HERCULES
George Frederic Handel

American Handel Festival at Princeton University

Princeton University Glee Club
Saturday 21st April 2007, 8:00pm
Richardson Auditorium
George Frederic Handel
(1685-1759)

Hercules
A Musical Drama
in 3 acts

Dramatis Personae

Hercules Mischa Bouvier, bass
Dejanira, his wife Deanne Meek, mezzo-soprano
Hyllus, his son Michael Colvin, tenor
Iöle, princess of Oechalia Jolle Greenleaf, soprano
Lichas, a herald Ian Howell, countertenor
Priest of Jupiter Charles Schneider, bass
Chorus of Trachinians & Princeton University Glee Club
Oechalians

Scene: Trachin in Thessaly

Obligato Krista Feeney, violin
Obligato Laura Smith, violin
Continuo Lynda Saponara, harpsichord
Continuo Lindy Clark, violoncello
Continuo John Feeney, contrabass

Richard Tang Yuk, Conductor

Pre-concert talk by Professor David Ross Hurley
“The characters in Handel’s Hercules” 7:00pm

THE WALTER L. NOLLNER CONCERT
“The Composition is as good as possible”

Donald Burrows

Handel’s career in London during the 1730’s was dominated by competition from a rival Italian opera company. This phase would seem to have come to an end in the years 1741-43, when Handel gave the last performance of his own performances of Italian opera and, after his visit to Dublin, established a new basis for his career in English works of the oratorio type. He may, however, have found the effects of competition from London’s opera supporters even more disturbing during the period that ensued. His first season in the new pattern, at Covent Garden Theatre during Lent 1743, was marked by success of his new oratorio Sampson, but the writer Horace Walpole’s assessment of the prickly situation (in a private letter) is significant. It begins: “Handel has set up an oratorio against the Operas, and succeeds.” The Italian opera company at the King’s Theatre, Haymarket was managed by determined aristocratic patrons, and the survival of their performances was, as ever with this genre in London, highly precarious, both financially and artistically; they could not afford any competition that might drain off their subscribers and audiences.

Matters seem to have worsened in the summer of 1743. Handel apparently indicated that he would be willing to compose a work or two for the Italian opera company but then changed his mind. Although he may have co-operated to the extent of making one of his old opera scores available for their next season, an atmosphere of rather distant hostility seems to have been established. Worse still, in Handel’s following Lenten season at Covent Garden, his repertoire of major new works paired the biblical oratorio Joseph and his Brethren with a secular work, Semele, based on a stage drama by William Congreve from the early part of the century. Although Semele was performed in English and “after the manner of an Oratorio,” the subject matter was clearly theatrical- Charles Jennens, Handel’s friend and librettist, described it as a “bawdy opera” – and it would probably have been regarded as a challenge by the Italian opera company, which in the spring of 1744 was on the point of collapse.

When the company found itself unable to proceed with any performances at all in the season of 1744-45, Handel moved physically into their territory by taking over the King’s Theatre for his oratorio performances. In preparation for this move, he composed two major scores in the summer of 1744, again coupling a biblical subject with a secular one – Belshazzar and Hercules. On the autograph of Hercules he recorded the progress of composition: he began drafting the score on 19 July 1744, completed the three parts successively on 30 July, 11 August and 17 August, and finished tidying up his music four days later. His month’s labour generated more than 250 pages of fluently written music. Handel’s plans for this season at the King’s Theatre were ambitious. At Covent Garden in 1743 and 1744 he had performed only during the Lenten period, beginning each time with a six-performance subscription and then offering a further six performances when success was assured. Now he advertised a 24-performance subscription, beginning in the autumn of 1744 and continuing through to spring 1745. The timing of the season was comparable to that habitually followed by London’s opera companies, who would often give 50 or more performances during this period. Handel envisaged putting on only half that number, but without knowing whether the London audience would support a series of more than a dozen performances of English oratorio, and over a longer season than had been customary for works of this type. Although he gathered enough subscriptions to enable him to begin, he soon ran into trouble. His initial idea- to start out with performances on every Saturday – proved impractical: the first night, a revival of Deborah on 3 November 1744, was so poorly attended that he had to discontinue the series until more subscribers “were in Town.”

