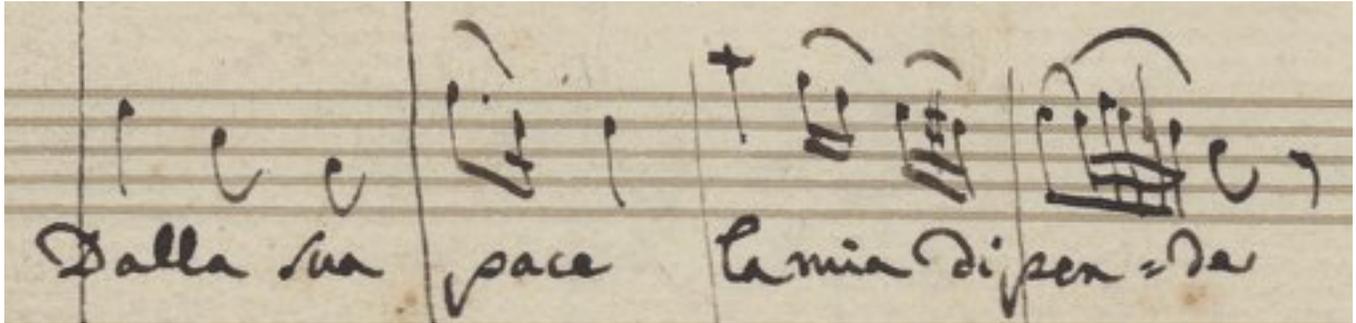
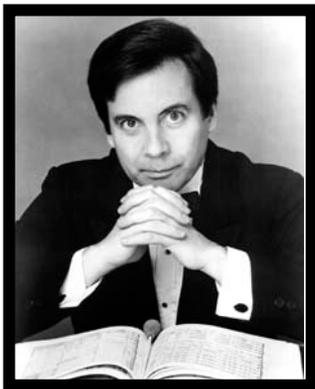


L O N G I S L A N D
O P E R A G U I L D
N E W S L E T T E R



JANUARY 2016



***A letter from the
Artistic Director of
Stony Brook Opera***

For our chamber opera production on Friday, February 12 at the Second

Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, and on Sunday, February 14 at the Recital Hall at Stony Brook University, we are pleased to collaborate with the Stony Brook Baroque Players in an all-Handel program. The first half of the program will include Handel's Sinfonia in B-flat major for strings, his Suite in c minor for two harpsichords, and an early cantata for soprano and continuo, *Manca pur quanto sai*, with soprano Ju Hyeon Han. The second half will feature a staging of Handel's Serenata *O, come chiare e belle*, a political allegory that is actually a mini-opera for three singers, strings, trumpet and continuo. Sopranos Janani Sridhar and Rachel Schutz, and Mezzo soprano Kristin Starkey star as the Shepherd Olinto, the goddess Glory, and the God of the Tiber River, respectively. Arthur Haas will be music director and conductor for the entire program, and Catherine Turocy, the foremost American expert in Baroque movement and gesture, will stage the Serenata, using costumes from the stock of her own Baroque dance company.

This issue of our *Newsletter* is devoted primarily to Handel's Serenata *O, come chiare e belle*, and includes

**Stony Brook Opera
2015-2016 Season**

an article about the work and the rest of the program by Erika Honisch, Assistant Professor of Music in the Department of Music (see "Handel in Italy," pp. 2-4). There are also interviews with both Arthur Haas and Catherine Turocy about their approach to performing and staging this work (pp. 9-12), as well as photos and brief bios of all the principal performers (pp. 5-8).

I am convinced that this will be a wonderful evening in the theater. Tickets for the Stony Brook performance are available at the Staller Center Box Office for \$10 each. For the Manhattan performance at the Second Presbyterian Church, on the corner of West 96th Street and Central Park West, no tickets are required. The church simply asks for a donation to their organ fund, at the door.

Finally, my sincere thanks to all of you who have made tax-deductible contributions to the Long Island Opera Guild in support of our 2015-2016 season. If you have been meaning to make a contribution but have not yet done so, it is still not too late. Please make your check out to the Stony Brook Foundation. Your tax-deductible contribution will be deposited in the Long Island Opera Guild account and will be used to help finance *O, come chiare e belle*, as well as our semi-staged concert performances of Puccini's *La Bohème* in April. Our March issue will be devoted to *La Bohème*.

Sincerely,
David Lawton

Handel in Italy

Erika Honisch

German by birth, Georg Friedrich Handel (1685–1759) enjoyed one of the most wide-ranging careers of any Baroque composer. While his compatriot Johann Sebastian Bach—born the same year, and just 80 miles away—spent his career moving from position to position in Saxony and the neighboring territories, Handel left his homeland in 1706 and never looked back. Most Baroque enthusiasts are familiar with the big hits from his years in London, where Handel moved permanently in 1712 and remained for the rest of his life. But Handel stopped in Italy before he headed for England. For audiences then, as now, the appeal of those well-known monuments from the English period—*Messiah*, of course, but also the amusingly pictorial *Israel in Egypt* and the castrato showpiece *Giulio Cesare*—lies in their distinctly Italian flavor. Handel acquired his skill at writing brilliantly virtuosic vocal parts and evocative instrumental lines in Rome, where he spent the crucial years from 1706 to 1710 and earned the affection sobriquet “Il caro Sassone” (the dear Saxon). This all-Handel program brings to life rarely performed music from this formative period, offering a tantalizing sense of Handel’s evolving flair for dramatic vocal and instrumental effects.

