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HOME-MADE FROM A TO Z: NEW DOCUMENTS FOR THE EARLY HISTORY OF HÄNDEL OPERA IN AMERICA

Rachel Scott

Georg Friedrich Händel's oratorios, orchestral music, and selected arias have been part of American culture since the late eighteenth century¹. The same is not true of his operas, which were poorly aligned with the operatic taste of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and went unperformed for over 150 years following the composer's death in 1759. Beginning in 1920, the initially small-scale productions of the Göttingen Händel Renaissance brought Händel opera to life, first for audiences in Germany, then spreading throughout Europe and reaching the United States in 1927. This article investigates unpublished and heretofore unknown documents to consider the contributions of Oskar Hagen (1888–1957), Werner Josten (1885–1963), and Bayard Quincy Morgan (1883–1967) to the first American production of a Händel opera, his *Julius Caesar*². Production budget drafts, the adapted libretto, and correspondence associated with the performance on 14 May 1927 at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, reiterate the do-it-yourself nature of this debut, which nonetheless generated considerable media interest³. In light of the hegemony of extravagant professional productions of nineteenth-century operas in the first part of the twentieth century, these artefacts demonstrate the small-scale budgets and personal networks on which the performance of early opera relied, both in America and abroad.

Oskar Hagen's 1920 production of *Rodelinda* at the inaugural Göttingen International Handel Festival (Göttinger Händelfestspiele) is recognised as the first Händel opera to be performed in its entirety after the composer's death⁴. After considerable musical success

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1. John Ogasapian notes several performances of Handel's music in Boston in the 1760s and 1770 in *Music of the Colonial and Revolutionary Era* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004).

2. Abbey E. Thompson, for example, indicates that she has not yet "found conclusive evidence of a relationship between Hagen and Josten"; correspondence between the two is presented in the conclusion of this article. "Revival, Revision, Rebirth: Handel Opera in Germany, 1920–1930" (MA Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006), 43.

3. No parts or full score from the 1927 production survive; accordingly, music will not be the focus of this article.

4. Henry Haskell notes the extraordinary response to the premiere of *Rodelinda*: "Reports of the performances appeared in some forty German newspapers; Hagen and his small band of Handel enthusiasts became celebrities almost overnight". Henry Haskell, *The Early Music Revival: A History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 137.

in Göttingen, Hagen left Germany in 1925 to chair the Department of the History and Criticism of Art at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Hagen was the central figure in the Göttingen revival of Händel opera, but the first American production of an opera by that composer also depended on the efforts of the American translator Bayard Quincy Morgan and the German-born musician Werner Josten. Morgan earned a Ph.D. from the University of Leipzig in Germany and taught German at the University of Wisconsin from 1907 to 1934, becoming Hagen’s colleague in 1925 when the latter joined the faculty. Josten toured the United States as a composer and accompanist for song recitals in the early 1920s, then stayed on to teach counterpoint and composition at Smith from 1923 to 1949⁵. The baroque opera revival in America owes much to Josten and his productions of works not only by Händel but also by Claudio Monteverdi, whose *Coronation of Poppea* had its American debut at Smith under Josten’s direction in 1926, shortly after Hagen’s arrival in Madison.

Extant correspondence among these men does not detail the planning of this important American debut, but the three must have collaborated closely, as Josten used Hagen’s editions and Morgan’s translations for the Smith College performances of *Julius Caesar* and *Xerxes*⁶. Although none of these men was primarily or professionally employed by opera companies, their work was essential to bringing Händel’s opera to American audiences and played an important role in the revival of baroque opera in that country. Surviving documentation including budget drafts, a copy of Morgan’s libretto bearing handwritten corrections, and correspondence provides insight into how the production came together and clarifies some of the specific contributions of three German-educated men whose academic and artistic interests led them to work on a modest scale to mount a local production of an important opera⁷.

Posthumous Reception of Händel’s Operas

It was not until the German Händel revival of the 1920s that audiences began to appreciate the composer’s dramatic capabilities; while several of his oratorios had secured a lasting place in the performance repertoire in England and abroad, there was a gap of over 160 years between complete Händel opera performances. *Admeto*, presented at the King’s Theatre in London in 1754, was the last during the composer’s lifetime, and the next was Hagen’s 1920 production of *Rodelinda* at the Göttinger Händelfestspiele⁸. Händel’s operas had already fallen out of favour before his death; in England, the Italian-language works suffered under perceptions of Italian culture as “effeminate and debauched” and

5. Lester D. Brothers. “Werner Josten,” *Grove Music Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.14503>, accessed 30 May 2020.

6. Throughout the article, opera titles will be written as recorded on the item or production in question.

7. The immigration and exile of German intellectuals to America has a rich literature, and, accordingly, will not be the focus of this article. Readers should instead consult Laura Fermi, *Illustrious Immigrants: The Intellectual Migration from Europe, 1930–1941* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Phyllis Keller, *States of Belonging: German-American Intellectuals and the First World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); and Reinhold Brinkmann and Christoph Wolff, *Driven Into Paradise: The Musical Migration from Nazi Germany to the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

8. David Kimbell highlights the importance of Hagen’s work in the rediscovery of Händel’s operas and acknowledges Winton Dean’s less than “cordial” treatment of Hagen in Kimbell, *Handel on the Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 178.

were, at times, coolly received⁹. His oratorios, however, fulfilled audiences' desires for ceremony, politics, and religion so well that the English claimed Händel as their national composer and revered him as a writer of sacred music.

Händel's operatic music was not unknown in England, though it was considered to be of less consequence or lower quality than his oratorios. William Weber records 282 performances of selected pieces from Händel's operas by the newly founded *Concert of Antient Music* between 1776 and 1790, which accounts for sixteen percent of their repertoire during the period¹⁰. London impresarios including Giovanni Andrea Gallini (1728–1805) commissioned operatic pasticcios featuring the composer's arias¹¹. The arias were also posthumously fitted with sacred texts and combined with other compositions to concoct new, more socially acceptable oratorios¹², a repackaging that has more to do with audience preferences than with the music itself¹³.

The Händel Opera Revival in Germany

Händel operas might not have been staged at Smith in the late 1920s without having first been revived in Germany in the early part of that decade. Accordingly, the work that went into making these operas accessible to a German audience offers vital context. At that time, Germans were accustomed to Richard Wagner's music dramas and had moved on to the operas of Richard Strauss. Händel's eighteenth-century *opera seria* would have been less palatable in this context and might not have succeeded theatrically without considerable reworking¹⁴. Although later scholars acknowledge this reality, they nonetheless criticise Hagen for his heavy-handed editing and rewriting of Händel's operas¹⁵. Yet if Hagen's goal was to return beloved works to the stage and to launch a revival of the composer's operas, he must be considered successful.