In November and December he gave just four performances in all, two each of Deborah and Semele; then, following a common theatrical practice in London that introduced new works early in the new year, the first performance of Hercules was announced for 5 January 1745. By then Handel had revised the score in order to extend and adapt the role of the herald Lichas (originally a minor tenor part) for the celebrated tragedienne and singer Susanna Cibber, who had already created roles in a number of Handel’s earlier oratorios. The rest of the principals, too, had close associations with the composer: the bass Henry Reinhold (Hercules), the French soprano Elisabeth Duparc, known as “Francesina” (Jole), and the tenor John Beard (Hyllus), who in the course of his long career appeared in more works by the composer than any other singer. Only the role of Dejanira, arguably the most important in Hercules, was created by Miss Robinson, who that season was collaborating with Handel for the first time.

Unfortunately Hercules did not restore the fortunes of Handel’s enterprise, as Charles Jennings, who was probably Handel’s finest librettist (providing him with the texts of Saul, Messiah and Belshazzar), glumly reported in a letter on 21 February:

“Handel has had worse success that ever he had before... For the last two years he had perform’d Oratorios in Convent-Garden Playhouse on Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent only, when there was no publick Entertainment of any consequence to interfere with him: & his gains were considerable. £2100 one year, & £1600 the other, for only 12 performances. Flush’d with this success,
the Italian Opera being drop'd, he takes the Opera-House in the Hay-market for this season at the rent of £400, buys him a new Organ, & instead of an Oratorio produces an English Opera call'd Hercules, which he performs on Saturdays during the run of Plays, Concerts, Assemblies, Drums, Routs, Hurricanes & all the madness of Town Diversions. His Opera, for want of the top Italian voices, Action, Dresses, Scenes & Dances, which us'd to draw company, & prevent the Undertaker's losing above 3 to 4 thousand pounds, had a scarce half a house the first night, much less than half the second; & he has been quiet ever since."

Jennens's assessment can now be complemented by an eye-witness report of the first night of Hercules itself, from a recently discovered letter written on 8 January by the fourth Earl of Shaftesbury to his cousin James Harris. Shaftesbury describes a last-minute crisis among his singers, which must have contributed to the disappointment of the thinly attended performance, and also reveals that the "opera party" was actively undermining Handel's theatre season, even though they were not offering performances of their own by drawing his audience away to other London entertainments:

"As you intimated in the letter you favour'd me with last week that you would like to hear how Hercules went off, I think I would to begin by acquainting you how things happened. There was a saving house and no more, a dismal prospect to all lovers of music of what is to be expected. A lady bespoke fifty places (one Miss Mathews) at Drury Lane, in order to hurt Handel; and the solicitations against him increase and gain ground every day. Unfortunately Mrs. Cibber was taken violently ill, that she could not perform: so Waltz (the minor role of the Priest of Jupiter was probably sung by Gustavus Waltz) was obliged to read a few lines here and there or a recitativo to carry on the sense of the drama. He had such a miserable hoarseness, that he was hardly able to utter a word. This produced a light laughter and a faint hiss from the audience. Francesca did excellently, Miss Robinson the same, and also Beard and Reinhold; and though Miss Robinson really showed great execution, yet the invertebrate audience gave her scarce any applause. The composition is as good as possible. Wadman (probably the flautist Carl Friedrich Weideman), Collet (probably the violinist Richard Colet), &c. tell me he never wrote anything beyond it in his life. The musicians are charmed with Hercules. However seeing going on so horridly, the poor man must to save himself from ruin think of retiring, and his friends have it now under consideration (with great privacy) what step he ought to take. I am quite provoked to see people behave so partially."

