny and helps account for the misogynistic topoi (Maenads, Hecate) in contemporary Handel literature. Yet it could hardly matter for the composer and his box office.

Far more impressive is the strength of this opposition. That Handel resumed his performances in March and nearly completed his season is proof of survival but not a mark of success.<sup>3</sup> In 2007, I offered evidence that Belshazzar's premiere (27 March), too, was targeted by his opponents/competitors, thus justifying Tobias Smollett's censuring of anti-Handelism (Advice, 1746).<sup>4</sup> Music in Good Time, a ballad from September 1745, strengthens my points still further.<sup>5</sup> Mined so far for its allusions to the entertainments of the Ruckholt house and Monticelli's return to Britain,<sup>6</sup> it has yet to be introduced in Handel studies. Of the handful extant copies in the British and Bodleian libraries in Britain and the University of Kansas, Lawrence, and the Huntington, in America, I have used the latter for this first full transcription:<sup>7</sup>

## MUSIC IN GOOD TIME

A

New BALLAD.

[woodcut]

LONDON:

Printed for G. LYON&lt;, &gt; near St. Paul's. 1745.

[2]

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[double line]

MUSIC in Good Time.

A

New BALLAD.

[ribbon]

I.

WHILE threaten'd with Ruin at Home and Abroad,  
By French and by Spaniards bang'd, bully'd, and aw'd;  
No Hopes of Assistance from Russians or Dutch,  
To keep up our Spirits, we can't sing too much.  
Derry down, &c.

II.

Ye Fiddlers, and Pipers, — and Poets unite,  
The first to set Music, to what the last write;  
For e'er we to Business more serious advance,  
We'll have (as Bayes has it) — a Song and a Dance.  
Derry down, &c. [4]

III.

Oh L—c—n, oh C—ke, and each Belman appear,  
With your Songs and your Sonnets to charm ev'ry Ear;  
To spin Catches and Odes, and your Past'ral fine,  
Assist them Grub-Phoebus, assist Bunters Nine.  
Derry down, &c.

IV.

That Vaux-Hall, and Ruckholt, and Ranelagh too,  
And Hoxton and Sadler's, both Old and the New,  
My Lord Cobham's Head, and the Dulwich Green-Man,  
\* May make as much Pastime as ever they can.  
Derry down, &c.

V.

Not Hockley in th' Hole shall a Past'ral 'scape,  
But Solomon's Cantic set Folks all a-gape;  
And the Laureats of Tyres, shall make the Grovering  
With Odes dull and loyal, in Praise of the King.  
Derry down, &c. [5]

VI.

Leave Guns, Drums and Trumpets, that Music of Hell,  
To the Frenchmen so bold, and the Spaniards so fell;  
Our Great Men (God bless them) to lulling incline,  
And manage Affairs to a Tune — very fine.  
Derry down, &c.

VII.

The French King and Tencin may torture their Pates,  
How to plague and distress all the Neighb'ring States:  
No Matter, brave Boys, — for, hark in your Ear,  
We've hir'd fresh Singers, — there's an Op'ra this Year.  
Derry down, &c.

VIII.

Most nobly we've sped with Venetian Allies,  
What tho' they refuse us all useful Supplies;  
Who shall dare banter our grave Negotiation,  
Since for Money with Songstress they'll furnish the  
Nation.  
Derry down, &c. [6]

IX.

What tho' our Troops, with their gallant Commanders,  
Have made such a pitiful Figure in Flanders;  
Our Ladies at Home, in a Campaign more glorious,  
Have routed poor Handel, and his Oratorio's.  
Derry down, &c.

X.

Our serious Concerns, they're safe, let me tell ye,  
Since ev'ry Hour we expect Monticelli:  
And what have we lost by our last Overthrow?  
Since, to pleasure the Mob, we have still Beard and  
Lowe.  
Derry down, &c.

XI.

The Nobles of France, who for Honour expose  
 Their Persons, so gay and gallant, 'gainst their Foes;  
 'Midst Music and Dancing their Conquests advance,  
 Nor will sell for a Song the Glory of France.  
 Derry down, &c. [7]

XII.

Our Nobles of Britain, of Taste more refin'd,  
 To ev'ry Pleasure devote all their Mind;  
 'Midst Music and Dancing their Moments they spin,  
 But still with regard to a precious whole Skin.  
 Derry down, &c.

XIII.