Hagen did not credit a single source or occasion with sparking his devotion to Händel's operas, but there is evidence that he was exposed to the material as a student. Hagen's contemporary and classmate Hanns Niedecken-Gebhard (1889–1954) recalled that he and Hagen were astonished to learn about Händel's largely unknown and beautiful operatic output in Hermann Abert's musicology courses at the University of Berlin¹⁶. Wolfgang Ruf

9. Mary Ann Parker, "Reception of Handel Operas, Then and Now", *University of Toronto Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (2003): 850–857.

10. William Weber, *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-Century England: A Study in Canon, Ritual and Ideology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), Appendix, Table 1.

11. Parker, "Reception of Handel Operas", 854.

12. Winton Dean with Anthony Hicks, *The New Grove Handel* (New York: Norton, 1983), 113.

13. An analogous phenomenon in theatre can be observed in Händel's near contemporary David Garrick's work to restore Shakespeare to the stage by considerably reworking it. See George Winchester Stone and George Morrow Kahr, *David Garrick: A Critical Biography* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1980).

14. Dean, "Recovery of Handel's Opera", 103–104.

15. For example, see Winton Dean and John Merrill Knapp, *Handel's Operas 1704–1726* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Paul Henry Lang, *George Frideric Handel* (New York: Norton, 1966); and Kimbell, *Handel on the Stage*.

16. "In Hallen saßen zu Füßen ihres tiefverehrten Lehrers Hermann Abert zwei idealistisch gesinnte, kunstbessene Studenten, Oskar Hagen und ich. Mit Staunen hörten wir im Kolleg, daß es von Händel ca. 40 Opern gäbe, die heute kein Mensch mehr kenne, die aber eine Fülle schönster Musik enthielten, sodaß ihre Wiederbelebung sich sehr verlohne!" Hanns Niedecken-Gebhard, "Ein Rückblick: Dreißeig Jahre Händelrenaissance", in *Georg Friedrich Händel: Ausstellung aus Anlaß der Händel-Festspiele des Badischen Staatstheaters*, ed. K. Häfner and K. Pietschmann (Karlsruhe: Badische Landesbibliothek, 1985), 259.

confirms the influence of Abert's scholarship and teaching to the twentieth-century revival of Händel opera¹⁷, and Hellmuth Christian Wolff highlights the importance of Abert's work on Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* to the post-World War I revival of baroque opera more broadly¹⁸. Ulrich Etscheid posits that Hagen learned about Händel's operatic output not in Abert's courses but in his musicology studies with Hermann Kretzschmar at Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Berlin¹⁹. Yet it was Kretzschmar who suggested that attempts to revive Händel's operas would be doomed because of the perceived poor quality of their texts²⁰.

Although Hagen's methods may seem questionable by modern standards of historically informed performance, his important role in the revival of Händel opera should not be underestimated. The Göttingen Händel Renaissance spearheaded by Hagen was not a series of professional productions, but rather a collaborative effort among students and academics at the University of Göttingen to attend to the many artistic and administrative aspects of an opera production. *Rodelinda*, the first offering, was presented in 1920 in the Göttinger Stadttheater and was received enthusiastically²¹. Hagen's Göttingen production of *Giulio Cesare* was performed 222 times within five years of its 1922 premiere²².

Hagen's approach to preparing Händel operas for his contemporaries may seem drastic to twenty-first-century audiences and scholars²³. For example, he shortened the long operas by eliminating da capos and even entire pieces, reassigned arias to different characters, and switched roles to different voice types. He also reorchestrated and reconfigured arias and removed recitatives. David Kimbell argues that Hagen made these substantive changes because he was convinced of the importance of these works and hoped to make Händel a "more central and integral part of the great classical canon of music"²⁴. Hagen's love and respect for Händel's operas is evident from the extant sources, signaling that he made the changes with the intent of reviving interest in a revival of a major composer's previously neglected output.

Händel in America

The 1927 production of *Julius Caesar* at Smith was received in a cultural environment in which Händel was well known and well regarded, but his operas were not. Händel opera excerpts did appear in nineteenth-century American concert halls, but they were vastly outnumbered by excerpts from more recent opera by such composers as Wagner and

17. Wolfgang Ruf, "Hermann Abert und die Händel-Renaissance", *Händel-Jahrbuch* 48 (2002): 221–231.

18. Hellmuth Christian Wolff, *Die Händel-Oper auf der modernen Bühne* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1957).

19. Ulrich Etscheid, *Handels Rodelinda: Libretto - Komposition - Rezeption* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1998), 242.

20. "Aber sie sind durch die Nichtsnützigkeit der Dichtungen heute zum Tode verurteilt . . ." H. Kretzschmar, *Geschichte der Opera* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Hartel, 1919), 177.

21. Wolff, *Die Händel-Oper auf der modernen Bühne*, 11.

22. The durability and success of Hagen's productions is noted with seeming surprise by scholars who find fault with what they consider heavy-handed revisions to Händel's work. See, for example, Winton Dean, "The Recovery of Handel's Operas", in *Music in Eighteenth-Century England: Essays in Memory of Charles Cudworth*, ed. Christopher Hogwood and Richard Luckett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 103–114.

23. For a musical comparison of Hagen's adaptations of Händel's operas, consult Abbey E. Thompson's well-organised thesis on Hagen and the German Händel revival, "Revival, Revision, Rebirth: Handel Opera in Germany, 1920–1930".

24. Kimbell, *Handel on the Stage*, 178.

Giuseppe Verdi²⁵. In nineteenth-century America, Händel was largely known and appreciated as the composer of *Messiah* and other sacred works. The Handel and Haydn Society of Boston was founded in 1815 and held its first concert, “Sacred Oratorio”, that year, featuring excerpts from the oratorios of Händel and Joseph Haydn. In the first seventy-five years of its existence, the group performed Händel oratorios in their entirety 153 times: *Messiah* eighty-two times, *Samson* thirty-three, *Judas Maccabaeus* seventeen, *Israel in Egypt* eight, and thirteen performances of other works²⁶. This group’s repertoire eventually expanded to include such contemporary composers as Amy Beach, Edward Elgar, and Arthur Sullivan, but it continued to perform sacred works exclusively²⁷.

