

The Sacred in Opera **May 2009**

In this Issue...
Ruth Dobson

We have interesting information and ideas to share with you in this issue of the SIO Newsletter. Our topic is the staging of oratorio, with particular emphasis on Mendelssohn's *Elijah*.

We know that many early oratorios were performed as operas, and included scenery, costumes, and staged action. However, oratorio as we know it today is most often presented in concert form. It is distinctive in its use of a narrator (testo), its lack of staged action, its reverential tone, and its emphasis on music for chorus as well as for solo voices. Recently there has been a revival of interest in staging oratorio. *Elijah* is considered one of Mendelssohn's greatest works and is certainly one of the most performed oratorios of all time. Its premiere was in 1846, one year before Mendelssohn died. Basted on Biblical passages from the Old Testament, it depicts various dramatic events in the life of the prophet Elijah, including the resurrection of a dead youth, the end of a terrible drought, and Elijah's ascent into Heaven. Its dramatic flow lends itself well to staging.

In addition to many stagings of *Elijah*, including one directed by Carl Gerbrandt and filmed by PBS for national broadcast, there have been several recent staged productions of the *St. Matthew Passion*, *St. John Passion* and other works. Jonathan Miller's well-known staging of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* is being presented again, this time at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in April 2009. Mr. Miller was the first director to stage it, presenting a modern-dress version in Holy Trinity in London in 1996. English National Opera presented a staged *St. John Passion* in 2002, directed by Deborah Warner. Glyndebourne presented staging of the *St. Matthew Passion* in 2007, directed by Katie Mitchell. Her controversial staging was set in a school where twelve children and their teacher have been murdered.

The staging of oratorio has its critics and its fans. The subject evokes strong opinions and responses from critics, directors, conductors, and audience members. Critical reaction to these productions is extremely varied. Some think that staging oratorio is less than successful as a basic premise. But there is no doubt that staging these works provokes a powerful response from those involved. That accomplishes much in itself. We hope that your interest in this subject will inspire more productions of sacred drama, including staged oratorio, in your own communities.

We asked our members and other contributors about their experiences in this area of sacred drama. We are grateful to Carl Gerbrandt and G. William Bugg for their viewpoints and contributions to this newsletter. We will continue with this subject in our next newsletter. We would like to hear from you about any experiences in this area.

Ruth Dobson
Chair, The Sacred in Opera

A Case for Staging Oratorio

Carl Gerbrandt

Scarlatti treated the solo cantata as a dramatic work, focusing on a single character that may not have played out his actions at all but rather allowed the audience to view his state of mind. In essence, the solo cantata became a chamber opera, frequently acted and sung by a single singer or actor in the home of a politician or artisan. Scarlatti, in many respects, became a model for Handel, the eighteenth century Italian opera composer. This influence naturally followed Handel into his other dramatic endeavors and especially his English oratorios. One need only look at music he composed for special events such as Ode for Queen Anne's Birthday, and celebration works such as the Utrecht Te Deum or the introduction to Zadok the Priest, to sense the dramatic intent and theatrical nature of Handel. In his own right, Handel's sense of theatre was as strong as any of his contemporaries and perhaps even of those noteworthy opera composers of the 19th century.

Handel is generally thought of as a synthesizer of musical forms in the Baroque, much as we think of Bach. However, Handel's one truly original contribution to musical art form was that of the dramatic oratorio. The oratorio of Handel was not a consciously contrived form, but rather grew out of the ever-popular and dominant Baroque opera. Dramatically for Handel, setting a Biblical or religious plot to music was no different than composing an opera on a secular theme. In all his sacred oratorios, Handel was not writing for the church, even in Messiah, but for entertainment. His oratorios without exception received their premieres in a theatrical or concert location and not in a house of worship.

The theatrical or dramatic intent of Handel's oratorios goes far beyond speculation. Most of the works declare in the titles their intent: "oratorio or sacred drama," "musical drama," "sacred drama," etc. Samson was specifically designated as "alter'd and adapted to the stage." In nearly all of his oratorios, Handel and his librettists went to considerable length to place, at times elaborate stage directions in the autographs. Handel's artistic and theatrical inclinations are clearly observed both in his music and his instructions. Librettos are set in the form of stageworthy dramas and frequently include dramatic events which become mundane without visual enforcement. In the case of Belshazzar, the opening chorus is dramatically unclear and nearly incomprehensible without action – yet with dramatization, it becomes a tour de force.