The Cits of the Court, and the Nobles of the City,  
 The former grown foggy, the last sadly witty,  
 With uniform Taste the Land shall confound,  
 By damning all Sense, and preferring all Sound.  
 Derry down, &c.

XIV.

Then, hey my dear Friends, since plainly we're sinking,  
 Still let us be gay, and damn all dull Thinking;  
 And if we must go, we'll still raise our Notes,  
 And die, like the Swans, with our Songs in our Throats.  
 Derry down, &c. [8]

XV.

The Scotch are in Arms, and the English quite poor,  
 And Pop'ry waits, like the Wolf at the Door:  
 The halloo, Boys, halloo, let's laugh, dance and sing,  
 Like Beggars so merry, — and God save the King.  
 Derry down, &c.

FINIS.

[woodcut]

One of countless ephemera sprouting in the wake of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion, the ballad is unique in pitting music against patriotism. At a time of national peril, entertainments of any sort lead to inertia and escapism (by suggestion, also treason). England's traditional enemies (even the French) are portrayed as manlier than the nation's elites, who are preoccupied with the resumption of Italian opera and the imminent arrival of a castrato (Monticelli).<sup>8</sup>

The reference to Handel in stanza IX precedes that in Smollett by more than half-a-year and might have served as its source. In turn, the use of 'rout' might have come from the poem 'To Mr. HANDEL' (January 1745)<sup>9</sup>. Aside from his long association with the Hanoverian monarchy, Handel represents here native culture suffering from agents of foreign taste. Also, the stress on female opposition is meant to embarrass the British peerage: the ladies are more resolved and effective in their cultural campaigns than their spouses are in the battlefield. This evokes Lady Brown's statement to Lord

Essex a decade ago: 'if Lady Essex and I, had been of the Conference at Vienna, I believe we should have given fewer Pensions to the Spaniards, and others, and apply'd that money to maintain in Italy the Troops that would have been sufficient for the preservation of more Countreys. your Lordsp sees what a great Politician I am'.<sup>10</sup>

As a Handelian source, Music in Good Time reminds us how tightly knit Handel's career was to Georgian politics. If Italian opera served as a cultural proxy of political division during the 1720s and 1730s, English oratorio became a new focal point for those championing Britain's religious and cultural heritage. The new source demonstrates that the 1745 Rebellion helped polarize the rift between the two genres. This in turn would provide Handel with a stepping-stone to launch the most stable and profitable period of his career, indeed the one that propelled him to immortality.

— Ilias Chrissochoidis

1 *The Daily Advertiser*, no. 4442, Thursday 17 January 1745, [1]; *Handel Reference Database* <ichriss.ccarh.org/HRD>, 1745: Jan 17.

2 *HRD*, 1745: Feb 21.

3 "How is the hero fall'n!": New Light on Handel's Darkest Hour (1745)," 2007 American Handel Festival, Princeton University, 19-21 April 2007.

4 [Tobias Smollett], *Advice: A Satire* (London: George Freer, 17[46]), 13n. David Hunter has recently scrutinized the claims of the poem in his "Puppet Politics: Tobias Smollett, Charlotte Charke, and Theatrical Opposition to Handel," *Theatre Notebook* 58/1 (2004): 7-17.

5 It is listed in the September issue of *The Gentleman's Magazine* 15 (1745), 504. See also D. F. Foxon, *English Verse, 1701-1750: A Catalogue of Separately Printed Poems with Notes in Contemporary Collected Editions*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1:491 (item M567).

6 *The Gentleman's Magazine* 84/2 (July-December 1814), 11; Thomas McGeary and Xavier Cervantes, "From Farinelli to Monticelli: an opera satire of 1742 re-examined," *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 141 ([no. 1154, May] 1999), 287-289: 289.

7 Shelfmark, Rare Books 283550.

8 Margaret Brown in Venice to Lord Essex in Turin, 3 April 1734: British Library, Add. Ms. 27733, f. 47v.

9 *The Daily Advertiser*, no. 4445, Monday 21 January 1745, [1]; William C. Smith, "Handel's Failure in 1745: New Letters of the Composer," *The Musical Times* 77 ([no. 1121, July] 1936): 593-98; reprinted in his *Concerning Handel His Life and Works* (London et al.: Cassell, 1948), 153-55.

10 Margaret Brown in Venice to Lord Essex in Turin, 3 April 1734: British Library, Add. Ms. 27733, f. 47v.

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