The American Handel Society and Princeton University Department of Music present the
American Handel Festival

Thursday, April 19  Friday, April 20  Saturday, April 21
librettist brought the Messianic message down to a more tangible level, showing that just as God planned and worked out the deliverance of the Israelites through Cyrus, He will bring about the greater salvation of His people through Christ. Cyrus’s fulfillment of the prophecy, therefore, heralds the ultimate hero and deliverer, Christ.

Panel Discussion: Handel’s Messiah, Judaism, and Christian Triumphalism

Michael Marissen (Swarthmore College);
Wendy Heller (Princeton University); Ruth Smith (Cambridge, UK)

A discussion of Michael Marissen’s theory of “anti-Jewish rejoicing” in Messiah. Marissen, Smith, and Heller will each make short presentations prior to a freer discussion. Audience participation will be welcomed.

Paper Session 3

Music, Text, and Interpretation

Richard King (University of Maryland), chair

“How the Hero Is Fallen!” New Light on Handel’s Darkest Hour (1745)

Ilias Chrissochoidis (Stanford University)

The spectacular failure of Hercules in January 1745 marks the lowest point in Handel’s career, so far as the composer openly conceded artistic and financial defeat. Recent scholarship credits Handel’s excessive ambition for this outcome more than any conspiracy against the production. New sources, however, demonstrate that opposition to Handel in 1744–45 was real, strong, and continuous. Following his announcement to continue performances, the opera party mounted two productions that blocked his return to Saturday nights and targeted Lenten Wednesdays (also spoiling Belshazzar’s premiere). Handel, moreover, had to cope with two oratorio series by Defesch and Arne, haphazard performances of a celebrated variety show, and a malicious accusation that he had hurt the musicians’ charity fund concert. His crisis did not end with tokens of public support in late January; opposition and adversity followed him throughout the season.
In this context, a hitherto unknown version of the poem "To Mr. Handel" suggests that Hercules's failure in 1745 might have rested on its allegorical power. The view of Handel as murdered Orpheus brings the two in alignment with the drama's hero. All three share conflicting dualities (Italian opera/English oratorio, human/divine nature), die "by a woman's hand" (Lady Brown, Thracian women, Dejanira), through treacherous means (boycott, ambush, poisoned cloak), and as a consequence of jealousy. Like Hercules, Handel, too, conquered a new kingdom (English language) and brought home (opera house) a splendid genre (oratorio), thus arousing the "jealous frenzy" of his companions (opera patrons), whose unlawful attempts to reclaim him led to his death as an opera composer, but also to a new life as a British composer. Thomas Broughton's superb knowledge of mythology, Handel's earlier attempts toward self-commemoration, and Lady Brown's strong emotive nature lend credibility to this reading and, perhaps, help us situate Handel's fall on the threshold between myth and reality.

Transfiguring Time: Music's Conversions in Handel's Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno

(Sarah Paden, Princeton University)

In his discussion on allegory in Baroque music, Manfred Bukofzer notes, "From the way in which the analogy [between the two realms of the sensuous and the spiritual] is contrived we can learn a great deal about the style of a given period." I would like to explore this possibility through an exegesis of Handel's first "Italian" oratorio, Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno (Rome, 1707), focusing on its representations of Time (Tempo). In depictions of the classical figures associated with Time (Cronus or Saturn) there resides a potent dualism and, thus, a paradoxical nature, sunny and melancholic, tyrannical and utopian. As Christian, moral allegory, Time figures prominently in Baroque painting, whether in terms of worldly impermanence, as in the vanitas, and natura morta traditions, or in theological terms, as the mirror's revelatory temporality of the soul's conversion to truth. Thus, the Roman oratorio's allegorical reconciliation of the temporal and sacred may be situated in a historical lineage of complex, interdisciplinary representation. Given that the original context of Il Trionfo's signification was the Arcadian Academy "crèche," the conflation of the moral and aesthetic programs of this work is only natural. Whereas Cardinal Pamphili controlled the constructions of allegory (and terms of analogy) in the libretto, in Handel's rendering of the oratorio, Bellezza remains suspended between the opposing counsels of Piacere (Pleasure) and Disinganno (Truth or "Dis-conceit"), while the role of music in the atonement of her soul becomes the, at times, dramatic, at times, ironic subtext. Through the music's patterning of tonal and figural allegory, as well as its rhetorical play of stylistic dialectics (sacred and secular; dramatic and pastoral), Handel manifests and resolves the many-layered paradoxes of this transcendent Baroque oratory.