Handel gave only one more performance of Hercules that season, on 12 January; Mrs. Cibber had recovered by then, and the score could be restored to its intended form. He was now, early in 1745, clearly facing a professional crisis, and he paused for a time in order to gauge the extent of his support. Fortunately reassurance was soon forthcoming from his subscribers, and he managed to give 16 performances in all before closing the season. In order to fulfill the promised run of 24, he made up the difference by offering six performances at Covent Garden early in 1746. By then, however, the London theatrical rivalries had been rendered largely irrelevant by panic over the 1745 Jacobite rebellion.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of dwindling audiences in the 1744-45 season and the short term crisis of Mrs. Cibber's illness, the performances of this time may actually have been among the best that Handel ever gave of his English works. He had the use of the opera-house orchestra, described by one observer as "the very best hands of all sorts," an experienced cast of soloists who had both musical and dramatic talents to bring his works to life, a supporting contingent of choral voices that included boys from the Chapel Royal.

After the initial performances in November 1744 the music publisher John Walsh wrote to James Harris: "Pity so great a man should ever perform without crowd'd audiences, who's music will ever be in esteem & can never be perform'd to the advantage it is now." But the faithful who attended Hercules undoubtedly appreciate the work in spite of the practical problems that plagued the first performance, and Shaftesbury reported that the "musicians were charmed with it."

Although given in oratorio style, without staging or theatrical costumes, Hercules was correctly described in advertisements and on the original printed libretto as a "Musical Drama," and both Handel and his librettist Thomas Broughton consistently referred to its major divisions as "acts" rather than "parts." There is no documentary record of the collaboration between the two men, but the evidence from the musical sources suggests that they must have worked closely together on the creation and revision of Hercules during 1744. Broughton (not publicly acknowledged as librettist at the time) was clergyman well versed in Classical literature whose appointments included a group of parishes near Bristol and the office of Reader to the Temple of London. In the printed text he acknowledged his use of two sources for Hercules: the ninth book of Ovid's Metamorphoses and Sophocles' tragedy The Trachinians; he seemed also to have drawn on the Latin tragedy Hercules Oetaeus by Seneca the younger. From Ovid comes the central motive of Dejanira's jealousy of Iole, and also the hint that her suspicion may have been the consequence of rumour rather than fact. The various legends about Hercules attest to his brute strength and to the heroism that followed from his choice of the path of "Virtue" rather than "Pleasure," but they also expose some less appealing aspects to his character. The resolution of the character into a virtuous hero seems to have been largely Broughton's invention.
In the libretto for Hercules Handel has an unusually well constructed drama, one ideally suited to the technical needs of his mature oratorio-type works, with potent musical opportunities on choruses and aria movements for delineating strong characters and strong situation. The chorus contributed to the drama by reinforcing, and sometimes extending, the ideas and moods evoked by the main characters' words. At the end of the acts the choral movements provide the necessary formal closure, but elsewhere they serve as encouragement (as in "Let none despair") or to comment on the action (most powerfully in "Jealousy! Infernal pest"). As in Semele, Handel has employed the full da capo aria structure derived from Italian opera more frequently than in his biblical oratorios. Lichas' arias also provide a lighter, major-key foil to the main story, but the tone of the work as a whole is necessarily serious. Hercules, Hyllus and Iole are all dramatically effective parts worth substantial aria movement, but the most compelling of all is that of Dejanira.

The drama culminates in the powerful soliloquies for the two principals of Act III., and their emotional turmoil is anticipated in the Sinfonia that opens the act, with its alteration of Largo and Furioso. Hercules' "O Jove! What land is this," given added weight in context by coming immediately after the chorus "Tyrants now no more shall dread," might well have formed the climax of the drama, but it is at least matched by Dejanira's scena "Where shall I fly?" which is one of the high points in all of Handel's English works. It is remarkable that Miss Robinson, the original singer of this role, seems to have had no career in London, with Handel or anyone else, beyond the 1744-45 season.

Quotations from the correspondence of James Harris are taken from Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill, Music and Theatre in Handel's World (Oxford University Press), by courtesy of the Earl of Malmesbury.

