

## BMC 21 - HANDEL AT ADLINGTON HALL

What better way to open our Grand Concert at Adlington Hall than with an Organ Voluntary, performed by Sir Nicholas Jackson on the 1670 Bernard Smith organ in the Gallery which Handel is known to have played. This is followed by a Suite for Two Harpsichords, for which Sir Nicholas is joined by Ms Joan Barker.

Elizabeth Legh, daughter of John and Lady Isabella Legh and the elder sister of Charles, visited London frequently from 1718 onwards - her father was from 1714-1722 one of the two Members of Parliament for Bodmin. Elizabeth was a very keen amateur musician, a great admirer of Handel and a most competent player upon the harpsichord. It is highly likely that she studied the harpsichord with Handel himself, albeit on an occasional basis. No doubt Handel would have performed this Suite with one of his pupils, perhaps Elizabeth Legh herself.

Elizabeth Legh was a subscriber for the second volume of Cluer & Creakes' *Pocket Companion*, published on 22nd December 1725. This volume contains thirty-six songs, twenty-seven of which are from Handel's operas. The list of subscribers is headed "Persons of Quality, Gentry & Others, who are Subscribers to & Encouragers of this New Method of Engraving & Printing Musick in Pocket Volumes." Elizabeth was also a dedicated follower of Handel's Operas, being one of the fifty-eight subscribers for "Scipione" (27th May 1726), also one of the eighty subscribers for the score of "Alessandro" (6th August 1726), and one of the fifty-seven subscribers for "Admeto" (24th June 1727).

In January 1727 Mrs Pendarves, who had known Handel since 1711, wrote to her sister Ann Granville: "Mrs Legh is transported with joy at living once more in "dear London", and hearing Mr Handel's opera ("Admeto") performed by Faustina, Cuzzoni and Senesino (which was rehearsed yesterday for the first time) that she is out of her senses..." It was in 1733, according to Dr. Charles Burney, that Handel started including Organ Concertos as interludes in his Oratorios - *Deborah* on 17 March, and *Esther* on 14 April, at the King's Theatre, Haymarket. Mrs. Pendarves wrote to her mother describing them as "the finest things I ever heard in my life". Indeed the Organ Concertos became so popular that Handel had them published. The Opus 4 set, entitled 'Six Concertos For the Harpsichord or Organ' was announced in the *London Daily Post* dated 4 October 1738. The title page included the statement: "These Six Concertos were Published by Mr. Walsh from my own Copy Corrected by my Self, and to Him only I have given my Right therein. George Frederick Handel." The Legh family would certainly have been familiar with these Concertos, and quite possibly have performed them in the Great Hall on their own organ accompanied by local musicians. Our Harp Concerto is the original which Handel later adapted as his Organ Concerto Opus 4/6.

That Handel was a guest at Adlington in 1741-1742 is virtually certain, either on his way to, or on his return from Dublin where his *Messiah* was performed, with further visits to follow. By this time Charles Legh had succeeded his Father and he became a firm friend of Handel. In 1748 Handel is said to have played the organ at nearby Poynton Church (demolished in 1858). In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for January 1747 there appeared the text of Hunting Song "By C.L. Esq". This Hunting Song was first set to music by Mr Ridley, the Organist at Prestbury. Four years later it was set by Handel himself and the autograph "Presented by him in this his own Hand Writing to Charles Legh Esqr in the year 1751" is still at Adlington.

Singing was always a popular evening pastime, and we move now to a Duet for Two Sopranos. This particular work would seem quite clearly to be a "sketch" for part of the *Messiah*. The first movement became, almost unchanged, "For unto us a Child is born", while the third movement became "All we like Sheep". Might it be that Handel "tried out" these movements on his hosts as he was on his way to Dublin? The manuscript is dated London, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1741. The text is as follows:

*No, di voi non vo' fidarmi cieco Amor, crudel belta! Troppo siete menzognere, lusinghiere Deita.* No, I have no faith in you, Blind Love, cruel beauty! You are too deceitful, Ye flattering deities. *Altra volta incatarmarmi gia potests il fido cor.* Once before you did enslave my heart. *So per prova I vostri inganni due tiranni siete ogn'or.* I know from experience all your deceits and what tyrants you both are.

For the centerpiece of our Concert we continue in the vocal medium with Handel's setting of the Psalm "Dixit Dominus", completed in Rome in 1707, which ranks among the maturest and most striking of the master's works, in spite of the early date of its composition; the power of its musical expression is surely comparable to that of the great Oratorios. The work is preeminently a type of vocal concerto with accompaniment for strings, in which can be felt not only the influence of Italian church-style, with regard to the handling of the voices, but also that of the old German polyphonic choral tradition.

*Dixit Dominus Domino meo: Sede a dextris meis donec ponam inimicos tuos scabellum pedum tuorum.* The Lord saith unto my lord, Sit thou at my right hand, Until I make thine enemies thy footstool. *Virgam virtutis tuac emittet*

*Dominus ex Sion: Dominare in medio inimicorum tuorum.* The Lord shall send forth the rod of thy strength out of Zion: Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.

*Tecum principium in die virtutis tuae in splendoribus sanctorum: ex utero ante Luciferum genui te.* Thy people offer themselves willingly in the day of thy power: In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, Thou hast the dew of thy youth.

*Juravit Dominus, et non poenitebit cum.* »*Secundum ordinem Melchisedech tu es sacerdos in aeternum.*« *Dominus a dextris tuis confregit In die irac suae reges. Judicabit in nationibus, implebit ruinas. Conquassabit capita in terra multorum.* The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the Order of Melchizedek. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies; He shall strike through the head in many countries.

