

George Frideric
HANDEL

BELSHAZZAR

AN ORATORIO

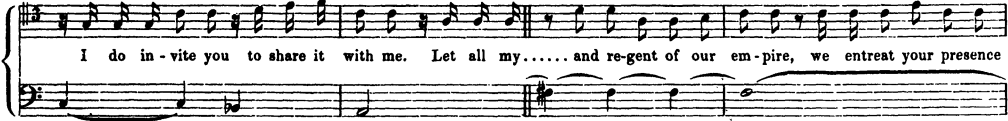
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P R E F A C E.

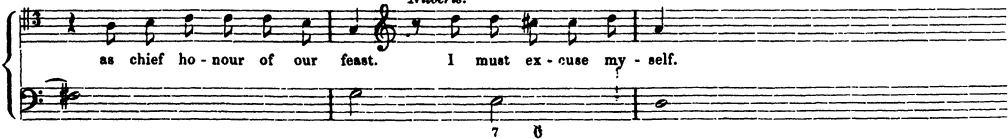
The oratorio of BELSHAZZAR was begun on the 23^d August 1744. and completed probably before the middle of October of the same year. It was first produced on the 27th March 1745. The libretto, written by CHARLES JENNENS, was considerably abridged by Handel, especially in the first two parts. It is evident that this was sometimes done without the sanction of the author, since the latter had the full libretto printed in every edition, including even those pieces to which Handel never wrote music at all. Considering these passages, which were either never set to music by Handel, or at least cut out before the performance, instructive on the relation subsisting between poet and musician, we have given them in a note. A few passages that even Jennens left out, viz. the lines of recitative printed in the edition brought out by the former London Handel Society, p. 170 :

Belshazzar.



I do in - vite you to share it with me. Let all my..... and re-gent of our em-pire, we entreat your presence

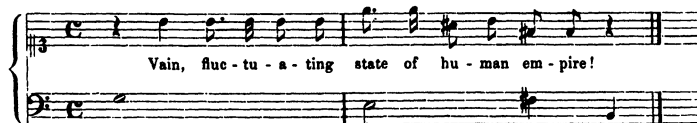
Nitocris.



as chief ho - nour of our feast. I must ex - cuse my - self.

7 8

we have of course not admitted, on the ground that the later version (p. 82 of our edition) is in every respect an improvement, and that an edition which is to be really true to the original ought never to transgress the limits intentionally set by the author himself. The abridgements and transpositions adopted by Handel at later performances under the pressure of circumstances are to be carefully distinguished from those mentioned above. For example, he once on a later occasion cancelled the glorious entrance-scene, pp. 6—10, and put instead of it, as introduction to the air *Thou God most high*, only the two bars of plain recitative found in his conducting score :



Vain, fluc - tu - a - ting state of hu - man em - pire!

which can never be considered a compensation for the omitted portion. From the air just mentioned he passed over, at performances, to the chorus »Behold, by Persia's hero made« (p. 18), omitting the whole scene between Nitocris and Daniel (pp. 14—18), which indeed is wanting in all early editions of the score.

Cyrus is designated (p. 27) as »Soprano«, by which however here (as in the precisely similar case of Joachim in the oratorio *Susanna*) is only meant that the part was written by Handel in the soprano clef; in character Cyrus is on the whole rather a high alto than a deep soprano, and is accordingly described in the list of persons as *Contralto*. The second final recitative of Cyrus (p. 248), composed subsequently, is in the alto clef, as is also the first solo of the final chorus; which is in both places indicated by the clef at the beginning of the line. The above choral solo, having no name prefixed, has been by us (in brackets) assigned to Cyrus as the most fitting character to utter these words.

Of Gobrias' air »Opprest with never-ceasing grief« (p. 28) there are three settings, all preserving the same subject. It was first written in *E♭* major, and then with some alterations transposed to *G* major, when Handel gave the part to a tenor singer; and finally transposed back from *G* into *E♭*, which in the original is indicated by »una terza più bassa ex *D♯*« [i. e. *E♭*]. The first and second settings have already been printed, but not the last, although unquestionably the best, and the only one which is given in the conducting score.

On p. 82:  was written by Handel thus: 

The word was made of three syllables in order to give a correcter accentuation; but this was really an arbitrary alteration, since the author of the words himself made it dissyllabic.

In the chorus of Belsazzar's courtiers, pp. 157—159, the 5 bars of bass (bars 8—12, p. 158) printed in small notes are not given in Handel's manuscripts, but are in the first edition of the score, published by Randall; and they probably rest on reliable tradition. This piece, which is not marked as a chorus by Handel himself, is to be regarded as a free choral recitative.

The word *interpret*, also, is twice altered on p. 166 on account of the accent: first in bar 5 , where it was given in the following manner by Handel and the early editions: ; and again in bar 11: , where Handel and the early editions have .

By a correction in the conducting score, Handel makes bar 16 of p. 210 to be as follows

 This however gives only $\frac{3}{4}$ to the bar; the correction into  is undoubtedly what was intended.

On p. 92 the earlier version (with an indication of the curtailment) is given as **A**, and the later as **B**. The same is the case on p. 165.

In the Third Part four pieces are marked with **A***, and four with **B**, as being distinct compositions to the same words. These two sets of pieces, which were produced at different times, are not perhaps of equal claims to be admitted into the score. At public performances, however, the pieces marked **B** ought to be preferred, in accordance with the composer's intentions and personal practise; although this consideration need not in all case overrule every other. With the first version of the final chorus to the Second Part »O glorious Prince«, the case is different; for this version, although

* The **A** is erroneously omitted to the first of these, p. 198.

the only one printed in the early editions, has value only as the first fully worked up treatment of the theme.

