



Handel: A Classical Icon OR Handel's 250th Anniversary

Handel's Patrons

VOICE OVER

In the 18th century if you were a composer who wanted to work in really large musical genres such as opera or music for orchestra you really had to have some form of patronage.... mainly in continental Europe with the courts, but you could also find other forms of patrons.

One of the vital things was that he never wanted to be classed as a court servant who would therefore be sitting at the servants' table, so his relationship with patrons is an interesting and rather unusual one.

It's quite remarkable when you remember that here was this young man from Germany, from middle class parents, his father was a doctor, his mother came from a family of clergyman, from a city that wasn't very well known in Germany, and certainly didn't have a very large musical reputation, and had a very, very minor court there so it wasn't a place that figured much on people's maps, and yet in every place that he goes to he goes straight to the top immediately, to really the best patrons for music... It's even true in the opera house in Hamburg....he comes right at the back of the second violin players, right at the back of the orchestra, but in about twelve to eighteen months you find him directing the operas and writing the music for the next one.

He goes to Italy, and here he has various different types of patrons...particularly he spends quite a lot of time in Rome where there isn't any opera, but the cardinals run regular concerts through the week, and it's for them that he writes music for their concerts, Italian cantatas, and pieces for instruments.

So even though he'd come from a very traditional Lutheran background in Germany, you find him dealing with the people that are very highest in the Roman Catholic Church. Now in this case, instead of being paid, as far as we can tell Handel was given a large apartment in a palace which belonged to Prince Ruspoli.

But he after that moves on back into what we might call a more regular court job at the Court of Hanover, he moves back to Germany. The only problem about this was that although he was appointed by the court on quite a good salary, there wasn't very much to do, because the court opera was in abeyance at the time, and when he took the job he arranged it so that he could also have leave of absence to go to other places, and it's at that stage that then he comes to London, and in London we have this interesting situation where he's received almost immediately at the Court of Queen Anne. Now this is a young foreigner coming to London to write for the opera house but very soon, a couple of months after arriving in London, he's performing at court on the queen's birthday. he found that here he was in a very interesting situation because Hanover was a very special court from the London point of view.

It was known that when Queen Anne died the succession of the British crown should pass to her nearest protestant relative, and that was none other than George, Elector of Hanover, so from the point of view of the Hanover court it was very good to have a representative in London at that time, and I think probably the Hanover court felt that it was really quite a good move, that this was where Handel wanted to go.

Even so, it was quite an interesting situation because the queen was not very keen on having anyone from the actual royal family in Hanover in London, and so what one finds is that Handel is fulfilling a diplomatic role as well as a musical one.

Certainly we know that Handel kept up contacts with the Hanover resident who was the diplomat stationed in London, and the diplomat actually writes letters to say that Handel has

been quite useful because he has a large number of influential friends in London, particularly Dr. Arbuthnot, who's one of the queen's physicians or doctors, and one of the things that the Hanover court is very interested to know is exactly how ill is Queen Anne, how soon is he going to die, when will George become King of Great Britain?

And so we have Handel not exactly acting as a spy, but he's being used as a useful source of information by the Hanover court while he's in London.

....we know that Handel spent the rest of his life, fifty years, in London but you're talking about someone who's not yet thirty years old. London was a much more promising prospect than the other places that he'd been to but he didn't necessarily think this was going to be the rest of his life.

Queen Anne was not in very good health and it was only a matter of time, and probably a very short time, before the Elector of Hanover came to Britain as King of Great Britain, in fact it was only twelve months.

Of course there was now a new, interesting situation in that you had a king who had come from Hanover, and a young German composer in London, there were times when the fact that George I had come from Germany was a little unpopular in London, and Handel was very clever actually in moving closer to the court when it was good for him, and moving a little further away when the image of the Germans was a little bit difficult.

It's a sign, I think, that he was very canny in relating his career to outside circumstances, and always doing things to best advantage.

Although his public career centred mainly in the opera house, nevertheless he was very favoured by the court, not least in the way that they kept on adding to his pension. At one stage there's another row in the royal family, this time between King George II and his son, Frederick, Prince of Wales, and rival opera companies are formed and everything becomes very, very difficult for a few years, but Handel rides this out and as time goes on, particularly when he moves over from opera into oratorio, this is after about 1740, you find that he's actually starting to get quite a big income from what he does in the theatre, and he builds up quite a lot of money. He opens an investment account, he buys stock, and actually he ends up as a very rich man.