O come chiare e belle, HWV 143 (1708)

The centerpiece of the program is the allegorical cantata *O come chiare e belle*, first performed at the Rome palace of the powerful and cultured Francesco Maria, Marquis of Ruspoli, on September 9, 1708. Its scoring is unique in Handel’s cantata output: it calls not only for the standard combination of voices (in this case two sopranos and an alto) and instruments (strings and basso continuo), but also for a solo trumpet. Significantly, the trumpet was a symbol of power—specifically, military power. The trumpet was the instrument of choice for Bellona, the Roman goddess of war, and for Fama (Reputation). In Baroque Europe, trumpet blasts characterized the soundtrack for cavalry charges and political events alike.

The sound of the trumpet was thus fitting for a time of war: the Marquis was at that moment embroiled in the protracted conflict over the Spanish Succession. Europe was divided over whether an Austrian candidate or the nephew of the already powerful French king Louis XIV should occupy the vacant Spanish throne. While the Holy Roman Empire, England, and the Dutch Republic pushed for the Austrian candidate, Pope Clement XI supported the French candidate. The Marquis supported the Pope, drumming up 1200 infantrymen and sending them marching toward Ferrara to buttress papal forces (see

Figure 1, for a picture of the young Handel among the company viewing the regiment). Ruspoli’s gambit paid off, and he was elevated to rank of a Prince by 1709. In the midst of all this, Handel—no doubt angling for a permanent position with the Marquis—crafted *O come chiare e belle*, a flattering and tuneful piece of public relations, using the sound of the trumpet in the concluding number to send a clear message about the power of the pope and his ambitious ally, Ruspoli.

The hero of the cantata—for of course there needed to be a hero—is “Olinto Pastore” (Olinto the shepherd). As those present at the 1708 performance would have known, the shepherd was a stand-in for the Marquis: Olinto was the pseudonym the Marquis had adopted for his participation in Rome’s Arcadian Academy, a group of erudite noblemen, poets, and musicians, drawn together by shared interests in matters of ethics and aesthetics. Olinto (soprano) is joined by “Il Tebro Fiume” (the River Tiber, alto), representing Rome, and “La Gloria” (Glory, soprano).

The plot is simple: Olinto, observing how his beloved Rome languishes, longs for Glory to return to the banks of the Tiber—which it does by the time the trio sing the concluding trio (“Viva, viva, viva”), accompanied by the celebratory and militant sounds of solo trumpet and strings. But the trumpet is silent for most the cantata. Rome responds to Olinto’s opening pleas in the standout aria “Più non spero,” which features a memorably active bass motive; Handel thought well enough of the aria to reuse it in his opera *Il pastor fido* (London, 1712). Glory enters the scene, gently admonishing Rome (“Caro Tebro”), before adopting a brilliantly commanding tone in the virtuosic “Tornami a vagheggiar”—an aria which was to resurface 20 years later in yet another of Handel’s London operas, *Alcina*.

Rome, predictably, gets the message. In “Al suon che destano,” Olinto describes Rome’s awakening using a menacing poetic meter that was characterized by obsessive accents on the antepenultimate syllable (e.g. DESTANO, VENgano). Glory celebrates the arrival of a “benevolent star” in “Astro clemente”; fans of wordplay will may appreciate the clever, if unobvious, reference to Pope Clement XI. But the scrappy shepherd saves the best for last: Rome’s awakening inspires Olinto to demand a different kind of music: “I want to exchange my humble bagpipe for a trumpet,” he declares, before launching into his final aria, a tour-de-force dialogue with the trumpet, punctuated by flashy ascending figures in the strings.

We know rather a lot about the original performance, thanks to the survival of payment records. They reveal a stellar cast of vocalists: Olinto was sung by Ruspoli’s prized soprano, Margherita Durastante, Tiber was sung by the alto castrato Gaetano Ursini, and Glory was sung by another renowned soprano, Anna Maria di Piedz. Three unnamed violinists were paid for their

involvement, as was a trumpeter identified only as “Gaetano.” Stony Brook’s production of *O come chiare e belle* is semi-staged, with costumes and historically sensitive gestures helping to transport us into the mythological, symbol-laden world first conjured up for Ruspoli, his friends, and his rivals.

Manca pur quanto sai, HWV 129 (1708)

The other vocal piece on the program, *Manca pur quanto sai*, is a solo cantata that Handel wrote for the Marquis of Ruspoli for performance about a month before *O come chiare e belle*, in August of 1708. Scored for soprano and basso continuo, this little love complaint is entirely in keeping with the thousands of such small-scale cantatas that had entertained the Italian nobility in their salons and chambers since the mid-seventeenth century. Alessandro Scarlatti alone wrote over 500 such “sung things,” and Handel wrote 60 during his three-year Italian sojourn.