Baroque opera was not familiar in the United States at that time, nor did it fit the prevailing operatic taste. The aesthetics and conventions of Händel’s operas, and those of baroque opera more broadly, differed from the core nineteenth-century repertoire, and they were not well understood or appreciated. In addition, opera productions were too expensive to allow significant financial risk—a concern that continues to affect programming decisions today—and a shift away from the practice of casting aside the old operatic repertoire for the new further discouraged divergence from the established canon²⁸. In Händel’s day, although his operas had commercial success initially, they were quickly replaced with newly composed works, as was customary at that time. In the late nineteenth century, by contrast, most American opera houses featured a repertoire of frequently performed operas.

Opera performance is frequently characterised by opulence; large-scale and lavish productions of canonical nineteenth-century works have long dominated American opera houses. Late nineteenth and early twentieth-century American operagoers expected large orchestras and ensembles, richly designed sets and costuming, and internationally renowned divas²⁹. Around the time of the Händel opera debut in America, most opera offerings were sumptuous productions from such composers as Charles Gounod, Giacomo Puccini, Verdi, and Wagner³⁰. The first American production of Händel’s *Julius Caesar*,

25. For example, the Digital Archives of the New York Philharmonic yields eighty-five programmes featuring Händel’s works between 1900 and 1927 compared to 1,065 programs featuring Wagner’s works during the same time period. The Händel results include entire oratorios, instrumental works, excerpted arias and ensembles from opera and oratorios, and arranged opera excerpts, most famously the *Largo*, “Ombra mai fu” from *Xerxes*. New York Philharmonic, “Digital Archives of the New York Philharmonic”, <https://archives.nyphil.org/index.php>, accessed 30 May 2020.

26. Handel and Haydn Society (Boston, MA), *History of the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston, Massachusetts*: Vol. 1, 1815–1890 (New York, 1977), 518.

27. *History of the Handel and Haydn Society*, Vol. 2, 1890–1933.

28. Marcia J. Citron provides a thorough discussion of musical canon formation, including the influence of historicity in *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000) and William Weber focuses on Händel to consider beginnings of musical classicism—performing music of the past—in the eighteenth century, in “Intellectual Bases of the Handelian Tradition, 1759–1800”, *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 108 (1981): 100–114.

29. James Henry Mapleson and Harold D. Rosenthal, *The Mapleson Memoirs: The Career of an Operatic Impresario, 1858–1888* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966), 120. Impresario Colonel Mapleson vividly depicts moving “costumes, properties, and even singers . . . to and fro across the ocean” to meet American demands for opulent European opera.

30. Edward Johnson, who served as Metropolitan Opera manager from 1935 to 1950 commented that “opera depends for its prosperity on Verdi, Wagner, and Puccini”, as quoted in Rosanne Martorella’s “The Relationship Between Box Office and Repertoire: A Case Study of Opera”, in *Art and Society: Readings in the Sociology of the Arts*, ed. Arnold W. Foster and Judith R. Blau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 312.

in contrast, was a humble performance of unfamiliar repertoire performed by students and faculty.

Oskar Hagen: Madison, Wisconsin, 1925

Hagen's role in the revival of Händel opera becomes less clear after he left Germany, but it is evident that his interest in publicising these works continued. In Madison, his focus turned to art history, a field to which he contributed significantly as an author of scholarly and pedagogical texts and as the founder of the University of Wisconsin's Department of the History and Criticism of Art and Art Collection³¹. He had left behind in Germany a culturally vibrant music milieu. In a 1926 letter to his publisher, Hagen describes a lacklustre classical music scene in Madison; nonetheless, he conveys the joy he and his wife experienced from sharing the beauty of Händel opera locally, albeit on a small scale³². Despite his expanded academic and professional responsibilities at the University of Wisconsin, Hagen continued to compose music in a variety of genres and arranged works by Johann Sebastian Bach, Haydn, Felix Mendelssohn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Antonio Vivaldi, Wagner, and the contemporary composers Hans Chemin-Petit and Bohuslav Martinů. Examples of these compositions and arrangements are housed in the Wisconsin Music Archives at the University of Wisconsin–Madison³³. The editions Hagen prepared for *Rodelinda*, *Ottone* (in German, *Otto und Theophano*), *Julius Caesar*, and *Xerxes*, the successful productions he mounted, and the overwhelming excitement he built for Händel's operas all ensured that their revival would spread far beyond Göttingen.

In a handwritten dedication to Wisconsin Governor Philip La Follette and his wife on the piano score for his adaptation of Händel's opera *Serse*, Hagen describes his effort to revive Händel operas as "home-made"³⁴.

This inscription not only expresses the time and care Hagen dedicated to the project but also reflects the excitement he felt and the importance he ascribed to his work. Hagen's description of the production as "home-made" included finding, adapting, and orchestrating the music, rewriting the libretto, preparing a vocal score, and handwriting every single element of the musical notation on a lithographic plate, which he then used to print every page from his own desk. Hagen's work in reviving Händel's operas also encompassed other activities not mentioned in the inscription, such as recruiting musicians, attending to various elements of stagecraft, and facilitating diverse aspects of the production. While most opera productions at this time relied on a team of paid collaborators,

31. Lee Sorensen, ed., "Hagen, Oskar", *Dictionary of Art Historians* (Web site). <http://www.arthistorians.info/hageno>, accessed 30 May 2020.

32. "Musikalisch ist hier so gut wie nichts los. Die Zentralstelle, von der aus die Musik dieses Ortes organisiert werden sollte, ist so miserable besetzt, daß schon deshalb nichts zu erreichen ist. Mit Thyra zusammen habe ich während des Winters hier und anderswo mehrfach Vorträge über Händels Opern gehalten, teilweise unterstützt durch ein kleines Streichorchester bzw. Quartett. Das waren Lichtblicke für uns und rechte Freuden. So schafft Händel Schönheiten auch jenseits des Ozeans", Hagen's letter to Reinhard Piper (Madison, Wisconsin, July 10, 1926), Nachlaß Hagen, quoted in Etscheid, *Handels Rodelinda*, 245.

33. Unfortunately, no Händel arrangements are included. Mills Music Library, "Oskar Hagen Collection (1910–1958)," <https://www.library.wisc.edu/music/home/collections/wisconsin-music-archives/oskar-hagen-collection-1910-1958/>, accessed 30 May 2020.

