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PURCELL, HANDEL, HAYDN, AND MENDELSSOHN: ANNIVERSARY REFLECTIONS
NEW COLLEGE, OXFORD, 27–29 MARCH 2009

During the final weekend of March 2009 New College, Oxford held a conference to observe the four major composer anniversaries occurring in this year: the three hundred and fiftieth of the birth of Henry Purcell, the two hundred and fiftieth of the death of George Frideric Handel, the two hundredth of the death of Joseph Haydn and the two hundredth of the birth of Felix Mendelssohn. The organizers of the event took rich advantage of the conjunction to prepare a programme that not only considered each composer individually but often also explored the numerous links between them, especially with respect to reception history. Not surprisingly, England became a focal point of the conference: Purcell was a native, Handel acquired citizenship during a residence of nearly half a century, and Haydn and Mendelssohn paid visits of brief duration but great artistic significance. Nevertheless, the weekend did not merely celebrate four canonical figures and the role of English musical culture in fostering their achievement; justifying the title of the conference, a notable number of presentations engaged in critical and historiographical reflection upon the legacies of these composers.

The programme consisted of a total of forty papers arranged in two parallel sessions, a lengthier presentation devoted to the economic aspects of reputation and the role of the anniversary, a roundtable on the history of recordings of music by the four composers, two lecture-recitals and a concluding keynote address. The event's organizers took care to produce a balanced set of offerings: of the forty papers, seven dealt specifically with Purcell, six with Handel, six with Haydn and eight with Mendelssohn, while the remainder explored connections and parallels between two or more of these figures. In the following report I shall focus on presentations concerned particularly with Handel and Haydn, with the caveat that such an approach does some injustice to the integrated discussions that characterized the three days of the meeting.

A session on Handel during the conference's first day, a Friday, featured three papers of diverse methodologies and perspectives. Amanda Babington (University of Manchester) offered a close study of the autograph score of *Messiah*, demonstrating how the special traits of Handel's calligraphy constitute a distinctive language whose detailed examination yields significant insights for performers, particularly with regard to the pacing and division of the work. Ilias Chrissochoidis (Stanford University), who was not present and whose paper was read, argued that while a preoccupation with musical style has led to the designation of Handel as a late baroque composer, a consideration of the social and historical circumstances of his career results in an alternative view of his important role in fostering the transition to modernity. Anthony Hicks (The Open University), presenting one of the many papers at the conference concerned with reception history, discussed Sir Thomas Beecham's reorchestrations and arrangements of Handel's music as significant creative acts in their own right and thus proposed the notion of a 'Handel/Beecham' oeuvre.

Further papers on Handel formed part of sessions on the relation of music to dance (Friday) and to theatre and the visual arts (Saturday). Jennifer Thorp (University of Oxford) examined the work of the choreographer and dance-master Anthony L'Abbé at the King's Theatre in London, where *Numitore* and *Radamisto* were staged, and offered a picture of the likely sharing of the city's limited fund of professional dancers among different companies. Pieter van der Merwe (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich) surveyed the recent rediscovery of designs by the scene painter Clarkson Stanfield for productions at Drury Lane, among them an 1842 revival of *Acis and Galatea*; these designs illustrate the use by the tragedian Thomas McReady, who directed the theatre at the time, of visual elements common in popular spectacle to promote his high-minded conception of serious drama.

Two sessions, one each on Saturday and Sunday and totalling six papers, were given over to Haydn. Drawing upon the examples of Haydn's *Seven Last Words* and Mozart's piano concertos, Chiara Bertoglio (University of Birmingham) discussed 'hidden verses' in eighteenth-century instrumental music, that is, textual allusions by means of verbally constructed musical motives, which therefore function as a kind of *idée fixe*. Wolfgang



Fuhrmann (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) argued persuasively in favour of recognition of a neglected eighteenth-century aesthetic category, that of the naive, which later acquired a derogatory meaning but in Haydn's lifetime stood alongside comparable categories such as the melancholy and the sublime, providing an important means for conceptualizing purely instrumental music. The final paper of the first session, by myself (Jen-yen Chen, National Taiwan University), made use of the sociological theories of Norbert Elias in order to interpret aspects of the patronage and reception of Haydn's oratorios, which suggest the interlinked, mutually reinforcing nature of aristocratic and bourgeois social classes in Austria around 1800.

In the second of the two sessions, Haydn's worldwide reach was especially apparent in the presentation by Paulo Kühl (Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Brazil), which offered a stimulating discussion of the role of the composer's legacy in the musical politics of early nineteenth-century Brazil. There, an emphasis upon the idea of Haydn's virtue, exemplified by a biography of 1820 by Joachim Le Breton (*Notícia Histórica da vida e das obras de José Haydn*, the first published book on music in the country), helped to articulate a nationalistic distinction between 'German'/'Brazilian' and 'Italian'/'Portuguese'. The second of the papers, by Paul Moulton (The College of Idaho), explored musical representations of Scotland, and because it gave equal consideration to Haydn and Mendelssohn, I shall discuss it further below, in my coverage of presentations dealing broadly with two or more composers. In the third paper, Susan Wollenberg (University of Oxford) placed Haydn's 1791 visit to Oxford for the awarding of an honorary doctorate within a larger context, showing how the frequent performances of his music in the university town for decades afterwards form a significant aspect of the composer's English reception. An additional paper on Haydn by Caryl Clark (University of Toronto), part of the session on staging and the visual arts, imaginatively proposed the notions of inside other and layered othering in its discussions of exoticism and difference in Haydn's operas for the Esterházy court; her examples included *Lo speziale* of 1768, in which a *faux* Turk (the 'outside' other) outsmarts a Jewish apothecary (the 'inside' other), thus expressing a clear hierarchy in the threatening foreignness to be contained by dominant Christian values.