The cantata, comprising two recitative-aria pairs, is sung by an unnamed and frustrated lover (soprano) who bemoans the inconstancy of the beloved, Tirsi, a shepherd. “Fail as much as you know how, inconstant Tirsi, to respond to my constancy,” the soprano sings in the opening recitative (“Manca pur quanto sai”), following this with a petulant declaration of fidelity (“Benché tradita io sia”) that unfolds over a determined and active bassline. With its triplet figures, propulsive dotted rhythms, and major key, the second aria, “All’amor mio,” feels almost triumphal. The real hero of this tale is unwavering loyalty; we learn almost nothing about Tirsi over the course of the cantata, but get an acute sense of the sense of betrayal felt by his wronged lover. The arias are tuneful and entirely conventional, with the “da capo” form inviting the skillful singer to ornament extensively on the return of the opening section.

Whose feelings are we privy to in this cantata? One candidate for the protagonist is Clori, a shepherdess commonly associated with Tirsi. Clori was, however, often depicted as a flirt. Renowned Handel scholar Ellen Harris has noted the anonymity of the protagonist in these and other Roman cantatas, however, has offered another possibility. She suggests that the anonymity is deliberate, allowing the singing voice to be heard either as female lamenting her beloved’s infidelity or as male lamenting *his* beloved’s infidelity—this, too, would be entirely in keeping with the intimate culture of the elite nobility who cultivated this most sensual of private genres.

Sinfonia in B-flat Major for Strings, HWV 339 (1704 or 1706?)

Suite for Two Harpsichords in C Minor, HWV 446 (1703–1706)

The instrumental pieces on today’s program come from Handel’s early career, as well. Most likely they

date from his time in Hamburg (1703–1706), where he played second fiddle (literally) and later harpsichord in the opera orchestra, and wrote his first opera, *Almira, Königin von Castilien* (1705). We are fortunate that today’s selections—the *Sinfonia in B-flat Major for Strings* and the *Suite for Two Harpsichords in C Minor*—survived at all, because Handel never published these early pieces. Rather, they survive only in manuscript copies.

In the case of the *Sinfonia*, we can thank one of Handel’s colleagues in the Hamburg opera orchestra, Christopher Graupner (1683–1760), for saving it. His neat copy of the work, labeled only “Sinfonia del Signor Hendel,” survives today in Darmstadt, while a later copy by Graupner’s associate Johann Georg Pisendel (1687–1755), is held today in Dresden. The piece preserved in this manuscript is a spirited, three-movement work for two violin parts and basso continuo. Energetic fast movements frame the more reflective second movement. The first movement offers early evidence of Handel’s penchant for reusing and reworking material: Handel scholars have noted that its main theme comes from an aria in *Almira*.

We are less fortunate in the case of Handel’s *Suite for Two Harpsichords in C Minor*, where only one of the two harpsichord parts survives. At the same time, those of us living in the vicinity of New York City can take some joy in knowing that this single surviving part is preserved quite close to us: in the Performing Arts division of the New York Public Library (the shelf number, for those who are curious, is Drexel 5856). The heavily repaired manuscript was copied from Handel’s original by a contemporary copyist, John Christopher Smith, apparently for the use of Princess Amalia of England, one of Handel’s pupils (although that particular claim has been disputed).

Numerous performers and scholars have taken on the challenge of “reconstructing” the missing second harpsichord part. Among these reconstructions—which really are *recompositions*—are a controversial early effort by the mid-20th century British keyboardist Thurston Dart, and a more recent effort by David Schulenberg, an alumnus of Stony Brook, now a faculty member at the Juilliard School of Music. Cast as a series of stylized dance movements, as was conventional by Handel’s generation, the *Suite* is an ambitious and cohesive work. Fragmentary though it may be, it rewards the effort of the patient and adventurous harpsichordists who take it on.