34. The Mills Music Library at the University of Wisconsin–Madison holds this piano score to Händel's *Serse*, which had been edited, printed, and inscribed by Hagen. Courtesy of the Mills Music Library, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

This is "home-made" from A to Z.
 I unearthed the music, wrote a new libretto, adapted and
 orchestrated the score, arranged the vocal score and having
 no means for its publication wrote with my own hand every
 staff, every clef, every note and every word on the lithographic plate,
 I inked the negative on my own desk and printed every page
 on paper, which a local news paper at Göttingen kindly forwarded
 to me. The 31 copies = there are no more in existence =, printed
 on my own little press, made possible the first performance since
 1738 of this truly immortal opera of George Friedrich Händel at
 Göttingen on the 5th of July 1924. On that occasion this copy was
 used by one of the singers, of which fact the books still bear evidence.
 Trusting that the "home-made" of this article will make up
 for its having been used on a previous memorable occasion, I dedicate
 this copy, No 5, to our beloved
 Governor, and Mrs Phil. La Follette
 as a token of friendship.
 Madison, February 6. 1931
 Oskar Hagen

Fig. 1. Oskar Hagen's dedication of his arrangement of Georg Friedrich Händel's opera *Serse* to Wisconsin Governor Philip La Follette and his wife, Isabel La Follette. Courtesy of the Mills Music Library, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Hagen did much of the labour himself or with the help of his network of colleagues and acquaintances.

Hagen's do-it-yourself Händel revival was literally homemade. In his inscription to Governor La Follette, Hagen indicates that the copy of the score dedicated to the governor was "used by one of the singers"³⁵. Hagen needed to recruit singers and instrumentalists cheaply and quickly, and he often looked no further than his own family. His wife, soprano Thyra Leisner Hagen (1888–1938), sang lead roles in Händel operas at Göttingen, including the title role in *Rodelinda*, Cleopatra in *Julius Caesar*, Theophano in *Otto und Theophano*, and Romilda in *Serse*. Thyra Hagen's sister Emmi Leisner (1885–1958), a celebrated contralto who performed extensively in operas as well as in concerts, was perhaps the better known of the two sisters³⁶. Thyra's public performances were nonetheless well received, and critics noted strong acting³⁷. The vocal resources available in his own family may have informed Hagen's selection of Händel operas to edit and produce, as his wife

35. See fig. 1.

36. Karl-Josef Kutsch, Hansjörg Rost, and Leo Riemens, *Großes Sängerlexikon*. 4th ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter Saur, 2004), 2675–2676.

37. For example, "Revival of 'Julius Caesar' the Feature of Handel Festival in Goettingen", *Musical Courier* 85, no. 4 (July 27, 1922): 5–8.

certainly played large roles in their revival. Violinist Rudolf Steglich (1886–1976), another participant in Göttingen, confirms Thyra’s participation from the outset and relays a story in which Hagen—newly risen from his sickbed—claimed that Händel opera had cured him³⁸.

Hagen’s claim to have “unearthed” the music is a stretch; he was familiar with and likely had convenient access to Friedrich Chrysander’s editions of selected Händel operas published by the Händel-Gesellschaft between 1858 and 1902. In fact, the title page of his piano score for *Julius Caesar* indicates that it was indeed based on the Händel-Gesellschaft edition, which Chrysander founded, and under which imprint his Händel editions were published³⁹. In a foreword to the same score for *Julius Caesar*, Hagen writes that the Chrysander edition was readily available in large libraries⁴⁰.

Hagen’s librettos were written in German for contemporary German-speaking audiences. This practice of translating into the vernacular was common in early twentieth-century opera productions, not only to facilitate understanding and engagement but also to cater to feelings of nationalism and national identity⁴¹. As Hagen acknowledged in the *Serse* dedication—saying he “wrote a new libretto”—his approach was not to translate the original libretto directly into German but to make something new and entirely his own. The signed note shown in Figure 2, warning against unauthorised use, confirms that Hagen prepared this piano score for the Göttingen Händel Festival.

A comparison of Hagen’s versions to the Chrysander or Hallische Händel-Ausgabe⁴² reveals many profound differences, showing that he made changes to suit the resources at his disposal and the audience he expected⁴³. In addition to being translated (*übersetzt*), Hagen’s entire opera, including music and text, was newly formed (*neugestaltet*) or reenvisioned. He excised entire set pieces (recitatives, arias, and ensembles) and scenes, moved passages to different places in the opera, shortened pieces, changed the orchestration of individual pieces or even of the entire opera, and altered characters’ voice types. In his version of *Julius Caesar*, for example, Sextus became a tenor role instead of a trouser role⁴⁴, and the role of Julius Caesar, originally written for a castrato, was revised to be sung by a bass-baritone. These were substantial changes, but also a practical acknowledgement of the scarcity of castrati and countertenors, not to mention the (by then) perceived incongruity of a heroic character singing in a high-pitched, “feminine” voice.

38. “Da habe ich mir zum Zeitvertreib Partituren Händels geben lassen, und wie ich so wieder einmal auf seine Opern stieß, da hat mich nichts schneller gesund gemacht! Kaum von Bette erstanden, habe ich mich an den Flügel gesetzt, und meine Frau sang mir Händelsche Operarien, die einfach herrlich sind. Heute fehlt uns dazu nur die Geige”, quoted in R. Steglich, “Die neue Händel-Opern-Bewegung”, *Händel-Jahrbuch* 1 (1928):80–81.

39. “Für die deutsche Bühne auf Grund der Partitur der deutschen Händelgesellschaft übersetzt und neugestaltet von Oskar Hagen”, George Frideric Händel and Nicola Francesco Haym, *Julius Caesar: Oper in drei Akten* (Frankfurt, ©1923/©1951).

40. “Wer sich für die Originalniederschrift Händels interessiert, dem steht der vorzügliche Neudruck der Originalpartitur in der Ausgabe Fr. Chrysanders (Händelgesellschaft Bd. 70) auf allen größeren Bibliotheken zur Verfügung”, George Frideric Händel and Nicola Francesco Haym, “Vorwort” in *Julius Caesar: Oper in drei Akten* (Frankfurt: C. F. Peters, ©1923/©1951).

41. Judi Palmer, “Surtitling Opera: A Surtitler’s Perspective on Making and Breaking the Rules”, in *Music, Text and Translation*, ed. Helen Julia Minors (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 21–33.

42. G. F. Händel, *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe: kritische Gesamtausgabe. Julius Caesar Series 2, Bd. 14* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1951).

43. Detailed musical comparison is outside the scope of this article, Abbey E. Thompson’s MA thesis does a credible job: “Revival, Revision, Rebirth: Handel Opera in Germany, 1920–1930”.