Various writings during Handel's time make it clear that many of his sacred oratorios were not only first performed in staged versions, but that subsequent concert performances were met with public distaste due to a lack of dramatic treatment.

The chorus in Handel's oratorios is a continuing area of concern for both stage directors and chorus masters. His oratorios are characterized by a vastness of choral music which in itself presents memorization problems if the chorus is to be included in the action. Chorus characterization presents additional production problems for the director. This is exemplified in Belshazzar, in which the chorus assumes the responsibility of characterizing three different groups of people: Jews, Persians, and Babylonians, all of which are contrasted both musically and dramatically by Handel. In certain instances, a director would be well advised to place his chorus members in an off-stage area and use them as observing commentators, i.e., a Greek Chorus. If action is desired, the use of a dance troupe or pantomime group is not only advisable but can be enormously effective and highly practical.

It should not be considered a breach of musical integrity to make cuts or rearrange the order of certain numbers. Most of the larger oratorios will benefit dramatically from cuts particularly for today's audiences. The use of dancers and mime artists will likewise generally improve the dramatic impact of a production.

Five of Handel's sacred oratorios, Alexander Balus, Israel in Egypt, Messiah, Susanna, and Theodora contain dramatic moments conducive to stage treatment. However, they represent the dramatically weakest of Handel's sacred oratorios. Solutions to the numerous and difficult production problems in these works cannot be measured against the advantages of staging and it is doubtful that stage action would add to the effectiveness of these works. Musically, they are certainly capable of standing on their own. Of these five works, Susanna is perhaps the most adaptable to the stage. However, while the plot contains religious elements, the overall nature of the libretto is more secular than sacred in spite of the fact that the libretto is loosely based on events from the Apocrypha.

While the staging of oratorios, particularly from the Baroque period, may appear to be a daunting task, the effort will be well worth your while. There certainly is historical permission as well as precedence.

THE STAGING OF MENDELSSOHN'S *ELIJAH*

Carl Gerbrandt

The recorded events in the life of the Old Testament Prophet Elijah are highly charged with dramatic intensity. Though frequently and successfully mounted as a stage production, Mendelssohn's great oratorio on selected events in the life of Elijah as a staged work continues to carry with it considerable controversy.

As one who has performed the title role of Elijah in both concert and staged productions, and has also staged the work, I believe there are legitimate arguments on both sides of the debate. I do, however, feel that the staged versions in which I have been involved resulted in more powerful communication of the plot as well as the message. Thus, I tend to advocate for staged presentations provided adequate technical support and appropriate singers-actors are employed.

Certainly there are as many approaches to staging and setting *Elijah* as there are directors and designers; and this is as it should be. Therefore, it should be understood at the outset of this article that I am suggesting only one of many possible approaches. None-the-less, the following suggestions have been tried in live production as well as in front of television audiences (PBS) with subsequent critical reviews that proved its dramatic worth.

Three elements stand as obstacles that require dramatic solutions when considering a staged version of *Elijah*. These issues apply equally to oratorios or any work composed for concert presentation.

1. Mendelssohn identified his work as an oratorio and therefore a concert piece.
2. How to overcome the lack of adequate orchestral passages necessary for enacting and motivating action called for in the libretto.
3. How to lend stage treatment to choral and solo sections in which no drama or action occurs, i.e., commentary material.

The first of these obstacles is a personal matter and must be dealt with on that level; though it must be remembered that the staging of concert works certainly has precedent throughout modern history. Many of Handel's great oratorios received dramatic treatment in their first performances, as was the case with many larger choral works during the Baroque period.

The second obstacle is perhaps the most difficult with which to contend. Imaginative and creative staging is of utmost importance in bridging dramatic gaps. Certainly good theatrical lighting can assist in defining scenes, characters,

and emotional moods. A creatively and efficiently conceived floor plan also is essential in bridging dramatic or scenic gaps.