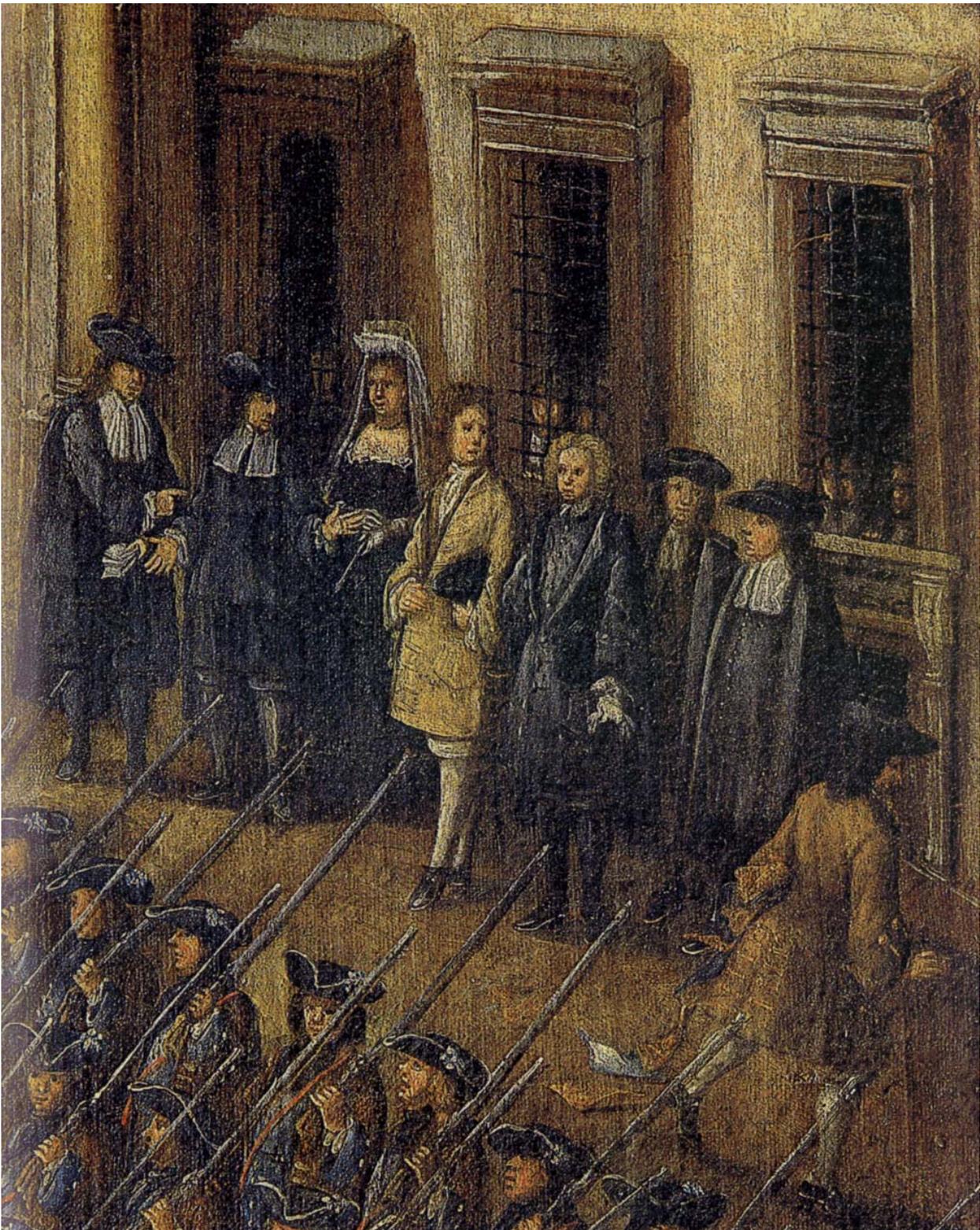


Figure 1: The figure in the gold coat, hat in hand, observing Ruspoli's army in Rome, 1708, is probably Handel. Margherita Durastante (the original Olinto) stands to his right. See Jonathan Keates, *Handel: The Man and His Music* (London: The Bodley Head, 44. Image reproduced from http://www.pietrometastasio.com/convegno_handel2009.htm

Meet our performers



Arthur Haas, harpsichordist, is one of the most sought-after performers and teachers of Baroque music in the U.S. today. He holds a master's degree in historical musicology from UCLA, where he studied harpsichord with Bess Karp. He also studied with Albert Fuller at The Juilliard School and with Alan Curtis in Berkeley and in Amsterdam.

Mr. Haas was awarded the top prize in the Paris International Harpsichord Competition in 1975, and then lived for a number of years in France, performing in many of the major European early music festivals and teaching at the Ecole Nationale de Musique in Angoulême. While in Paris, he joined the famed Five Centuries Ensemble, known for its performances and recordings of both early and contemporary music. In 1985, his formal American debut at Lincoln Center's

Alice Tully Hall was highly praised by the New York Times.

He is a member of the Aulos Ensemble, one of America's premier early music ensembles whose recordings of Bach, Vivaldi, Telemann, and Rameau have received critical acclaim in the press. He is also a member of Empire Viols and Aula Harmoniæ. Mr. Haas participated in the first recording of the Bach Goldberg Variation Canons with Alan Curtis, and has also recorded suites for two harpsichords by Gaspard LeRoux with William Christie. His solo CD's of Pièces de clavecin by Jean-Henry D'Anglebert, Suites de clavecin of Forqueray, music by Henry Purcell and his contemporaries, and suites of Jacquet de la Guerre and François Couperin have been widely praised in the press. Known for his expertise as a continuo player, Mr. Haas has toured with such distinguished early musicians as Marion Verbruggen, Jaap ter Linden, Julianne Baird, Laurence Dreyfus, Bruce Haynes, and Wieland Kuijken. In 2001, he recorded Bach's Cantata #199 and songs of Henry Purcell with the soprano Dawn Upshaw.

Annual summer workshop and festival appearances take him to the International Baroque Institute at Longy, and the Amherst Early Music Festival, where he has served as artistic director of the Baroque Academy since 2002. Mr. Haas is professor of harpsichord and early music at Stony Brook University, where he directs the award winning Stony Brook Baroque Players, and is also on the faculty of the Mannes College of Music and Juilliard's recently created historical performance program. In Fall 2012, he began teaching harpsichord and early music courses at the Yale School of Music.