44. The first Sesto was Margherita Durastanti (active 1700–1734) and the role is once again performed by women; preferences have come full circle.

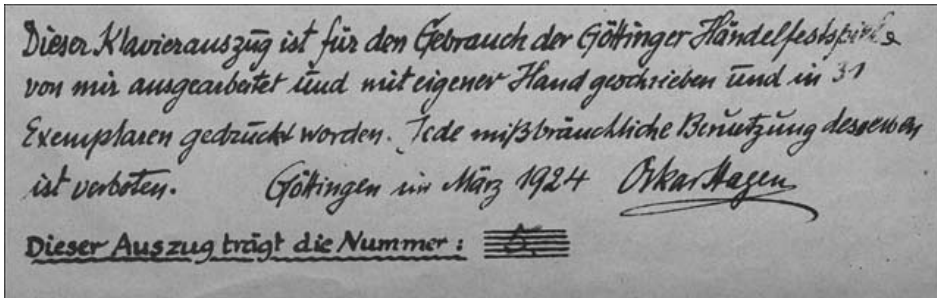


Fig. 2. Oskar Hagen's note on a piano score explaining that he prepared it for the Göttingen Händel Festival in 1924. Courtesy of the Mills Music Library, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Hagen did not claim to be interested in the composer's intent or historical accuracy, instead [he] made changes to suit the resources and audience at his disposal.

Hagen's approach is not so unusual in the context of the early twentieth century, when ideas about historically informed performances of baroque music as understood today were barely nascent. Increasing historical awareness has been traced back to such figures as Arnold Dolmetsch and Wanda Landowska, as well as to musicologists who began to make early music available through historical editions such as *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst* and scholarly publications, and who organised performance groups to explore this "new" repertory. Howard Mayer Brown links *collegia musica* at German universities in the beginning of the twentieth century to the subsequent performance of early music in American universities⁴⁵. This influence was carried to the United States by many channels, most directly via German musicians and scholars working there. Werner Josten was one such German who helped to introduce elements of historical awareness in his revival of baroque opera at Smith in the late 1920s. However, the initial Händel productions, which relied so heavily on homegrown talent, would not have been possible without Hagen's adaptation of the opera and the English translation by his University of Wisconsin colleague Bayard Quincy Morgan⁴⁶.

Bayard Quincy Morgan: Madison, Wisconsin, ca. 1926

The program notes for the American debut of *Julius Caesar* credit Hagen's score; no translator is listed, but a contemporaneous *Boston Evening Transcript* review indicates that Bayard Morgan translated *Julius Caesar* into English for the event⁴⁷. Morgan taught at the University of Wisconsin–Madison until 1934, when he left to head the German Department at Stanford University, where his papers are now housed⁴⁸. Box 2, Folder 4 in Morgan's collection in the Department of Special Collections & University Archives is

45. Howard Mayer Brown, "Pedantry or Liberation? A Sketch of the Historical Performance Movement", in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 27–56.

46. Documentation places these colleagues in proximity, see M. G., "Umschau der Schriftleitung", *Monatshefte für Deutschen Unterricht* 23, Nr. 3 (März 1931): 83–86.

47. Henry Taylor Parker, "Opera from Handel: His 'Julius Caesar' Two Centuries Old", *Boston Evening Transcript*, May 16, 1927, reprinted in *Baroque Opera at Smith College, 1926–1931* (New York, 1966), 26.

48. Online Archive of California, "Guide to Bayard Quincy Morgan Papers", <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt5f59s2k3/>, accessed 30 May 2020.

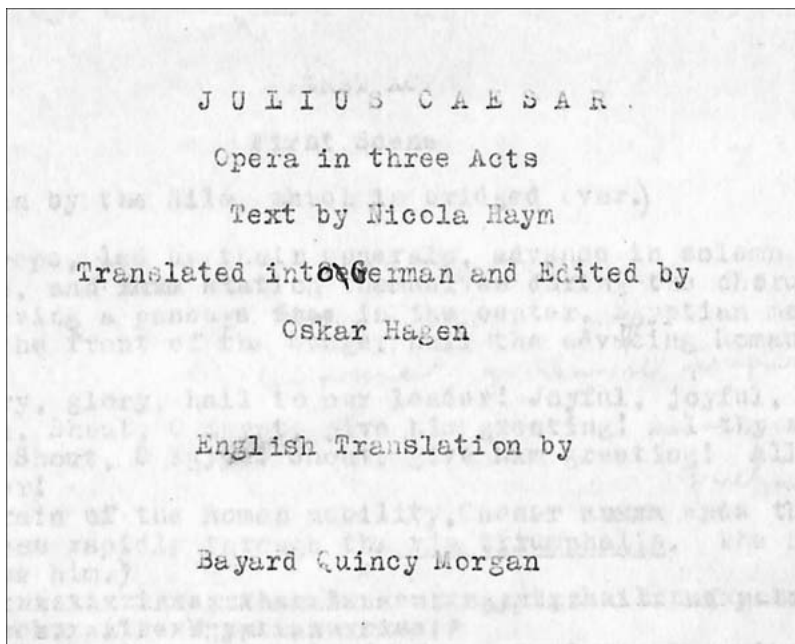


Fig. 3. Title page of the manuscript of *Julius Caesar*, translated from Nicola Haym's original Italian libretto into German by Oskar Hagen and then into English by Bayard Quincy Morgan. Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

labelled “Händel; Xerxes”, and surprisingly, it includes not only the revised English translation of *Xerxes* but also that of *Julius Caesar*. This archival discrepancy presents an impetus for scholars to examine the contents of archival collections more fully, and it raises the possibility of additional documentation linking Hagen, Josten, and Morgan. The collection provides no information on how Morgan came to translate *Julius Caesar*—that is, if he was formally commissioned and paid to do so, or if he was more casually engaged, perhaps by his colleague Oskar Hagen. If Morgan was paid for his work, the amount was not included in the Smith College budget discussed below.

The translated text is presented by act and scene and follows the typical conventions of scripts. Lines of text are preceded by the speaker's name and stage directions, and scene descriptions are included in parentheses: for example, “(The curtain rises during the last bars of the symphony)” or “(Plain by the sea at Alexandria in the light of the setting sun)”⁴⁹. Handwritten corrections to the typewritten text appear throughout, both over the text and in the margins⁵⁰. The manuscript libretto is divided into Act 1 (four scenes), Act 2 (two scenes), and Act 3 (three scenes). This aligns with Hagen's adaptation of Händel's opera but differs considerably from Händel's original, which had eleven scenes in the first and second acts and ten scenes in the third.

