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HANDEL REFERENCES IN *The Evening Advertiser* (1754-1756)

In a recent visit to the Huntington Library, in San Marino, California, I was surprised to discover a complete set of *The Evening Advertiser*, published thrice-a-week in London from 3 March 1754 to 15 April 1758 (641 issues). This is hardly small news, given that the paper's representation in the 'Early English Newspapers' spans forty-nine issues, beginning with no. 462 (12-15 February 1757). Owing to severe time limits, I was able to briefly examine only the first two volumes, concentrating on Handel-significant dates in 1754-6.

Although the *Evening Advertiser's* coverage of theatrical life is minimal, the following excerpts, reprinted here for the first time, indicate that further exploration may be warranted. The first three confirm *Messiah's* growing success as a fundraiser for the Foundling Hospital in the mid-1750s (and close gaps in Deutsch's *Handel* and vol. 4 of the *Händel-Handbuch*). Particularly interesting is the first extract, which reports Handel playing an organ concerto before the second part of the oratorio. The careful phrasing ('performed himself') indicates both awareness of the composer's disability and due appreciation for his continuing support of the charity.

No. 33, Tuesday 14–Thursday 16 May 1754, [1]:

Yesterday in the chapel of the Foundling hospital the sacred oratorio of Messiah was performed for the benefit of that charity, under the direction of George Frederick Handel, Esq; who opened the second act with a concerto on the organ, and performed himself with the universal applause of a numerous and polite audience, whose esteem for the great skill and benevolence of that eminent master can neither be increased nor expressed.

*No. 183, Tuesday 29 April–Thursday 1 May 1755, [3]:*¹

This day the Oratorio of Messiah was performed in the Chapel of the Foundling-hospital towards the support of that noble charity, to a polite and numerous assembly.

No. 347, Tuesday 18–Thursday 20 May 1756, [3]:

The number of ladies at the Foundling Hospital

yesterday at the performance of the Messiah was so great, that it was with the greatest difficulty they got to the coaches; and in the confusion of bringing the coaches to the gate five were broke down.

The next report alludes to the 1755 oratorio clash between Handel and Thomas Arne. It is not sufficiently known that Arne's first steps coincided with the beginning of English oratorio. Indeed, the author of *See and Seem Blind*, a spirited review of London's theatrical affairs in 1732, openly designated *Esther* a reaction to the successful English opera *Amelia*, which served as a professional vehicle for at least half of the Arne family (Arne's sister, the future Mrs. Cibber, sang the title-role).² Handel's sojourn in Dublin in 1741-2 gave Arne an opportunity to fill a gap in London, offering an ambitious production of *Alexander's Feast* (12, 19 March). News of Handel's retirement as a performer in 1754, and frustration over his own suppressed *Eliza* (1754),³ probably encouraged Arne to assert himself as the new creative force in the genre.

His two-week season in the Drury-Lane theatre pitted his oratorio *Abel* (12, 14, and 21 March) and a single night of *Alfred* (19 March) against double performances of *Judas Maccabeus* and *Messiah*.⁴ Aware of the risks involved in such an undertaking, Arne recruited the kingdom's top virtuoso, Felice Giardini, to play first violin and perform a concerto. He also tapped on national sentiment, pairing *Alfred* with 'a Solemn Dirge in Honour of the Heroes who dye [*sic*] in the Service of their Country'.⁵ There is little doubt that he hurt the aging composer professionally ('the Town at Present is much fonder of Arne than Handel'⁶). Still, his success must have been limited, for he did not continue his experiment until after Handel's death.

No. 165, Tuesday 18–Thursday 20 March 1755, [3]:

The Oratorio's to-morrow are, Mr. Handel's Messiah at Covent-Garden; and Mr. Arne's Abel at Drury-lane.

Finally, I take the liberty to include a report on the recovery of Signora Regina Mingotti (1722-1808) in 1756. Her arrival in London in 1754 had galvanized the city's ailing Italian opera.⁷ Aside from her links to Farinelli (she had studied with Porpora and sung in Madrid for a couple of seasons), Mingotti mesmerized Londoners

¹ A similar report appeared in *The Public Advertiser*, no. 6399, Friday 2 May 1755, p. [2].

² 'This alarm'd *H—I*, and out he brings an *Oratorio*': [?Aaron Hill], *See and Seem Blind: Or, A Critical Dissertation on the Publick Diversions, &c.* (London: H. Whitridge, [1732]; repr. with introduction by Robert D. Hume (Los Angeles, 1986), 14.

³ Jane Adas, 'Arne's Progress: An English Composer in Eighteenth-Century London' (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, 1993), 157-8.

⁴ *The Public Advertiser*, nos 6355 (12 March 1755), 6357 (14 March), 6361 (19 March), and 6363 (21 March), all on p. [1].

⁵ *The Public Advertiser*, no. 6361, Wednesday 19 March 1755, p. [1].

⁶ William Shenstone to Lady Luxborough, [29-]30 March 1755: *The Letters of William Shenstone*, ed. Marjorie Williams (Oxford, 1939), 438.

⁷ Charles Burney, *A General History of Music* (London, 1789), iv, 463.



with her physical beauty and prodigious talent (contemporaries described her as a ‘female Garrick’ and declared ‘occhio mortale non vide mai figura simile’⁸). Alas, she proved difficult to deal with, and her frequent absence from the stage on account of ill health and artistic differences with Francesco Vanneschi, the opera’s manager, led to heated public debate.⁹ Although Mingotti did not interact with Handel, we know she participated in a charitable performance of Hasse’s oratorio *I Pellegrini* (with additional music by Giardini) on 25 March 1757, in direct competition with *Judas Maccabeus*.¹⁰ Whether the passage below alludes to an actual pregnancy or ironically compares her long absence to one is something I presently cannot determine.

No. 323, Tuesday 23—Thursday 25 March 1756, [3]:

It is with great joy that we congratulate Les Beaux Esprits on Signora M***** being delivered from the indisposition which she has laboured under for nine months past, to the frequent mortification of her idolizers and managers of the Opera-house, by preventing her performing.

Ilias Chrissochoidis

⁸ Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill, *Music and Theatre in Handel’s World: The Family Papers of James Harris, 1732-1780* (Oxford, 2002), 304; Vincenzo Martinelli, *Lettere familiari e critiche* (London, 1758), 136; see also letter of C. Gilbert to Elizabeth Harris, 19 November [1754] (‘in her I really think is

every perfection, of a figure, an actress & a singer’): *Music and Theatre*, 298.

⁹ See, for example, the lengthy report in *The Public Advertiser*, no. 6355, Wednesday 12 March 1755, p. [2].

¹⁰ *The Public Advertiser*, no. 6993, Friday 25 March 1757, p. [1].