*De torrente in via bibet: propterea exaltabit caput.* He shall drink of the brook in the way: Therefore shall he lift up the head. *Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto, sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.* Honor the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, now and ever shall be, for ever and ever. Amen.

Sir Nicholas continues the concert with two pieces performed on an 18<sup>th</sup> century Kirckman harpsichord. The Fantasy in C is followed by the Air and Variations known as the “*Harmonious Blacksmith*”.

The original tune called simply “*Air*” was published in 1720 in a book of eight Suites under the title “*Suites de Pieces pour le Clavecin*” which Elizabeth Legh most probably knew and played. Elizabeth may have taken a particular liking to the Air, for there is a tradition that Handel composed the “*Harmonious Blacksmith*” Variations whilst staying at Adlington and that the autograph was there until the early 1800s. It is there no longer and so far as is known there is no extant autograph in existence.

Though Handel’s Opus 3 Concertos were published in 1741 (by John Walsh, apparently without Handel’s permission), the Oboe Concertos in particular were certainly composed much earlier. For their dating and origins we turn to Charles Burney, a particularly ardent Handelian, and one of the sponsors of the mammoth Handel Festival of 1784.

“*During the years 1718-1720, Handel seems to have been employed at Cannons, as maestro di capella to the Duke of Chandos; who, among other splendid and princely kinds of magnificence, established a chapel, in which the cathedral service was daily performed by a choir of voices and instruments superior at that time perhaps in number and excellence, to that of any sovereign prince in Europe. Here Handel produced, besides his anthems, the chief part of his hautbois concertos, sonatas, lessons, and organ fugues; which are all so masterly, spirited, and exquisite in their several kinds, that if he had never composed an opera, oratorio, Te Deum, duet, cantata, or any other species of vocal music, his name would have been had in reverence by true Musicians, as long as the characters in which they are written, should continue to be legible.*”

The early dating of these Concertos would give them limited currency at the time when Elizabeth was on her frequent visits to London. Handel may also have had them performed as opera intermissions. We may once again assume that this work could have been performed during a musical soirée at Adlington – given the availability of a competent local oboist!

Another early work is the Trio for Two Sopranos and Baritone, dating from Naples, Autumn 1708, a delightful Italian love song perfect for a domestic musical evening.

*Se tu non lasce amore, mio cor, ti pentirai, lo so ben io.* If you do not leave me, my love, my heart, you will repent, I know it. *Ma con chi parlo, oh Dio!* But whom am I speaking to, oh God! *Quando non ho piu core o il core che pur ho non e piu mio.* When I have no more heart, or when the heart I have is no longer mine.

Sir Nicholas returns to the Organ Gallery for two pieces to round off our concert. First, a short Fugue, followed by a stirring Voluntary. But... yes, there is to be a short encore! - a rare piece definitely associated with Adlington: the “*Pigeon’s Air*”. John Christopher Smith, who was Handel’s pupil and later his Treasurer and copyist was an eyewitness to this charming story relating to a “*Pigeon in the Dove-house of Mr Legh in Cheshire*”:

“*That gentleman had a Daughter who was extremely fond of Music, and a very fine performer on the Harpsichord. The Dove-house was built not far from the Parlour, where the musical Instrument stood. The Pigeon, whenever the young Lady*

*play'd any Air, except Spera si in Otho (by Handel) never stirred; but as soon as that Air was touched, it would fly from the Dove-house to the Window; there discover the most pleasing Emotions; and the Instant the Air was over, fly back again. The young Lady was so delighted with the Fancy, that she ever after called Spera si the "Pigeon's Air", and wrote it under that Title in her Music-Book. . . ."*

As we end our Grand Concert it is with the hope that you too, Dear Listener, may in our musical offerings have "discovered the most pleasing Emotions".

**The Organ at Adlington Hall** was built by Bernard Smith (formerly Schmidt) c. 1670. He was like Handel, originally a native of Halle. He was to become the most successful British organ builder of his time with instruments such as those in Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, Durham Cathedral and many others to his credit. The Adlington Organ is outstanding for its size as well as its date – in fact there is no unaltered British instrument of comparable size within 150 years of this. The instrument has two manuals and 14 speaking stops as follows: **GREAT ORGAN:** Opn Diopason 8 / St Diopason 8 / Principall 4 / Twelfth 2 / Bl Flute Bas 2 / Bl Flute Trib 2 / Fifteenth 2 / Ters 1 / Sm Twelfth 1 / 2 & Twenty 1. **CHOIR ORGAN:** St Diopason 8 (borrowed from the Great) / St Flute 4 / Bassoon 8 / Vox Humana 8 / Trumpet 8.

Set in the heart of the Cheshire countryside, ADLINGTON HALL is one of Britain's most beautiful Country homes. Its history begins in 1040, when the Legh family chose the site for a Hunting Lodge. The present House seen in our photo clearly shows two main elements: the Georgian Front (1749-1757), and (right rear in photo) the "Black and White" Tudor Manor, built 1581 and incorporating the Great Hall (1480-1505). Supported at its East end by two oak trees from the original Hunting Lodge, their roots still in the ground, the Great Hall is notable both for its breathtaking hammer beam vaulted roof and the magnificent Bernard Smith (Schmidt) Organ dating from 1670, which was played by Handel himself and remains virtually in its original condition. The Hall is located 12 miles south of Manchester and 5 miles north of Macclesfield and is now a Corporate Hospitality & Conference Centre. [www.adlingtonhall.com](http://www.adlingtonhall.com)