Obstacle three can be easily overcome by making appropriate cuts in the score which may mean deleting some "favorite" material. Again, this falls into the arena of creativity and also prioritizing the importance of dramatic flow. A suggested list of cuts in *Elijah* is as follows:

No. 5 – "Yet Doth the Lord"

Staging this number believably would be difficult in view of the two contrasting concepts found in this text: "His curse hath fallen down upon us" and "His mercy on thousands fall."

Nos. 6, 7, and 7A – Cherith's brook scene

These three numbers could be conceived of as a separate scene and played down center stage or in front of the curtain. However, they are short and add little to the overall dramatic flow.

No. 18 – "Woe Unto Them Who Forsake Him!"

This aria breaks the developing intensity of the Baal scene.

No. 32 – "He That Shall Endure To the End"

This number could be included if properly choreographed, though it is similar to No. 31 in that the action stalls.

No. 35 and the chorus of No. 36

This is mostly commentary material with similarities to the last half of No. 34.

No. 37

Elijah said what needed to be said in the last half of number 36. Further, the piece is close to the end and tends to slow the intensity as the plot moves toward conclusion.

Nos. 40, 41, 42

These numbers are primarily commentary and contain little action. Furthermore, after Elijah's dramatic disappearance, including these numbers may be anticlimactic. Moving immediately to the concluding "Lord our Creator, how excellent in Thy Name in all the earth" prevents delaying the climax of the ending.

THE CHORUS & DANCERS

Including the chorus directly in the action in *Elijah* presents a number of difficult problems. Many of the choral sections are musically difficult, not easily memorized, and many are commentary in nature. The number of singers needed to fill Mendelssohn’s musical needs and the dramatic needs of the large crowd scenes would place considerable demands on technical areas such as costumes and properties not to mention budgetary concerns. Thus, rather than involving the chorus in the action, the production may be better served by using them as a Greek chorus, unseen or visually non-intrusive, as they comment on the action rather than being in it.

As a replacement for an on-stage chorus, select two groups of actors: one group would represent Israelite townspeople with a believable mixture of couples, children, and widows. The second group should be experienced dancers. A choreographer will, of course, be necessary. These dancers are of great dramatic importance. They assume several different characters and are on stage during much of the production. Their objective is to react to the drama taking place or to create the drama, particularly in sections where only choral commentary is occurring. Their roles are demanding and should not be underestimated.

The dancers and non-dancers frequently work together on stage requiring close coordination between the director and choreographer. While the dancers retain their identity as Israelites throughout the production, the dance group assumes several different roles:

1. Israelites – Introduction through No. 4
2. Prophets of Baal – Nos. 10-16
3. Israelites – Nos. 19A-20 and 21-24
4. Several may appear as angels in No. 28
5. The wind, sea, earthquake, and whirlwind in Nos. 34 and 38

THE CAST

ELIJAH.....Baritone A Prophet of Jehovah	AN ANGEL (Nos. 27, 39).....Tenor
AHAB.....Tenor King of Israel	AN ANGEL (Nos. 30, 31).....Mezzo-soprano AN ANGEL (No. 33).....Soprano
JEZEBEL.....Mezzo-soprano Queen of Israel, Ahab’s Wife	CHORUS.....SATB A Greek chorus commenting on the action
OBADIAH.....Tenor High-Ranking Servant of Ahab	ANGELS.....SSA 6 to 9 in number who sing No. 28
THE WIDOW.....Soprano	DANCERS
TWO ISRAELITE WIDOWS (No. 2).....Soprano and Alto	Mime and dance throughout, assuming various roles
ISRAELITE WOMAN.....Soprano	SUPERNUMERARIES – Guards of Ahab (2 or 4)
THE YOUTH.....Boy Soprano 12-year old servant of Elijah	– Children of Israel (adults and children) – The son of the Widow, 7 to 10 years of age

CHARACTER SKETCHES

ELIJAH:

- I Kings 17, 18, 19, 21; II Kings 1, 2, 3, 9, 10; other isolated Old Testament and New Testament references to Elijah and Elias
- Came from Gilead, a poor and deeply troubled area of Israel at the time
- Nothing is known of his family or birth
- Stern and ironclad personality
- Direct approach to others
- Unfailing devotion and zeal for Jehovah
- Unlimited faith in God
- Courageous; fierce in his opposition to sin
- Tenderness, as shown to the Widow
- Fervent in prayer (James 5:17)
- His confidence is exhibited in the selection of “fire” as the subject for the contest with Baal, the “god of fire”