Catherine Turocy, recognized as one of today's leading choreographer/reconstructors and stage directors in 17th and 18th century period performance with over 60 Baroque operas to her credit, has been decorated by the French Republic as a Chevalier in the Order of Arts and Letters. She received the prestigious BESSIE Award in New York City for sustained achievement in choreography as well as the Natalie Skelton Award for Artistic Excellence. In 1980 she received the Dance Film Association Award for "The Art of Dancing" video

produced with Celia Ipiotis and Jeff Bush. NEA International Exchange Fellowships supported extended visits where she lived in London and Paris, conducting research and interacting with other artists. In the 1980's she worked in France as a choreographer under famed stage directors Pier Luigi Pizzi and Jean Louis Martinoty.

In 1976 Turocy co-founded The New York Baroque Dance Company with Ann Jacoby. Turocy is the Artistic Director and main choreographer for the company, the only fully professional, incorporated Baroque dance company in the United States.

A founding member of the Society for Dance History Scholars, Ms. Turocy has lectured on period performance practices around the world including the Royal Academies of Dance in London, Stockholm and Copenhagen; the Festival Estival in Paris and The Society for Early Music in Tokyo. She has served as consultant to Clark Tippett of American Ballet Theater and Edward Villella of the Miami City Ballet. As a writer she has contributed chapters to dance history text books, articles to Opera News, Early Music America and Dance Magazine, many which have been translated into French, German, Japanese and Korean. A chapter in Janet Roseman's book, *Dance Masters: Interviews with Legends of Dance*, published by Routledge is dedicated to her work. Books in which Turocy has authored chapters include: *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader* published by Wesleyan University Press, *Creating Dance: A Traveler's Guide* published by Hampton Press and *Dance on its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies*, published by Oxford Press.



Hailed for her “diamantine high notes... and giddily delirious coloratura” Welsh-born soprano, **Rachel Schutz** is increasingly in demand for her evocative performances and wide range of repertoire. She is active both in the opera house and on the concert stage, having appeared extensively around the United States, Europe and Asia. Notable performances include the Ravinia Festival, Zankel Hall, Santa Fe Opera, Tanglewood Music Center, Ojai Festival, Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra, Hawai'i Opera Theatre, Opera Parallèle, Stockton Opera, Dame Myra Hess Concert Series and the Boston Pops Orchestra. Ms. Schutz is also an avid supporter of new music, having worked with composers Augusta Read-Thomas, John Harbison, Libby Larsen, John Musto, and William Bolcom. Rachel Schutz received her AB degree in Music at Stony Brook University in 2003, and has returned this year to pursue her DMA degree in Voice performance.



Ju Hyeon Han

Soprano **Ju Hyeon Han** was born in Seoul, South Korea, in 1986, and went to New Zealand for her studies in 1997. While in New Zealand, she appeared in numerous concert and oratorio performances, including concerts with the Auckland Philharmonic orchestra, and soprano soloist for Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus*, Mozart's *Requiem* and Schubert's *Mass in G*. In 2008, Ju Hyeon received a Bachelor of Music Honors in Vocal Performance from the University of Auckland. Then she continued her studies in the United States, earning a Master of Music in Vocal Performance and in Vocal Pedagogy at New England Conservatory, and a Professional Studies Certificate in Voice at Manhattan School of music. In addition, Ju Hyeon was a two-time participant at SongFest, a fellow at the Steans Music Institute Ravinia Festival program for singers, and a participant at the Amherst Early Music Festival. Ju Hyeon is currently completing a Doctor of Musical Arts degree at Stony Brook University. Afterwards, she hopes to pursue a career as a concert singer specializing in art song recitals, contemporary music and oratorios. She also plans to teach, and hopes to work with under-privileged or special needs children and young adults.



Soprano **Janani Sridhar** is a seasoned performer of both operatic and concert repertoire. Previous operatic credits include *L'Elisir d'Amore* (Adina), Mrs Sem in *Noyye's Fludde*, La Bergère/La Chouette in *L'enfant et les Sortilèges*, *Die Zauberflöte* (Pamina), *La Traviata* (Violetta Valéry), *Madama Butterfly* (Kate Pinkerton), *Dido and Aeneas* (Dido), *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (Antonia), *Cendrillon* (Clorinda), and *La Boheme* (Musetta). Competition credits include 1st place in University of Connecticut's Concerto Competition, the Amy Jane Cohen Encouragement Award-Connecticut Concert Opera, 3rd place in National Opera Association Vocal Competition, Young Artist Award in the Harold Haugh Competition, 1st place in the Youth Asian Music Competition, Gold with Distinction in the Youth Asian Music Competition, and 1st place in the Llangollen Musical Eisteddfod. Janani is an alumna of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and Manhattan School of Music and is currently pursuing her doctorate at Stony Brook University.