49. Morgan, *Julius Caesar*, Third Act, First Scene, 15. Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

50. Corrections appear to be in Morgan's own hand; they are consistent with the handwritten corrections to his typewritten translation of *Xerxes*.

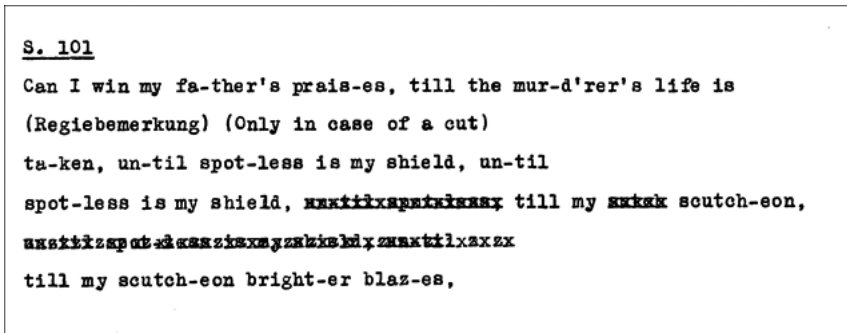


Fig. 4. One of five pages of supplements included in the box with Morgan's libretto for Julius Caesar. Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

Indeed, it is clear from his libretto that Morgan worked from Hagen's German version of *Julius Caesar*, already an extensive revision of Haym's original Italian text, which was fitted to the adapted music to be used in the Smith College production. This process aligns with Morgan's usual practice, as he primarily translated German works into English. Contemporary reviews of the Smith College production praise Morgan for improving the text but assume that he worked directly from the original libretto rather than from Hagen's German translation. Olin Downes of the *New York Times*, for example, wrote: "Morgan's version of the Haym libretto . . . makes an originally diffuse and somewhat bungling job quite concise and as dramatic as might be within the forms and the formulas of eighteenth century opera"⁵¹.

Figure 4 presents one of five pages of supplements included in the box with Morgan's libretto. The underlined text, "S. 101", likely indicates a page number⁵². Morgan's use of antique language—including the term *scutcheon*, an archaic spelling of *escutcheon* (shield)—is noteworthy, even if it was chosen for the purpose of scansion with the music⁵³.

Page 101 in the Peters Edition piano score of Händel's *Julius Caesar* as adapted by Hagen is the final section of the act-ending aria by Sextus ("Darf ich ruhen" or "L'angue offeso mai riposa")⁵⁴. Morgan's supplemental aria text matches syllabically with the music and semantically with the Italian and German texts on page 101 of the Peters Edition score, which is the "B" section of Händel's da capo aria. Hagen rewrote the aria to omit the repeated and originally ornamented "A" section. Interestingly, the director's note indicates that the text is only to be used in the case of a cut. Hagen indicates a possible cut from the end of page 100 to the last measure in the second system of page 102 that would render the supplemental text unnecessary.

51. "A Handel Revival: First American Production of 'Julius Caesar' – Classic Opera After 200 Years", *New York Times*, May 22, 1927, X6.

52. Seite, German for page, is often abbreviated as S.

53. Google Books Ngram Viewer shows a declining use of this term in the English language book corpus from 1860, https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=escutcheon&year_start=1750&year_end=1950&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cescutcheon%3B%2Cc0, accessed 30 May 2020.

54. George Frideric Händel and Nicola Francesco Haym, *Julius Caesar: Oper in drei Akten* (Frankfurt: C.F. Peters, ©1923/©1951).

Table 1. Comparison of a section of the Italian libretto of Händel's opera *Julius Caesar* from the Chrysander edition, German text written by Oskar Hagen, the English translation by Bayard Quincy Morgan.

Nicola Haym's Italian	Oskar Hagen's German	Bayard Quincy Morgan's uncorrected English
<p>A: L'anguie offeso mai riposa, se il veleno pria non spande dentro il sangue all offensor.</p> <p>B: Così l'alma mia non osa di mostrarsi altera e grande, se non svelle l'empio cor.</p>	<p>A: Darf ich ruhen, darf ich rasten, jemals ruhn, ehe Rache ich genommen, eh er tot am Boden liegt.</p> <p>Wie ein Wurm, den man getreten, schlag auch ich die gift'gen Zähne in die Ferse dem, der mich verletzt hat.</p> <p>B: Meines Vaters heil'gen Manen hab als Sohn ichs zugeschworen, hab ich Rache treu gelobt.</p> <p>Was ich schwur, muß ich halten allen Nöten kühn zum Trotze, Muß ihn schlagen, töten den, der ihn erschlug.</p>	<p>A: Dare I dally, dare I rest me, ever rest, until vengeance I have taken, till he dead before me lies.</p> <p>Like a snake that has been trodden I will [strike?] my poison fangs into the foot of him who has offended me.</p> <p>B: To my father's sacred spirit as his son my oath I've taken, vengeance I have truly sworn.</p> <p>What I swore, I will keep it, notwithstanding all distresses, I must slay him, kill the man that slew my sire.</p>

Comparing the German and English texts of this aria further demonstrates that Morgan worked from Hagen's more verbose German text. Table 1 presents the Italian from the Chrysander edition, the German text written by Hagen, and the English translation by Morgan. The Italian text is considerably shorter and is repeated in various orders throughout both the "A" and "B" sections of the aria. The German and English texts are longer, and few phrases of the German text repeat, reflecting Hagen's belief that his audiences had little tolerance for da capo arias and their repeated texts.

The text of the "A" section of the same aria is presented in Figure 5 to illustrate the style and variety of revisions to the typewritten text.

Werner Josten: Northampton, Massachusetts, 1927

Soon after Josten's arrival at Smith College, he launched a successful series of baroque operas⁵⁵. In 1926, he led the American debut of Monteverdi's *Coronation of Poppea* for the commemorative opening of Smith's Sage Hall. These early productions were homespun events involving students, faculty, and community members. An *Opera News* article comments on the local origins and small scale of the first production: "The college voice-teachers were pressed into service, a chorus was recruited, sets and costumes were designed and homemade and *Poppaea* was put into rehearsal"⁵⁶. In the *New York Times*,

55. The Werner Josten Performing Arts Library at Smith is named for him.

56. P. Keppler, "Baroque Beachhead: Recollections of a Bold Venture", *Opera News*, December 1, 1958, 30.



Fig. 6. Photograph by Eric Stahlberg of the Smith College Faculty Opera production of *Julius Caesar* performed at the Academy of Music in Northampton, Massachusetts, on 14 May 1927. Courtesy of College Archives, Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts).