AHAB:

- The son of a king
- King of Israel for 22 years
- Married to Jezebel who acquired nearly complete control over him (I Kings 21:25-26)
- An Architect: built many major structures including an ivory house, several cities, his own royal residence in Jezreel
- He figured prominently into Assyrian archaeology
- In spite of his weak disposition he ran a close race with the Damascene state as heading the foremost power in central and lower Syria in the mid-9th century B.C.
- Politically strong
- His army: 10,000 men and 2,000 chariots

JEZEBEL:

- I Kings 16:31
- A princess, the daughter of Ethbaal, King of Zidon
- Immediately upon her marriage to Ahab, Phoenician worship on a grand scale was established
- Ahab built an altar and house of Baal in Samaria for her
- Exercised nearly complete control over Ahab
- Housed and supported 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Astarte (I Kings 16:31, 32; 18:19)
- Ordered many prophets of Jehovah slain (I Kings 18:13)
- Licentious habits
- Fierce and stern qualities
- Harlotry, sorcery (II Kings 9:22)
- She engulfed Israel in idolatry; only 7,000 Israelites did not bow before Baal

OBADIAH:

- Principal servant of Ahab with a high ranking position; was in charge of Ahab’s household
- True servant of God
- A wise council to Ahab (I Kings 18:5-6)
- Loyalty to God pre-empted loyalty to Ahab (I Kings 18:3-4)

THE WIDOW:

- A widow with one son who was dying of starvation
- Poor and without resources
- Highly emotional and impulsive

BAAL:

- Storm god of the Phoenicians
- Presided over fire

THE YOUTH:

- According to Jewish tradition, a boy of Zaraphath
- A servant to Elijah, attending to him constantly

THE SETTING & SCENES

Elijah is best played “in period,” approximately 875 B.C., during King Ahab’s rule in Samaria. The scenes are as follows:

PART I

Scene 1 – Outside Ahab’s Palace (Intro. through No. 4)
During the Overture, a period of three years elapses, moving from a time of prosperity to poverty as a result of the drought.

Scene 2 – The Widow’s home (Nos. 8-9)

Scene 3 – Mt. Carmel (Nos. 10-20)

PART II

Scene 4 – Outside Ahab’s Palace, sometime later (Nos. 21-25)

Scene 5 – The Wilderness (Nos. 26-end)

THE SET

Space invariably determines design. If this production is to be mounted in a house of worship, no doubt considerable alteration will be necessary to accommodate the choral ensemble, the stage area, and the orchestra size and position.

In planning the design, it should be kept in mind that King Ahab was a highly skilled and active architect. Thus the scenes outside his palace should reflect his style which according to records was elegantly lavish.

Space permitting, the entire production can be placed on one unit set. Figures 1, 2, and 3 show drawings on how this can be accomplished given adequate dimensions.

Off stage up right would represent Ahab’s palace with stage right being the courtyard. A special arch could be constructed to represent the entrance from the offstage palace to the courtyard.

Up center, down right, and down left could be used as exits to other locations in the town. An exit down left into the auditorium and through the audience can also be effective for Elijah’s initial entrance and also the whirlwind dancers in No. 34.

SYNOPSIS

Elijah, the only Prophet of Jehovah who still followed His way, declares that because of Israel’s disobedience to God, he will withhold rain from Israel for the next three years. Three years pass. Obadiah asks the people to confess, forsake their idolatry and return to God.

Elijah, a man rejected by all but God and living in a land of famine, goes to Cherith’s brook where the ravens bring him food. The Lord commands Elijah to go to the home of a Widow in Zarephath; there he will be taken care of. The Widow’s son has just died. Through the prayer of Elijah, the son is revived to life.

Elijah goes to King Ahab and is accused of causing this drought and famine. Elijah challenges Ahab and the Prophets of Baal to a confrontation on Mt. Carmel. Elijah and Ahab will both build altars to their individual gods; the god who sends fire to consume the offering on the altar will be declared the true God.