On p. 160, instead of the direction *Allegro Postillions*, given in the original MS., (where *Postillions* is intended to indicate the character of the movement,) the conducting score has merely *Allegro*.

The recitative on p. 205 was omitted as early as 1745, and the following air of Daniel was then sung in G major.

On pp. 209—210 Arioch's recitative was shortened, and the Messenger then entered suddenly: this is explained in a separate note on p. 209, as it could not be shown in the music itself without difficulty.

Of the words on pp. 221—224, which are there set twice to music, the conducting score has a third setting, written down by Handel himself, — a plain recitative for a performance at which Gobrias was taken by a tenor voice:

Gobrias.

To pow'r im-mor-tal my first thanks are due; my next, great Cy-rus, let me pay to you, whose
arm this im-pious king laid low, the bit-ter source of all my woe.

The most valuable enrichment of our edition is the Finale. This great oratorio has always hitherto been printed without a conclusion, because Handel employed one of the so-called Chandos Anthems («*I will magnify thee*») for this purpose — according to the old editions the whole anthem, but according to the latest edition, prepared by Macfarren for the London Handel Society, only «the first chorus» of it. Neither of these two practises has proved very suitable for performance. Whoever, therefore, really cares about the oratorio as the work of Handel, will be glad to learn that neither practise is correct, but that a few subjects only are here taken from the anthem, but worked up quite independently, and in a form which particularly fits them to conclude the whole oratorio.

Bar 4, p. 261, in the vocal bass part is given by Handel thus , omitting the last syllable of *Amen* and the note for it; this has been corrected.

The employment of the organ in performances of this work will shortly be discussed in the second volume of the «*Jahrbücher für musikalische Wissenschaft*», with remarks on an organ accompaniment added by Macfarren in his above-mentioned edition.

Leipzig, Nov. 1, 1864.

Chr.

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BELSHAZZAR.

BELSAZAR.

Dramatis personae.

BELSHAZZAR, King of Babylon. *Tenore*.
NITOCRIS, mother of Belshazzar. *Soprano*.
CYRUS, Prince of Persia. *Contralto*.
DANIEL, a Jewish Prophet. *Contralto*.
GOBRIAS, an Assyrian Nobleman, revolted to
Cyrus. *Basso*.
ARIOCH, a Babylonian Lord. *Tenore*.
Messenger. *Basso*.
Chorus of Babylonians.
Chorus of Jews.
Chorus of Medes and Persians.

BELSAZAR, König von Babylon. *Tenor*.
NITOCRIS, Belsazar's Mutter. *Sopran*.
CYRUS, Fürst der Perser. *Erster Alt*.
DANIEL, ein jüdischer Prophet. *Zweiter Alt*.
GOBRIAS, ein zu Cyrus übergegangener Assyrier.
Bass.
ARIOCH, ein babylonischer Hofmann. *Tenor*.
Ein Bote. *Bass*.
Chor der Babylonier.
Chor der Juden.
Chor der Meder und Perser.

ACT I

Scene 1.

The palace in Babylon.

Nitocris. Vain, fluctuating state of human empire!
First, small and weak, it scarcely rears its head,
Scarce stretching out its helpless infant arms,
Implores protection of its neighbour states,
Who nurse it to their hurt. Anon, it strives
For pow'r and wealth, and spurns at opposition.
Arriv'd to full maturity, it grasps
At all within its reach, o'erleaps all bounds,
Robs, ravages and wastes the frightened world.
At length, grown old and swell'd to bulk enormous,
The monster in its proper bowels feeds
Pride, luxury, corruption, perfidy,
Contention, fell diseases of a state,
That prey upon her vitals. Of her weakness
Some other rising pow'r advantage takes,
(Unequal match!) plies with repeated strokes
Her infirm, aged trunk: she nods — she totters —
She falls — alas! never to rise again.
The victor state, upon her ruin rais'd,
Runs the same shadowy round of fancied greatness,
Meets the same certain end.

Thou, God most high, and Thou alone,
Unchang'd for ever dost remain:
Through boundless space extends thy throne,
Through all eternity thy reign.
As nothing in thy sight
The reptile man appears,
Howe'er imagin'd great;

1. Scene.

Der Palast in Babylon.

Nitocris. Ach, unstät eitles Loos der Menschen-Herrschaft!
Erst klein und schwach, erhebt sie kaum das Haupt,
Streckt kaum noch aus hülflos die Kindeshand
Und ruft um Schutz an jedes Nachbarreich,
Das thöricht ihn gewährt. Als bald erstrebt
Sie Kraft und Macht und trotzet jeder Hemmniss.
Bei voller Reife angelangt, erfasst
Sie alles um sich her, verhöhnt das Recht,
Raubt, verwüstet, verheert die bange Welt.
Zuletzt, voll angeschwellt zu Riesengrösse,
Ernährt das Ungethüm im eignen Schoosse
Stolz, Ueppigkeit, Verderbniss, Eidesbruch
Und Zwietracht, faule Seuchen eines Staats,
Die ihm das Mark zerstören. Seine Schwäche
Nimmt eine neue Macht voll Gierde wahr,
(Ungleicher Kampf!) und schlägt mit junger Kraft
Sein alt gebeugtes Haupt: er wankt, er sinket,
Er fällt, ach weh! nie wieder zu erstehn.
Das Siegerreich, auf seinen Fall gebaut,
Durchläuft den gleichen Kreis erträumter Grösse,
Endend am gleichen Ziel.

Du, Gott der Höh', und Du allein,
Bleibet immerdar dir selber gleich:
Endlosen Raum umspannt dein Arm
Und alle Ewigkeit dein Reich.
Ein Nichts erscheint vor dir
Der Mensch auf Erden hier,
Wie stolz daher er dräut;