Artist Profiles

Mischa Bouvier

Hailed by the Monterey County Herald as a "polished performer with a very well-handled voice" and the Cincinnati Enquirer for his "solemnis and distinguished" singing, baritone Mischa Bouvier continues to gain acclaim for his opera, concert and recital work. Mischa's opera include Le Medecin in Pellèas et Méliande, Bouncer and Washington Dandy in The Ballad of Baby Doe, Officer in The Barber of Seville, Usher in Trial by Jury, and Death in Gustav Holst's Savitri. As an Artist Apprentice for Lyric Opera Cleveland in 2005, Mischa covered the roles of Georg in She Loves ME and William in the professional Ohio premiere of Philip Glass's The Fall of the House of Usher. This season's performances include two concerts of Songs from the Labyrinth with Sting, lutenist Edin Karamazov and the Concord Ensemble in Los Angeles; bass soloist in a concert of cantatas by J.S. Bach, Telemann and Georg Benda with the Bach and the Baroque Ensemble in Pittsburgh; baritone soloist is the tri-state premier of Richard Einhorn's Voices of Light with the Lebanon Symphony Orchestra & Annonymous 4 in Ohio; the roles of Bardolph and Chief Justice in Gordon Getty's opera Plumb Jack in Albuquerque and Mazatlán, Mexico; and the role Jigger Craigin in Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel with Keith Lockhart and the Boston Pops during a fellowship at the Tanglewood Music Center in Massachusetts.

Deanne Meek

This season Deanne Meek creates the role of Ma Joad in Ricky Ian Gordon's Grapes of Wrath (Minnesota, Utah), makes her Teatro Real debut in Ariadne auf Naxos, and sings Bianca in Eine florentinische Tragedie (Bard Summerscape Festival). Past credits include Ruggiero in Alcina (English National Opera) Derabella in Costanza (Strasbourg); Rosso in Die Walküre (Châtelet); Hermia in A Midsummer Night's Dream (Liceu, La Monnaie); Komponist in Ariadne auf Naxos (Tolosa); Rosina in Il barbiere di Siviglia and Octavian in Der Rosenkavalier (England's Opera North); Angelina in La Cenerentola (Grange Festival); and Cherubino in Le Nozze di Figaro and Hänsel in Hänsel and Gretel with New York City Opera. Additional baroque credits include Nerone in L'incoronazione di Poppea, Mozart's Requiem, Sesto in Giuditta Ceasar, Bach's Magnificat, Vivaldi's Gloria, Handel's Messiah, and Beneficent in Boston Baroque as well as Zenobla in Radamisto (St. Louis) and Dido in Dido and Aeneas (Spoleto Festival U.S.A.). Future engagements include Marie Marie in Dialogues of the Carmelites (Uthl), Meg Page in Falstaff (England's Opera North), and her debut with Opera de Lyon in a reprisal of her acclaimed performances of Hermia in A Midsummer Night's Dream.
Michael Colvin

Hailed as “a perfect model of the ‘bel canto’ style of singing” (Sun Newspapers) and praised as having “one of the most beautiful young lyric tenor instruments around” (Opera News), Irish-Canadian tenor Michael Colvin has achieved international recognition with acclaimed performances throughout Canada, the U.S. and in Europe. Michael Colvin’s 2006-07 season features an exciting mix of debuts and important return engagements including Rodrigo in Rossini’s La Donna del Lago for Garsington Opera (UK), Ferrando in Così Fan Tutte to open the Canadian Opera Company’s new Four Seasons Centre for the Perforning Arts and Count Almaviva in Opera Lyra Ottawa’s The Barber of Seville.

Concert highlights this season include a return to San Francisco for Weihnachtsoratorium with Nicholas McGegan and his Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Beethoven’s Symphony No 9 and Mozart’s Requiem with Peter Oundjian and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Elijah with the Ulster Orchestra in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Mahler’s Das Lied Von Der Erde for the National Ballet of Canada and Arvo Pärt’s Passio with the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir. Future highlights include Portland Opera’s La Cenerentola, Beethoven’s Symphony No 9 with the National Arts Centre Orchestra, Elgar’s Dream of Gerontius with the Elora Festival and Verdi’s Requiem with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.