Much ceremony surrounds the offering to Baal, yet nothing happens. Elijah then prays once to Jehovah and fire descends from heaven. The Prophets of Baal are slain. Sometime later, Israel has again slipped into idolatry and Elijah, discouraged, goes to the wilderness asking God to take his life. He falls asleep and is ministered to by angels and the voice of God, renewing his spirit. God then sends a whirlwind, taking him up to heaven.

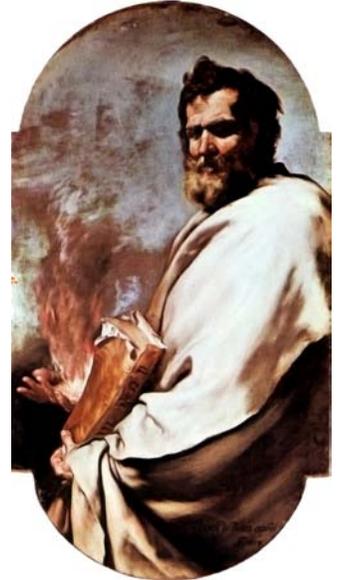


Continued on page 7

HAND PROPERTIES

For purposes of simplicity, the following hand and stage properties are being kept to a minimum. Certainly many more creative ideas are warranted in the crowd scenes.

- Wicker baskets for most of the women
- Water jugs and pottery vessels
- Small Baal idols to be worn as pendants
- One Baal idol which is bartered for, then seized and smashed to the ground by Elijah during the Overture
- Spears for the guards
- Blanket for the Widow's scene
- Wooden bench as the child's bed in the Widow's scene
- Seven foot staff for Elijah
- Food items for the Widow scene
- Knives for Baal prophets
- Bolts of fabric for trading and bartering for crowd scenes



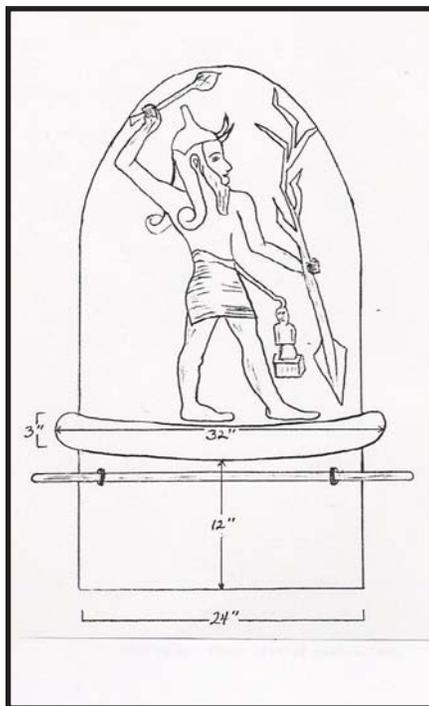
STAGE PROPERTIES

The Altar of Jehovah

According to I Kings 18:30-32, Elijah reconstructed an altar that had been torn down by the people of Israel (I Kings 19:10, 14). The altar should consist of twelve large rocks constructed of Styrofoam, paper maché, etc. The rocks must fit snugly together, with the completed altar being approximately 30-36 inches in height.

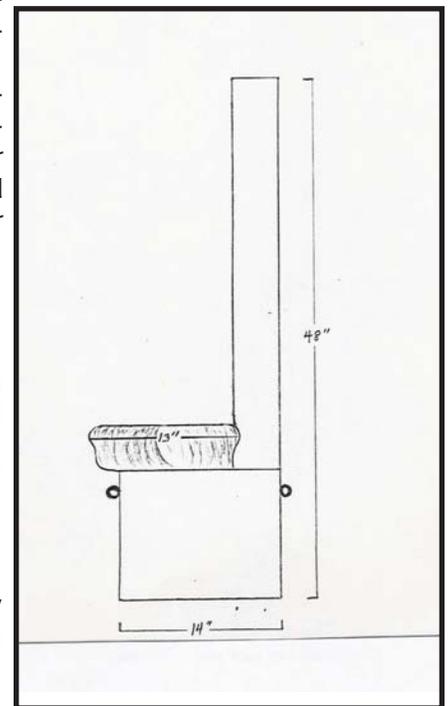
Little musical time is allotted for the repairing of the altar. It is suggested that this repair take place during

the second half of No. 13 ("Call him louder") by Israelites upon instruction from Elijah. Furthermore, at least the bottom half of the altar should be in place from the beginning of the production with the remaining rocks lying near by. This will allow for the concealment and placement of needed electrical devices in the base of the altar for "the fire from heaven" in No. 16.