The conference's two lecture-recitals were also devoted to Haydn. On Friday afternoon the ensemble Café Mozart, directed by Derek McCulloch, presented an attractive programme featuring selections from the two collections of twelve songs originally published by Artaria in 1781 and 1784 and later issued in English-language arrangements by Longman in 1786 and 1788, an example of the active business between the two firms that contributed to a familiarity with Haydn's music in England before 1791. Furthermore, reflecting common practices of the time, the performance made use of guitar accompaniment and also included a vocal adaptation of the opening movement of the Keyboard Sonata in C major HXVI:35. On Sunday morning Mekala Padmanabhan (independent scholar, Seattle) introduced a recital by fortepianist Rebecca Maurer of keyboard works and arrangements which illustrated domestic music-making around 1800, among them instrumental versions of three Haydn canzonettas prepared by Thomas Haigh.

As mentioned earlier, papers exploring connections between two or more of the four composers constituted a significant portion of the weekend's reflections. In one of the two sessions on biography that took place on Friday, Christopher Wiley (City University, London) surveyed writings by late nineteenth-century English authors on Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn, in the process cogently demonstrating how they appropriated these figures and claimed them as Britain's own in the face of the 'problem' of a lack of canonical native composers since Purcell. In the other session Sinéad Dempsey-Garratt (University of Manchester) discussed the way in which Mendelssohn suffered in comparisons with Purcell, Handel and Haydn (among others) in nineteenth-century reception, especially with respect to a supposed lack of originality, while John Higney (Carleton University) examined the significant presence of the four composers in the pages of the English music journal *The Harmonicon* (published 1823–1833), whose promotion of musical knowledge and inculcation of 'correct' taste underscored a growing ideology of canon. Michaela Freemanova (Akademie věd České republiky (Czech Academy of Sciences)), in a session entitled 'Later Reception' which also took place on Friday, sketched a broad picture of the dissemination of the works of Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn in the Bohemian lands, offering an impressive range of examples (the author herself was not present, and her paper was read).



As part of the Saturday session on staging and the visual arts, the presentation by Monika Henneman (University of Birmingham) contrasted the frequent condemnation by scholars of operatic stagings of oratorios with the prevalence and success of such crossover performances, especially those that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thereby exposing an academic bias in favour of 'pure' forms. Later in the day two papers illuminated specific dimensions of the familiar linkage of Handel and Haydn. Patricia Debly (Brock University) compared Handel's *Orlando* (1733) and Haydn's *Orlando Paladino* (1782), proposing a revisionist interpretation of the celebrated 'mad' scene of the earlier opera as an ironic commentary on the style and genre of opera seria. Matthew Badham (University of York) considered a different pair of works by these composers, *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* and *The Seasons*, and examined their respective treatments of the dialectic of light and dark central to the aesthetics of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. On the conference's concluding day the aforementioned presentation by Paul Moulton persuasively argued that the 'Scottish' works of Haydn and Mendelssohn functioned as musical guidebooks for virtual tourists, making Scotland exotic, idealizing and taming it for enjoyment in the comfort of the drawing room or the concert hall.

Three larger presentations filled out the conference's programme. The joint paper on Saturday morning by Andrew Pinnock and Will Lingard (University of Southampton) provided the most direct example of the reflective impulse that was in evidence in so many other papers. Critically exploring value (not only economic but also socio-cultural) and the processes by which it is produced, perpetuated, contested and subverted, they detailed the changing promoter–audience relationship in successive Purcell and Handel anniversaries in order to illustrate how such value rests upon an inherently unstable basis. On Saturday afternoon four speakers in a roundtable organized by David Vickers and chaired by Christopher Hogwood assessed the actual and potential role of recordings past, present and future in disseminating knowledge and fostering appreciation of the music of the four composers. The weekend closed with a keynote address by David Hunter (University of Texas, Austin), who provided an appropriate conclusion to the three days of discussions by linking together biography, the practice of anniversary commemorations and the shaping of social memory, identity and heritage that (paradoxically) lies at the heart of the continuing fascination with writing and rewriting the lives of remarkable individuals.

In summary, this conference demonstrated both that the very concept of anniversary merits critical scrutiny and that it can serve as the point of departure for rich, fruitful and stimulating intellectual exchange.

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HAYDN: FORMS OF EXPRESSION

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The two hundredth anniversary of Joseph Haydn's death has brought with it the expected crop of commemorations and celebrations, among which was the conference 'Haydn: Forms of Expression' held in Wellington. The weekend was a rich and variegated celebration of Haydn's achievement. There were two concerts by the New Zealand String Quartet. One of them was hosted by The Honourable Chris Finlayson, Minister of Culture, Peter Diessl, Austrian Consul-General, and Elizabeth Hudson, Director of the New Zealand School of Music. This took place at Parliament House, preceded by commentary by the organizer of the conference, Keith Chapin (New Zealand School of Music), and followed by a reception. There was also a performance of the *Missa brevis Sancti Joannis de Deo* as part of Sunday morning's service at the Anglican