Julius Caesar commensurate with its musical worth”⁶¹. Estimate B, at \$950, would “allow for a minimum of equipment with absolutely no attempt at scenic illusion of decorative beauty”⁶². Wigs and properties were the only categories that remained unchanged between the two estimates. Neither budget allowed for extravagances, and accordingly, both relied on homemade sets and apparel. In both options A and B, Art Department faculty and students would be responsible for the scenery and costume design. From photographs of the event, including the image in Figure 6, Estimate A seems to have been accepted: the scenery includes steps, platforms, and arches, not just a curtain. The special “18th century chandeliers” mentioned in Estimate A, however, are not evident in the production photographs. Neither budget accounts for the purchase or rental of scores and parts; presumably Hagen gave permission to use his adaptation free of charge⁶³. The Peters Edition of Hagen’s piano score, one reviewer notes, was used “with a few modifications” in this production and was available at the Boston Public Library⁶⁴.

Contemporaneous reviews of *Julius Caesar* confirm several homespun elements of the production, from set and costume design to the local recruitment of participants. The stage sets and costumes were largely homemade and simple. The programme included an “explanatory note on the scenery and costumes” that conveyed that a literal reconstruction of ancient Egypt was not attempted, but rather that the producers “have taken the great 18th century painters as their guides, and constructed scenes and costumes which

61. *Julius Caesar* [budget - Estimate A], Courtesy of College Archives, Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts).

62. *Julius Caesar* [budget - Estimate B], Courtesy of College Archives, Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts).

63. Figure 2 forbids the unauthorised use of Hagen’s adaptation.

64. Parker, “Opera from Handel”, 26.

JULIUS CAESAR.

Estimate A.

Scenery (Consisting mainly of curtains but with platforms, doorways, arches and steps.)	\$800.00
Costumes (Based on a cast of seven principals and twenty supernumeraries, and including materials, the salary of an expert seamstress, and her living expenses.)	575.00
Wigs (To be rented in New York.)	100.00
Properties (As specified in the text.)	75.00
Lighting (Including the rental of additional equipment and the expense of installing it, <i>with special 18th Century chandeliers.</i>)	350.00
Makeup (Services of a makeup man from Springfield.)	<u>50.00</u>
Total	\$1950.00

This budget would permit a dignified though not over elaborate staging of Julius Caesar commensurate with its musical worth. The designs for scenery and costumes would be made and carried out by members of the Art Department and their pupils.

Fig. 7. Estimate A, the more generous budget for the 1927 Smith College production of Händel's *Julius Caesar*. Courtesy of College Archives, Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts).

JULIUS CAESAR.

Estimate B.

Scenery (A Curtain-Setting with no indication of the locale of the play.)	\$400.00
Costumes (Rented from New York.)	300.00
Wigs " " " "	100.00
Properties	75.00
Lighting (Using the equipment already to be found at the Academy, with some additional expense for gelatines, etc.)	50.00
makeup (Possibly to be provided by a student.)	25.00
Total	<u>\$850.00</u>

These estimates allow for a minimum of equipment with absolutely no attempt at scenic illusion or decorative beauty. The opera would be performed against curtains, in rented costumes and in flat illumination. In this case the music would be obliged to stand on its own feet.

Fig. 8. Estimate B, the budget for a thriftier production of Händel's *Julius Caesar* at Smith College. Courtesy of College Archives, Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts).

will add one more element of interest . . . by enabling its audience to see and hear it essentially as it would have been seen and heard 200 years ago”⁶⁵. By studying eighteenth-century paintings to re-create the fashionable dress and design of that time, the production designers did attempt some visual authenticity.

This effort to create visual effects faithful to Händel’s time stands in stark contrast to the aural effects. Although no parts or full score from this production survive, reviews offer some hints of what it sounded like. One homemade element of the production was a “harpsichordized” piano. Several reviews acknowledged the interesting sound of the upright piano listed as a harpsichord in the program, and some provided evocative descriptions: “so doctored as to yield the peculiar twing of the harpsichord, an effect which was skillfully enhanced by an extra vibrato in the accompanying ‘cello”⁶⁶. Downes notes in his *New York Times* review that this version of the work was condensed and contracted, but he found this approach appropriate both for the small stage and for the modest production. He reports that the orchestra consisted of “a piano with a harpsichord effect, a string choir, a flute, oboe, bassoon and trumpet . . . held together with excellent musicianship and authority by Mr. Josten”⁶⁷. Both Oscar Thompson and Henry Taylor Parker missed the horns, “used four strong in an opera”⁶⁸. Parker commented on Händel’s “moderation with the ornaments of song”, saying that the composer “is as likely to bestow them upon a male as a female voice, upon a bass as well as a tenor—slow, large-voiced, emotionally significant coloratura of the elder day”⁶⁹. One wonders if the restrained use of vocal ornament had more to do with Hagen’s score, or with the limited musical training and experience of the amateur singers.

Most participants in this first Händel production were local, but not all were affiliated with Smith. Because Smith is a women’s college, men were recruited for singing roles, but they also played in the orchestra and contributed to other elements of the production. The performance featured the conductor’s wife, Margaret Josten (1888–1976), as Cleopatra, much like the Göttingen Händel productions starring Hagen’s wife, Thyra. Local newspaper reviewers proudly acknowledge the talented homegrown performers: “Vocal honors went to Miss Marie Millette of the music faculty and Walter Marsh of this city”⁷⁰. Another common theme in reviews is a call for professional opera houses to add Händel to their repertoire; for example, Parker writes: “Sooner or later the Metropolitan or the Chicagoan stage may find room for an opera by Händel. Its larger means will amplify and adorn the voyage of discovery. At Northampton on Saturday a college laid the course”⁷¹. The modest production at Smith indeed laid the foundation for continued exploration of baroque operas at the college, as well as for increasingly professional productions of these works.

65. Program notes for *Julius Caesar*, May 14, 1927, printed in *Baroque Opera at Smith College*, 20.

66. Francis Regal, “Handel’s *Julius Caesar* Given at Northampton: Ancient Opera Produced for First time in America by Smith College Department of Music”, *Springfield Republican*, May 15, 1927 reprinted in *Baroque Opera at Smith College*, 22. The process of preparing the “harpsichordized” piano for Baroque opera performances at Smith College was not documented, but Haskell indicates that around this time, they were “created by inserting thumbtacks or similar devices into the piano hammers, producing a metallic sound not unlike that of the modern French and German harpsichords”, see Haskell, *The Early Music Revival*, 87.