The Baal Altar

Figures 4 and 5 indicate one version of an historical Baal altar. The backing and the offering shelf should appear to be constructed of marble, with Baal set in "relief." The spear represents war and fire. Offerings to Baal were placed on the shelf area. The shelf should be strong enough to support Elijah as he desecrates Baal's altar by standing on it. Dowels are fastened on each side for transporting purposes.



LIGHTING & STAGING

Special lighting effects are of utmost importance in this production with the “magical” moments in the action, i.e., in particular the fire from heaven in the Baal scene, the sudden arrival of rain, and the mysterious disappearance of Elijah during the whirlwind scene in No. 38.

Lighting should be designed to allow for isolated areas of action during specific scenes such as the Widow’s scene, Elijah’s sleep scene, the Baal scenes, and Elijah’s disappearance.

Of critical importance is the effects used during the “fire descends from heaven” section in No. 16. This can be effectively designed with a combination of “flash pots” and red light in the altar, a large focal overhead leko aimed straight down on the altar, smoke, fog, and pulsating red lights. This special effect creates an exciting moment, but must be designed with safety in mind. It is imperative that a certified special effects person be identified for this task along with consultation with the local fire marshal.

Another critical moment which can easily become laughable if not directed with care is the disappearance of Elijah in No. 38. Special effects lighting will be enormously helpful in this moment of “magic.” Stage wise, use the dancers in their special costumes as the whirlwind. With Elijah on top of the mountain (top platform), he gives the dancers orders and they respond to the text and music with their choreography.

From “Lo, there came a fiery chariot,” the dancers engulf Elijah in their costume fabric, leading him quickly around the stage as if in a whirlwind. Ultimately, they swirl him up to the top of the platform again where he should be entirely covered by their garments. Unseen by the audience, Elijah disappears by escaping behind the platforms and exiting up-left on hands and knees. He should leave both his staff and cloak on the floor at the top of the mountain. This scene must give the illusion of Elijah’s mysterious disappearance.

As the whirlwind dancers leave stage quickly, the Angel of No. 27 appears where Elijah was last seen. During the final chorus (No. 43), a pool of bright light is left on the area where Elijah was last seen, revealing only his staff and cloak. The finale can be lit in different ways, but is quite effective with the stage empty as the chorus sings the final “Amen.” Only the memories of Elijah remain.

Staging affords many opportunities for creative planning and execution. At the same time, the placement of characters and development of the drama should be in the hands of the director, and therefore, becomes a very personal matter. Having staged Elijah a number of times, I have detailed my own stage directions and would happily share them as might be appropriate and within pre-determined settings. Suffice it to say, such writings would require far too much verbiage for this space.

Pursue the powerful effect of the aural and visual combined! It will be well worth your while.

THE COSTUMES

Costumes should certainly reflect the period as well as the importance and wealth or poverty level of the characters. Appropriate research is certainly necessary in determining the nature of the costumes. Since the dancers are foreign to this score, I will add a brief description of those costumes.

Dancers

As Israelites:

Period style, burlap, peasant look in earth colors of light yellows, greens, and browns. Many women with shawls and head coverings; barefoot.

As Baal prophets:

II Kings 10:22 simply states “Vestments of splendor.” Masks of white or unusual headpieces; tunics over tights. Colors and style should be very colorful and perhaps a bit bizarre.

As the whirlwind, fire, sea, earthquake, wind:

Much free flowing chiffon-like fabric, floor length, layered with matching cloaks. Heads, faces, hands, and feet should also be covered. Colors should be dark browns, grays, and greens.

Staging Oratorio – Comments by G. William Bugg

I guess my first response to that is to ask, “Why would you want to do that?” Having said that, I will share with you that I have done it myself but only with Elijah and I have very definite ideas about how that should be done. The extenuating circumstance with this work is that it was originally intended to be an opera but Mendelssohn kind of lost focus with it. He did present it as an operatic production initially but the drama is not continuous enough to sustain it as a theater piece. Since I have laid out two different ideas here let me respond to them one at a time.

