

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.