

## Notes: Handel's London

The musical scene in London during Handel's time was special in that it prospered not by noble patronage, as was largely the case in Europe, but rather by private-sector market forces. While composers on the Continent coveted an appointment at an active and wealthy court like Dresden or Paris, England's royal coffers had been strained by decades of war, forcing even the court musicians out into the public concert halls in search of a paycheck. Thanks to an unusual and enlightened decision on the part of the English monarchy to deregulate music publishing and performance, London's concert scene bustled with activity as the 18<sup>th</sup> century began. All of this, combined with the burgeoning middle class and its mania for foreign music, made London a destination for ambitious musicians from all over Europe.

One particularly important presence on the London map during Handel's lifetime was the enterprising – if somewhat unscrupulous – music publisher John Walsh. Walsh and his Amsterdam counterpart Etienne Roger revolutionized the music publishing industry when they opened shop in the 1690's, providing unprecedented access for both composers and customers. Their new and efficient method of engraving music on metal plates and their international networks of distributing agents made it possible, for the first time in history, for composers to have their music printed without paying for it and distributed without their personal involvement.

Walsh's impact on the musical life of London would be hard to overestimate – so much so that tonight's concert might just as well be called *Walsh's London*. He published new compositions, reprints, arrangements, popular music and cheap music tutors. He advertised, offered subscription series and pioneered the practice of giving out free samples to earn new customers. He even sold pirated versions of some of Roger's catalog. When Walsh died in 1736, the *Gentleman's Magazine* reported that he left an estate of £30,000, or approximately \$6,007,680 in current US dollars.

German-born **George Frideric Handel** first traveled to England in 1710. Fresh from Italy, he composed *Rinaldo*, the first Italian opera specifically written for the London stage. After selling the publishing rights for this very successful piece to Walsh in 1711, he returned to Italy for a year, where he began studying English in preparation for his return. His career in London had its ups and downs, but he chose to stay and eventually became a naturalized Briton. He made an indelible mark on the London scene, with enormously influential successes in operatic, choral, orchestral and chamber music. His relationship with Walsh, though sometimes rocky, continued for most of his lifetime.

Walsh published Handel's Opus 2, the first of the composer's two sets of trio sonatas, in approximately 1730 with a fake Roger imprint on the title page. The purpose of this deceit can only be guessed. Walsh seems to have gathered trio sonatas that Handel wrote at various times during the previous decades to create this set, but he was only able to assemble ten instead of the customary twelve. He added two sonatas that were clearly written by a different composer in order to make up the expected dozen and put out the publication with Roger's imprint, perhaps in order to shift blame away from himself. When he reprinted the set under his own imprint shortly afterwards, he substituted two different sonatas for his original additions, but these do not seem to be by Handel either. In any case, both editions sold very well, and the quality of the genuine

Handel works in the set, including the two that we perform tonight, is exceptionally high.

Of all the composers on this program, only **William Babell** is native to England. He had a very active career in London, serving as church organist, violinist and harpsichordist in King George's *Private Musick*. He was particularly admired for his virtuosic improvisations and published his own set of extravagantly ornamented arias from Handel's *Rinaldo* arranged for solo harpsichord. Handel himself, who taught Babell composition, commented that the embellishments were so difficult that "only Babell could play them." The *Sonata in G Minor* comes from a set published by Walsh after Babell's untimely death of the plague at the age of 33. It includes Babell's own ornaments for the slow movements, giving a glimpse of his famous improvisational style.

Like Handel, **Arcangelo Corelli** was an enormously important and influential composer. The two met in 1708 at the home of their mutual Roman patron, Cardinal Ottoboni, when Corelli was already an acknowledged master and Handel just at the beginning of his career. Corelli's lasting fame is particularly impressive given that his published output was confined to a mere six dozen pieces belonging to just three genres: solo sonata, trio sonata and concerto grosso. His Opus 5 sonatas for violin were reprinted over 40 times, including in arrangements for recorder, flute and viola da gamba, and codified the two main sonata forms that would be used for the next few decades. The *Follia* variations are Opus 5's grand finale. A tune with roots in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, *Follia* means "obsession." While many composers wrote sets of variations on this simple, two-part theme, it is Corelli's that reached the greatest audience and sparked the most imitators.

German-born lutenist **Rudolph Straube** studied composition with J. S. Bach while in Leipzig. He had a fondness for travel and eventually made his way to London in the late 1750's. He became an accomplished performer on the so-called "English guittar," a popular salon instrument there, and published several attractive sonatas for "guittar" with continuo. He had a correspondence with the painter Gainsborough, in which Straube advised the artist on how best to acquire a lute. Straube's taste rests firmly in the rococo style that bridged the high baroque of Handel and Vivaldi with the classical style of Haydn and Mozart.

A large portion of Handel's audience – and Walsh's customer base – consisted of musically trained members of the growing middle class. One particularly lucrative innovation of Walsh's was the play-at-home arrangement. During the run of a popular opera, such as **Handel's *Rinaldo***, audience members could buy its most famous arias arranged for ensembles like two recorders and continuo, voice and harpsichord or solo violin. It was a bit like buying a soundtrack album of a musical: after the show the audience could relive its favorite moments from the show at home. Walsh's arrangements of Handel's orchestral works included the *Water Music* for oboe, violin and continuo and the *Fireworks Music* "curiously fitted" to an unaccompanied flute (!).