Jolle Greenleaf

Hailed as “a golden soprano” by the New York Times, Jolle Greenleaf is established as a specialist in 17th and 18th century repertoire. She received a Master’s degree from the Mannes College of Music and a coveted Beebe Fellowship to study at The Royal Conservatory in The Hague. Ms. Greenleaf has performed with illustrious period instrument conductors such as Martin Gester, Bernard Labadie, Ton Koopman, Eric Milnes, Andrew Parrott, John Scott, and Jeanette Sorrell. She is often engaged as a recitalist, and has performed many roles including Belinda in Purcell’s Dido and Aeneas, Amour and Céphise in Rameau’s Pygmalion, Sandrina in Mozart’s La Finta Giardiniera, Licori in Vivaldi’s La Finta Sofia, and in the title role in Cavalli’s La Calista. She is frequently heard in baroque masterworks including J.S. Bach’s Mass in B Minor, Christmas and Easter Oratorios, Magnificat and St. John Passion, Handel’s Jephtha and Messiah, Monteverdi’s Vespers of 1610, and Purcell’s King Arthur and Fairy Queen. In 2005, she debuted at Carnegie’s Zankel Hall under Ton Koopman performing Bach’s Trauer Ode. She can be heard on Tiffany Consort’s CD’s O Magnum Mysterium (2006 Grammy nominated) and In Sare and Certain Hope (released 12/06). Ms. Greenleaf is the voice teacher to the boys of St. Thomas Choir in NYC.

Ian Howell

Noted for his "...polished sound, clear resonance, and powerful enunciation..." by San Francisco Classical Voice, Ian Howell, Countertenor, has performed on major concert stages across the United States, Europe, Mexico, Canada, Japan, and Taiwan. Mr. Howell recently took First Prize at the American Bach Soloists International Solo Competition with an acclaimed performance of Bach’s Cantata, Vergnügte Ruh, and Third Prize (and made his Carnegie Hall Debut) at the prestigious Oratorio Society of New York’s Competition. This Blackburg, VA native can be heard with the all-male chamber choir Chanticleer on one DVD and seven CDs, including the GRAMMY award winning Lamentations and Praises, and the GRAMMY award nominated Our American Journey. Future engagements include performances with The American Bach Soloists, The Portland Baroque Orchestra, The Choir of St. Thomas Fifth Ave (NYC), and a debut recording with the American Bach Soloists. Mr. Howell is dedicated to spreading awareness of the countertenor voice, and has given master classes and lecture/demonstrations across the country. Recordings and a performance calendar can be found at www.ianhowellcountertenor.com. Mr. Howell graduated December ’06 with a Master’s degree in Early Music, Song, and Chamber Ensemble offered jointly by the Yale Institute of Sacred Music and the Yale School of Music.

Richard Tang Yuk

Mr. Tang Yuk holds a Doctoral degree from the Indiana University School of Music and is a Licentiate of the Royal Schools of Music (UK). He studied conducting with Amy Kaiser, Robert Porco, Thomas Dunn and Helmuth Rilling; Harpsichord and continuo studies with Elizabeth Wright at the Early Music Institute at Indiana. He is currently Artistic Director of The Princeton Festival, formerly Assistant Artistic Director & Chorus Master at the opera Festival of New Jersey where he has conducted several operas. He was Conductor of the National Youth Orchestra of Trinidad and Resident Conductor for Trinidad Opera Company before coming to the United States. He is currently on the Music Department faculty at Princeton University as Director of Choral Music and Associate Director of the Program in Musical Performance. He teaches classes in Conducting, Opera and Vocal Performance. He has served as choral clinician for the New Jersey Regional Schools Council, and has conducted at Lincoln Center, New York, for the National Choral Council. His choirs have performed in several European and North American cities. South America, the Pacific and the Caribbean. His performances of the major choral-orchestral literature have received critical acclaim. He is from the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago.
Charles Schneider

Charles Schneider is a baritone from New Jersey who enjoys a busy schedule of both singing and teaching. Mr. Schneider currently serves as an adjunct professor of voice at New Jersey City University and Wagner College where he is also the director of the Opera Workshop. He has sung roles with Des Moines Metro Opera, Lyric Opera Cleveland, The Princeton Festival, Opera New York, The OK Mozart Festival, Concert Operetta Theatre of Philadelphia, Anchorage Opera, Opera Iowa, National Opera Company, and The Wildwood Park for the Performing Arts in Little Rock, Arkansas. Most recently Mr. Schneider has performed the role of Don Alfonso in The Marriage of Figaro with the Concert Operetta Theater of Philadelphia and Opera at Rutgers. Last summer he appeared on the main stage at Princeton Festival as the Imperial Commissioner in Madama Butterfly and will be back again this summer to perform El Dancairo in Carmen. Currently, he is enrolled in the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at Mason Gross School of the Arts and plans on receiving his DMA within the next year.