How to Stage *Elijah*

Everyone will agree that some of Mendelssohn’s best choral writing is contained within this work. At the same time the scenes with the prophets of Baal and Elijah have some pretty dramatic stuff going on that can be illustrated quite well on stage. As a result the music and the overall effect is strengthened by the dramatic interpretation. However, when the chorus sings the magnificent, “He watching over Israel,” the audience just needs to sit and listen to that inspiring work and allow themselves to be moved by its grace and transforming beauty. If you establish the idea in your own mind that the choral pieces do not gain much by having them choreographed for dancers to interpret, then certain things begin to fall into place. In the production that I staged I had created for us a set that included space for the chorus to perform that was separate from the space for the dramatic action. On a fairly wide stage this was relative easy to do. We put the chorus on two sets of risers arranged in an open “V” formation the narrow end pointed up stage and was approximately twenty feet apart. The open end was then focused down stage approximately thirty-five feet apart. There were three risers for each choral group, on each side and a choral shell behind them. In the area between the two choral groups we built a six level platform at obtuse angles to allow for multiple arrangements of singers, dancers and actors. When the attention was on the choral works we lit the two choral groups left and right, and kept the lights off of the middle section of the set. For the dramatic sections of the work we reversed the lighting arrangement and brought up the middle section and kept the choral groups in less light. For the Baal sequence both areas needed to be adequately lit.

As a result, Elijah enters walks to the top of the center platform and sings his very first recitative in a solo spot with everything else in the dark. He retreats and the orchestra plays the overture. Lights come up on chorus for them to sing “Help Lord.” Lights come up on center section for the “the deep affords no water and the rivers are exhausted...” as actors come into place and prepare for the duet with chorus, “Lord bow down thine ear.”

The point is to try to separate the two different kinds of music, choral or more dramatic, and present them in their strongest position for performance. The same thing could be accomplished in a traditional sanctuary setting by having the choir remain in the loft and staging the dramatic sections in the chancel area.

Staging Oratorio

In general I am too much of a traditionalist to get my head around why staging oratorio is a good idea. Few of the works that I have seen staged, really have a story line that one can tell more effectively with a dramatic interpretation. Chief among these being Handel’s *Messiah*. The best that can happen is a “park and bark” kind of presentation that I have spent the last thirty years of my life trying to move both singers and audiences beyond when

they think of “Opera Performances.” Armed with Carl Gerbrandt’s wonderful book *Sacred Music Drama*, that lists almost four hundred operatic works with sacred themes, surely anyone can find an opera that can be presented with even the most modest of resources. Some works like Vaughan William’s *The First Nowell* can be presented with simple tableaux and solo singers. But as soon as that is offered, the audience will cease to listen to the music in the same way and focus on the tableaux. Other works could utilize dancers for instrumental sections and singers possibly in costumes, but the trade off is the same. All of which is a far cry from actually staging a work that was not created with that intent or for that medium.

One of the real services that this organization can offer, it seems to me, is to make available ideas and personnel that can assist those of us who may need a fresh look at our challenges, or the answer to a problem. I know all of us stand ready to do that.

I hope these ramblings have been just that for someone.

Bill Bugg

The Sacred in Opera

Committee Members:

Ruth Dobson (Chair)

Carl Gerbrandt

Michael Penny

Curtis Rayam

Kathleen Roland-Silverstein

Linda Snyder

The Sacred in Opera is a project of the
National Opera Association.

For more information, please visit us online at

<http://www.noa.org/>

or

<http://www.augustana.edu/hosting/sacredopera/>

Layout by Daniel Hammond, Augustana College '10

Biographies

G. WILLIAM BUGG received the Bachelor of Arts from Furman University, the Master of Church Music from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Memphis. Dr. Bugg holds membership in Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, Phi Kappa Phi, the National Honor Society and is a former member of the Southern Baptist's Centurymen. He was selected in 1970 as one of the "Outstanding Young Men of America." Dr. Bugg has served as State Governor of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, as well as State President. He was a Metropolitan Opera regional finalist in 1970, and is listed in *Who's Who in American Music: Classical*. He has appeared with the Kentucky, Shreveport, Birmingham, Atlanta, Chattanooga, and Southern Regional Opera Companies. In April of 1986 he made his New York recital debut at Carnegie Hall and returned to Carnegie Hall in April of 1988 to present his original work of Dr. Bartolo. In 1990, he sang with the New York Grand Opera. He is a five-time winner of Birmingham's OBELISK Award for Outstanding Vocal Performance and participates annually in the International Cathedral Music Festival held in England. In April of 1998, Dr. Bugg founded and now directs Alabama Operaworks, a regional opera company. In the summer of 1999 he sang for the consecration of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament.