67. Downes, “Handel’s ‘Caesar’ Sung at Smith”, 27.

68. Parker, “Opera from Handel”, 27.

69. *Ibid.*, 27.

70. “‘Julius Caesar’ well sung at Smith College”, *Springfield Union*, May 16, 1927, reprinted in *Baroque Opera at Smith College*, 25.

71. Parker, “Opera from Handel”, 27.

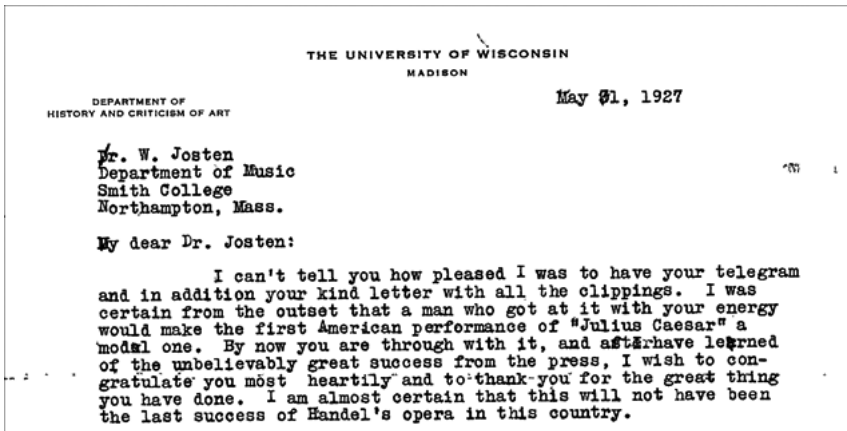


Fig. 9. Letter from Oskar Hagen to Werner Josten. Courtesy of Music Library, Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts).

Conclusion: Putting the Production Together

Hagen wrote to Josten on 31 May 1927 to congratulate and thank him for his successful production of *Julius Caesar*: "I was certain from the outset that a man who got at it with your energy would make the first American performance of 'Julius Caesar' a model one"⁷².

The letter suggests not only that Hagen was aware that Josten was working on this production, but also that he had been involved "from the outset"⁷³. Unfortunately, correspondence or records that would make explicit the nature of the collaboration among Hagen, Josten, and Morgan have not yet emerged, but it is evident that Hagen and Josten followed similar processes in their respective productions. Both men recruited musicians and attended to numerous administrative and artistic details, handling things, as Hagen put it, "from A-Z"⁷⁴. They were each actively involved in a variety of decisions and tasks; the work they could not execute themselves was frequently completed by their own friends and associates.

Although opera productions frequently present canonical works on a grand scale, early performances of Händel opera in the United States were not unique in exhibiting home-made elements. Around the time Hagen set to work on Händel operas in Germany, Dolmetsch and his contemporaries in England were making copies of historical instruments, rediscovering long-forgotten music, and forming ensembles to play the music on period instruments⁷⁵. Initial performances of Händel's Hamburg operas were not performed by virtuoso singers and an excellent orchestra, but rather by a small group of professionals supplemented by gymnasium students⁷⁶.

72. The two extant letters between Josten and Hagen in the Smith College Library are both from Hagen to Josten and are dated May 31, 1927, and May 16, 1928.

73. Oskar Hagen, Letter to Dr. W. Josten dated May 31, 1927. Courtesy of Music Library, Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts).

74. See Figure 1.

75. Margaret Campbell, *Dolmetsch: The Man and His Work* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975).

76. David Kimbell discusses the "motley elements" of Hamburg opera performances during Händel's time at the Theater am Gänsemarkt from 1703 until 1705 or 1706 in order to contrast them to the highly professional forces available to him as an opera composer in London, see *Handel on the Stage*.

Indeed, these revivals of early music have much in common with performances of avant-garde music: both frequently require the composer to recruit musician colleagues, make new instruments or customise existing ones, create clearly notated music in sufficient parts, and modify the available resources to achieve the desired effect. Certainly, some musicians in these arenas benefitted from patronage that supplied ample resources, including trained performers, suitable venues, and copyists. Most, however, were compelled to offer productions that were in some sense “home-made”. We are only beginning to appreciate the relationship of these three German-educated scholars whose humble musical collaboration brought the first fully staged Händel opera to America. We can confidently conclude, however, that their efforts were similar to those of peers throughout Europe who worked locally and modestly to produce early music in an age of opulence and grandeur.

English Abstract

The contributions of Oskar Hagen, Werner Josten, and Bayard Quincy Morgan were essential to the successful production of Händel's *Julius Caesar* at Smith College in 1927. This article presents and examines previously unpublished artefacts associated with the first performance of a Händel opera in America to consider its homemade nature and the significance of homemade music within the context of the early music revival. Considering the hegemony of extravagant nineteenth-century opera productions in the first part of the twentieth century, these documents demonstrate the small-scale budgets and personal networks on which the performance of early opera often relied at that time.

French Abstract

Les contributions d'Oskar Hagen, Werner Josten, et Bayard Quincy Morgan ont été essentielles à au succès de la production de *Julius Caesar* de Haendel au Smith College en 1927. Cet article présente et étudie des artefacts inédits liés à la première représentation d'un opéra de Haendel en Amérique à considérer sa nature artisanale, et la signification d'une production artisanale dans le contexte du renouveau de la musique ancienne.

Compte tenu de l'hégémonie des productions d'opéras parfois extravagantes au 19^e siècle, ces documents montrent les petits budgets et les réseaux personnels sur lesquels les représentations d'opéras baroques s'appuyaient souvent à cette époque.

German Abstract

Die Beiträge von Oskar Hagen, Werner Josten und Bayard Quincy Morgan waren für die erfolgreiche Produktion von Händels *Julius Caesar* am Smith College im Jahr 1927 von entscheidender Bedeutung. In diesem Artikel werden bisher unveröffentlichte Gegenstände im Zusammenhang mit der Uraufführung einer Händel-Oper in Amerika vorgestellt und untersucht, um deren 'handgemachte' Natur und die Bedeutung 'handgemachter' Musik im Umfeld der Wiederbelebung der Alten Musik einzuordnen. In Anbetracht der Dominanz extravaganter Opernproduktionen des 19. Jahrhunderts in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts zeigen diese Dokumente, mit welcher geringen Budgets und mittels welcher persönlichen Netzwerke eine Aufführung von frühen Opern damals häufig nur stattfinden konnte.