Orchestra

Violin I
Krista Bennion Feeney (Concertmaster)
Anca Nicolau
Susan Shumway
Leona Nadj
Robert Moose

Violin II
Laura Smith (Principal)
Karl Kawahara
Elizabeth Miller
Jonathan Kahn

Viola
Jessica Troy (Principal)
Ron Lawrence
Margret Hjaltested

Violoncello
Lindy Clarke (Principal & Continuo)
Lisa Terry

Oboe
Marsha Heller (Principal)
Sarah Davol

Horn
Karl Kramer (Principal)
Anthony Cecere

Timpani
Peter Wilson (Principal)

Orchestra Personnel Manager
Diane Lesser

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Lily Arbisser ’08
Carey Batschi ’10
Margaret Byrom ’10
Deborah Chang ’10
Michelle Chen ’09
Becky Harper ’10
Faaria Kherani ’09
Jocelyn Miller ’08
Ronee Penoi ’07
Alexis Rodda ’10

Alto
Amy Coenen ’07
Sylvia Dee ’10
Sarah Eldridge GS
Juliet Forsheaw ’07
Rachel George ’10
Jenny Hsi ’09
Chenxin Jiang ’09
Brenda Jin ’10
Olivia Kang ’09
Ting Liu ’10
Anupama Pattabiraman ’10
Adrienne Raphael ’10
Sara Shaw ’10
Maya Srinivasan ’10
Kate Stevick ’09

Tenor
Dylan Alban ’09
Christian Burset ’07
Tom Gavula ’11
Frederick Hall ’09
Zaafir Kherani ’08
Matt Krob ’08
Steve Ross ’10
Jonathan Schwartz ’10
Milton Wilkins ’09
Joe Zipkin ’07

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Brandon Bierlein ’08
Anand Dharan ’07
David Fort ’10
Adam Fox ’09
Geoffrey Guray ’10
Thomas Kneeland ’10
Dan Moulton ’09
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Princeton University Glee Club

The Princeton University Glee Club is the oldest singing group in existence at Princeton. It was founded in 1874 by Andrew Fleming West ’74, who later became the first Dean of the Graduate College. The Glee Club is currently celebrating its 132nd season of concerts.


On the eve of the College football games in 1913, the Glee Club held its first concerts with the Glee Clubs of Harvard and Yale Universities, beginning a tradition of joint concerts that have continued to this day.

The Princeton University Glee Club was involved in some remarkable projects in the 1930’s. They gave the American Premiere of Stravinsky’s Oedipus Rex with Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1931; performances of Schoenberg’s Gurrelieder and Wagner’s Parsifal in 1932 and 1933; Bach’s Mass in B Minor at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1935; and with the Vassar College Choir, gave the first United States performance of Jean Philippe Rameau’s Castor et Pollux in 1937.

From 1958 to 1992 Walter L. Nollner led the Glee Club, giving him the honor of the longest tenure of any previous conductor. Under his direction the choir traveled outside the United States for the first time, establishing a pattern of international concert tours to Europe, Asia, South America and the South Pacific, including two around-the-world tours. In honour of Professor Nollner’s service to the Glee Club, an endowment fund has been established in his name to assist the Glee Club with its yearly operations. The Nollner Endowment Fund was officially launched in February 1999.

Under the current director Richard Tang Yuk, the Glee Club has continued the tradition of overseas concert tours and expanded the repertoire to include more works of the twentieth-century. The Glee Club recently returned from a successful concert tour to Hong Kong in January 2007. The Glee Club presents several concerts every year in the spectacular acoustic of Alexander Hall on the Princeton campus. They perform a major oratorio each spring with professional soloists and orchestra. Recent masterworks performed include Bach’s St. Matthew Passion, Haydn’s Die Jahreszeiten and Copland’s In the Beginning.

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