Mezzo soprano **Kristin Starkey** is currently working towards her D.M.A. in Vocal Performance at Stony Brook University. She has recently been seen as La Principessa (*Suor Angelica*) and Grimgerde (*Die Walküre*) with New York Lyric Opera, and as a featured soloist with One World Symphony singing *Field of the Dead*. Repertoire includes roles as Alisa (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Mrs. Grose (*Turn of the Screw*), Dalila, Carmen, Musette (Leoncavallo's *La Boheme*), Oktavian, Hermia, Cenerentola, La Voix, Third Lady, and Arsamene. Upcoming performances include Il Tebro in Handel's *O come chiare e belle* for Stony Brook Opera, and Erda (*Das Rheingold*), Rosette (*Manon*), and Maddalena (*Rigoletto*) with Opera Company of Brooklyn.

Interview with Catherine Turocy

David Lawton (hereafter DL): We have done several Baroque opera productions based on Baroque movement and gesture. I have found the results a revelation every time. The movements and gestures of the singers seemed to mirror the content of the music more closely than any approach that I have ever seen for this repertoire—indeed, the movements seem to illuminate the music. I'm thrilled to have you with us as director for Handel's *Serenata O, Come chiare e belle*. I'd like you to tell our readers about Baroque movement and gesture, and, in particular, how this approach differs from more standard ones of opera staging.

Catherine Turocy (hereafter CT): Baroque movement and gesture are part of a larger concept. The philosophy of the *cosmografia del minor mondo*, which many of your readers may understand though the study of Leonardo Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, provides the context for Baroque declamation and movement onstage. The singers are not simply mimicking a sign language through hand gestures, they are embodying concepts of proportions and geometrical paths in space related to the harmony of the spheres. They are expressing divine thoughts through music, poetry, gesture and movement, which all share the same aesthetic but express themselves in their own discipline. Hence, the period movement approach to stage direction allows the music to resonate and to be seen as well as heard. As the 18th century wore on and with all the social and political revolutions at the end of the century, the arts changed and so did approaches to performance practice. Standard opera staging today is no longer based on these principles used at the time of Handel.

DL: When it comes to questions of musical performance practice, we consult important treatises written by prominent eighteenth-century composers and theorists such as Johann Friedrich Agricola's *Introduction to the Art of Singing*, or Johann Mattheson's *Der vollkommene Kapellmeister*, dealing with concepts of rhetoric and music. We cannot be absolutely sure that we are "getting it right" when we try to apply what we learn from these treatises, of course. However, imaginative performers can use such ideas as a starting point, and build on them by using their own musical intuition. What kinds of sources survive from the period concerning movement and gesture, and their role in operatic acting? Are there treatises with illustrations?

CT: Music, dance, declamation...these were essential to the education of a gentle person and there were many books and treatises published for educational usage.

Treatises on the art of declamation can be easily found and here is a short sampling: *Chirologia* (1644) and *Chironomia* (1648) by John Bulwer; *An Essay Towards A History of Dancing* by John Weaver (1712) and *Chironomia; or a Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery: Comprehending Many Precepts, Both Ancient and Modern, For the Proper Regulation of the Voice, the Countenance, and Gesture. Together With an Investigation of the Elements of Gesture, and a New Method for the Notation Thereof; Illustrated by Many Figures* by Gilbert Austin (1806) The last treatise reflects on the style of declamation in use from the second half of the 18th century. In fact, the treatise was so well written and comprehensive that it was in common use in the United States through the 1930's. In addition, today's performers continue to follow the advice given to professional performers in the 18th century which was to study gesture in painting, dancing, sculpture, opera and drama, because it all issues forth from the same aesthetic rules.

DL: How do you decide when to use specific gestures for the staging of a scene? Can you give us a specific example from the Handel serenata?

CT: I like to work directly with the singers when making my decisions. I have a memory for the traditional movements and gestures and this is my pool from which I draw when first coming to rehearsal. Each artist has a unique physicality and perspective on the poetry. Like a beautiful piece of marble in front of Michelangelo, I study the potential of nature's beauty and together we carve the interpretation and let the music spill forth from a moving sculpture. Performance on stage is about transformation. The character of the River, Tebro, will be the most challenging. I really cannot describe simply one gesture and do it justice. Readers, please Google "Bernini" and you will find my inspiration for many of the postures.

DL: This *Serenata* is not a true opera, but its musical construction is exactly the same as one of Handel's full-length operas: a regular alternation of simple recitatives in which the action advances, and arias in which the characters give expression to the feelings that they experience as a result of those actions. The story of the serenata has a coherent plot, but it is an allegorical one. How do you view this work in dramatic terms, and how do you intend to make your conception clear to our audience in your staging?