In recent years Dr. Bugg has been a frequent performer in musical theater productions at the Virginia Samford Theater. He has appeared as Frederick in *A Little Night Music*, Emile de Becque in *South Pacific*, and for a second time for Birmingham audiences as Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*. In January of 2009 Dr. Bugg will reprise his role as King Arthur in *Camelot* with that same series. In the Summer of 2007 he was a featured soloist with the Furman Singers Reunion Choir in their first Spelleto performance in Charleston.

In the Spring of 2005 Dr. Bugg's sabbatical leave was dedicated to a study of music theater degree programs in other schools and the genre of cabaret songs. As a conclusion of that project Dr. Bugg produced and performed a one man cabaret which he has done in Birmingham and elsewhere entitled, *Neither Heroes nor Clowns*. Dr. Bugg is married to Virginia F. Bugg, Executive director of Better Basics, a United Way agency working to improve the reading abilities of children in the inner city. They have two grown daughters and four outstanding grandchildren, all of whom live in the Birmingham area.

DR. CARL GERBRANDT is Professor Emeritus of Voice and Director of Opera Theatre at the University of Northern Colorado. While he made his mark in the field of operatic performance, Dr. Gerbrandt has also presented many recitals nationwide, masterclasses, and choral workshops. Of his over seventy opera and oratorio roles, four have been American premieres. He has appeared as bass soloist in two professional filmings of Handel's Messiah. Dr. Gerbrandt made his professional directing debut at Washington D.C.'s Kennedy Center in Mozart's *The Abduction From the Seraglio*. Additionally, his staged production of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* was filmed by PBS-TV with subsequent broadcasts. He has staged over 40 operas, has served on a distinguished panel of international artists, and has given a presentation on the "Opera/Music Theatre Cross-over Singer" before a national audience. He has also presented operatic productions at three national music conventions. Prior to his work at UNC, Dr. Gerbrandt was opera director for Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University, Southern Baptist Seminary where he began their Sacred Music Drama Program, and Tabor College. In 1990, Dr. Gerbrandt held a Visiting Scholar position at Cambridge University, England, where he completed his book, *Sacred Music Drama: the Producer's Guide*. The second edition has recently been published by AuthorHouse. He has also edited *The Songs of Louis Cheslock*, a collection of the complete songs of the late American composer. In 2004, he was again invited to Cambridge University, this time as a Visiting Fellow researching Zarzuela.

Conductor of the heralded Greeley Chorale from 1987-present, Dr. Gerbrandt directed the auditioned 90-voice choir on five International concert tours and presented 10 world premieres. In Summer, 1996, he became the first guest conductor of the Oxford Academy Orchestra in Oxford, England, leading the orchestra and the Chorale in Mozart's Requiem to a near capacity audience in the world renowned Sheldonian Theatre. In 2005, he took the Chorale to Italy. Most noteworthy was a performance before the Pope in Rome, a High Mass in St. Peter's, and a performance of Mozart's Requiem with the Mozart Sinfonietta of Rome before a standing room only audience in the Pope's church, Chiesa di St. Ignazio. The Chorale is scheduled to tour Greece, Summer 2009. Recently, Dr. Gerbrandt has lectured before the National Opera Association convention in New York City, served as opera stage director and voice teacher for the Vocal Arts Symposium in Colorado Springs, as accepted engagements as a voice clinician and stage director. He holds conducting and performance degrees from Tabor College and Wichita State University, and a doctoral degree in Voice Performance from Peabody Conservatory of Music of Johns Hopkins University. Post-doctoral studies in voice and opera were taken at Nordwestdeutsche Musikakademie in Detmold, Germany.