CT: Allegory is my specialty... a story in which the characters and events are symbols that stand for ideas about human life, and in this case, both a political and historical situation. Olinto, the shepherd, will represent the "people," mortal man who is always finding his place in the universe according to the situation which is constantly changing. Tebro, the river, has the power, but is tired of action. Is it necessary to move? Is it necessary to heed the call of action yet again? Does Nature get old and tired and is it time to settle for drying up? Sometimes it is painful to find the strength to act, to move, to be alive... Glory appears but Glory is more complex than Victory. Glory has a past. Glory has a relationship with Tebro. Love and admiration, tenderness, deep emotion exists between Glory and Tebro. All three characters exist in the same universe and are interconnected...microcosm/macrocosm. The drama will be in experiencing how the characters reconnect to stand strong and carry out what they perceive as the Divine Plan. As a result, the audience, in witnessing the staged drama, should be moved to find the noble spirit in themselves to "stand forth" and carry

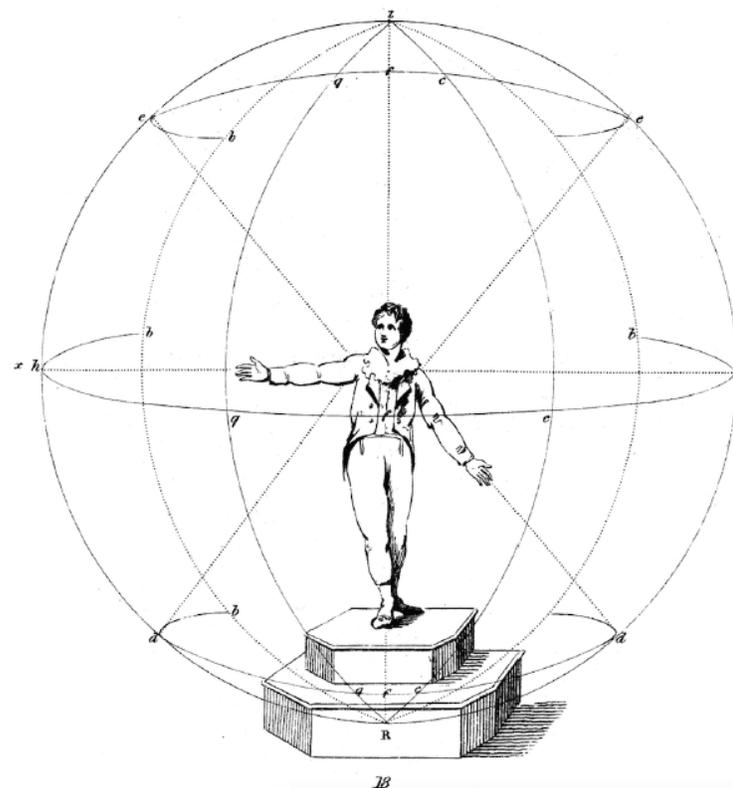
on with duty and love...just as the ancient heroes referred to in the libretto.

DL: Most of Handel's opera arias (including in this Serenata) are in the familiar A B A form, in which there are at most two "affects": the main one in the A section, normally based on the first stanza of the text; a contrasting one (or one that elaborates on the principal one) in the B section, normally the second stanza of text; and finally, a return to the main one in the repeat of the A section. Singers normally embellish their vocal lines in the return of the A section. When you stage one of these arias, do you vary the movements and gestures in the repeat of the A section as well?

CT: Yes, the repeated A is the state of "resolve" after the meditation (B) of a contrasting action to the original statement of A. In other words...A: "I must go..." B "But what if..." A:" ok, but I must now go..." The repeat of A has to be different because we considered B and now we are really set on the action of A.



Hand Gestures



Chironomia Sphere

Interview with Arthur Haas

DL: Your Stony Brook Baroque Players and our Stony Brook Opera have a long history of memorable collaborations, from full productions such as Handel's *Orlando* in 2012, and mixed programs such as this one, consisting of some instrumental works and a staged short opera. I find this Handel program a particularly interesting one. I'm aware that you chose the *Serenata O come chiare e belle* after hearing our singers audition at the beginning of the Fall semester, when it became clear that we could have a very strong cast for it. From the beginning this work was conceived as the second half of the program. Tell us about the three works on the first half of the program, and how you chose them.

Arthur Haas (hereafter AH): Of course, my top priority was to perform an all Handel program, so that the first half of the program would complement the *Serenata* on the second half. After that my goals were both artistic and practical. On the artistic side, I wanted to showcase the Baroque Ensemble and found the *Sinfonia* that will open the concert. This is a brilliant spirited concerto grosso-type orchestral piece for the same instrumentation as for the *Serenata* - violins and continuo. This sparkling work will "show off" the fine Baroque string playing that we have at Stony Brook. Both outer movements are virtuoso, the first somewhat serious filled with scales and arpeggios, and the last like a lively gigue. The middle movement is more contemplative and expressive.

As far as Handel's vocal music is concerned, I wanted to perform one of his many solo vocal cantatas that is more typical of the kind of libretto he employed - the joys and sorrows of young love, where the narrator teeters back and forth between exuberant love, and jealous uncertainty. The Stony Brook voice department has so many strong singers and this gives the chance for another major talent to be heard, who couldn't unfortunately be cast in the *Serenata*. Thus, the last piece on the first half - *Manca pur quanto sai*.

Finally, one can't really have a Baroque program without some dance music, and the 2-harpsichord suite fills that role admirably. This is a typical dance suite with Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, and a lively Chaconne to end. Also this gives audiences to hear a different texture from either string or vocal music.

In addition, when I was thinking about the circumstances under which Handel wrote the *Serenata*, I became more and more intrigued with his early career, both in Hamburg before he left for Italy, and then in Rome. The

two instrumental works on the first half probably date from his Hamburg years (1703-1706), while the solo cantata, like the *Serenata*, were written during Handel's sojourn in Italy, and all of these works were composed within a few years of each other at the end of the first decade of the 18th century. This will give us all a chance to really hear what Handel was thinking about musically at that stage in his life.

DL: This cast has had some preliminary sessions that we have not always been able to offer our students for a Baroque opera. I gave a master class for the Handel cast in October, introducing them to the principles of Italian versification and applying those concepts to the study of the Handel libretto. Julianne Baird gave an exciting and memorable master class in December in which the Handel cast sang some arias and recitatives for her. Please summarize your reactions to this class, and tell us how you think the work she did with them will benefit our performances, from a musical point of view.

AH: Julianne Baird is one of the world's leading experts in Handelian vocal style. It was truly amazing to see how she was able to work with each of the singers, take their strengths and weaknesses, and point them in the direction that they need for the upcoming performances. She zeroed in on performance practice issues such as appropriate ornamentation especially in the da capo of arias and how to go beyond the actual notation of the arias to bring out the meaning of the text. Also, she worked a lot on declamation of the words in recitatives so the singers would sound as if they are actually speaking the language using the notation only as a guide to accentuate the important syllables of each word. Finally she spoke about historical context of the work - where Handel was at that stage in his life, and what was going on both politically and culturally in Rome around the time of the *Serenata*'s conception.

DL: I'd like to know what you have in mind for a continuo group for these pieces. Please explain to our readers what a continuo group is, how it functions in the ensemble, and what specific instruments you have in mind for the continuo groups of the various pieces. How do you decide which instruments play, and where?

AH: The continuo players are the backbone and foundation of any piece written in the Baroque period. Simply put, the continuo group provides accompaniment to the singers by way of a strong and expressive bass line, chordal filler over that bass line, and rhythmic impetus to move the work along. Our continuo group for the *Serenata* consists of a cello and

violone (Baroque double bass) on the bass line, and then two instruments to fill in the chords and supply rhythm: harpsichord and theorbo. Both are plucked string instruments and supply different sounds and textures depending on what they are accompanying. The harpsichord can give a full sound doubling the cello's bass line and playing big chords to make the harmonies clear. The theorbo, which is like a gut-strung guitar is softer and can change the mood at a moment's notice. I will employ the theorbo alone in soft and sadder moments, for example, in recitatives, and use the harpsichord alone when I want to emphasize the dance aspects of the arias. For a full robust accompaniment, I will use both together.

DL: What is meant by the term “continuo realization,” and how much of what the continuo players perform is actually written down by the composer? What is left to the imagination of the individual performers?

AH: Composers only wrote a bass line under the vocal parts. It is up to the continuo group to fill in the chords and thus complete the sounds that one hears in the work. This is what is called "continuo realization." In our performances, both the harpsichordists and theorbo player are working from the bass part and filling in the chords themselves. In certain cases, the composers have put numbers under the bass notes - what we call "figures," which tells them which are the right chords to play. Handel makes things more difficult often by not putting the figures in at all. So the players have to be reading all the parts at once to make sure they play the correct chords. On top of that, most of the arias begin with a short solo for the continuo players before the singer enters. So the harpsichordist needs to invent a melodic line that is appropriate to the mood of the ensuing aria.

DL: Since there are passages in which singers would have embellished the vocal lines—especially in the return of the A section in Da Capo arias—how have you addressed this aspect of performance practice? Have you allowed the singers to come up with their own embellishments, or have you written them yourself?

AH: In the 18th century, I'm sure that the best singers were able to write their own ornaments for da capo

sections of arias, or even invent some of them on the spot! Alas, in this day and age, especially in a school setting where singers are not necessarily Baroque specialists, this is not quite possible. Nevertheless, I really feel that each singer needs to discover the joys of inventing ornaments and so my policy has been to give them some ideas and have them start with these ideas and then augment them themselves as fits their particular voices and sense of taste and style. In the rehearsal process, we hone and refine these ornaments as we go along. We try to keep that feeling of spontaneity that ornaments need to express.



Theorbo

Stony Brook Opera
Dateline 2016
Save the dates!

I. Chamber Opera production of Handel's *O, come chiare e belle*

(Two performances)

--Friday, February 12, 2016 at 8 p.m., 2nd Presbyterian Church, W. 96th and Central Park West, New York City.

--Sunday, February 14 at 3 p.m., Recital Hall, Staller Center, Stony Brook University.

II. Semi-staged concert performance of Puccini's *La Bohème*

(Three performances)

--Wednesday, April 27, 2016 at 12 noon, preview performance, Berkner Hall, Brookhaven National Laboratory

--Saturday, April 30, 2016 at 8 p.m., Staller Center Main Stage, Stony Brook University

--Sunday, May 1, 2016 at 3 p.m.: Staller Center Main Stage, Stony Brook University