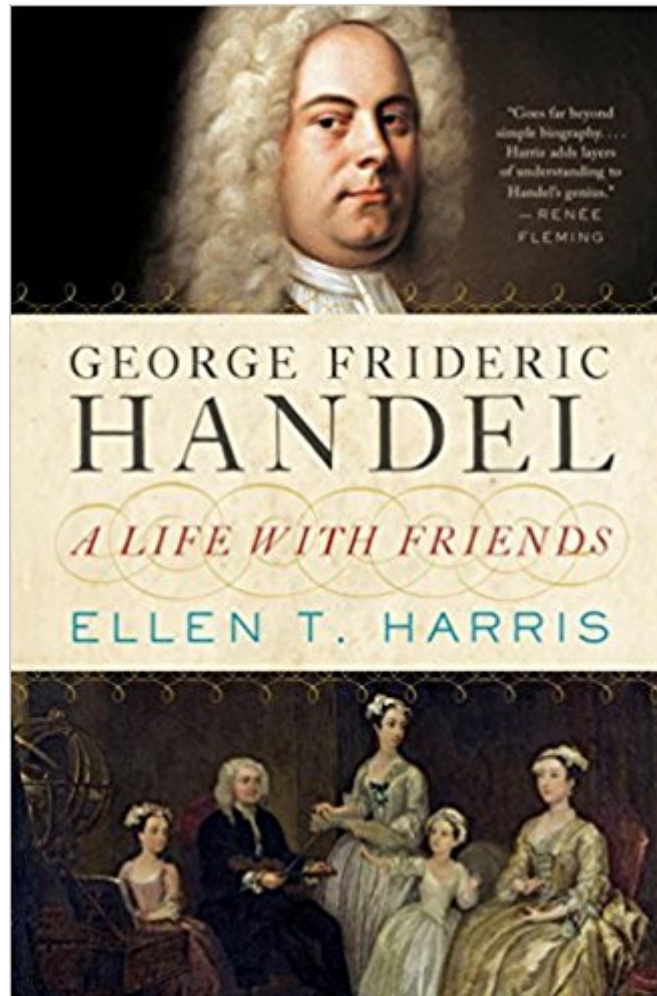




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George Frideric Handel: A Life With Friends



Synopsis

An intimate portrait of Handel's life and inner circle, modeled after one of the composer's favorite forms: the fugue. During his lifetime, the sounds of Handel's music reached from court to theater, echoed in cathedrals, and filled crowded taverns, but the man himself—known to most as the composer of *Messiah*—is a bit of a mystery. Though he took meticulous care of his musical manuscripts and even provided for their preservation on his death, very little of an intimate nature survives. One document—*Handel's will*—offers us a narrow window into his personal life. In it, he remembers not only family and close colleagues but also neighborhood friends. In search of the private man behind the public figure, Ellen T. Harris has spent years tracking down the letters, diaries, personal accounts, legal cases, and other documents connected to these bequests. The result is a tightly woven tapestry of London in the first half of the eighteenth century, one that interlaces vibrant descriptions of Handel's music with stories of loyalty, cunning, and betrayal. With this wholly new approach, Harris has achieved something greater than biography. Layering the interconnecting stories of Handel's friends like the subjects and countersubjects of a fugue, Harris introduces us to an ambitious, shrewd, generous, brilliant, and flawed man, hiding in full view behind his public persona. 43 illustrations; 3 maps

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review To fully appreciate the great composer of the universally known oratorio *Messiah*, it is not enough to trace his personal life, Harris says. The culture of the society he served and

aspired to join must be considered, too. As she proceeds through Handel's life, Harris embeds him in the institutional realities of eighteenth-century England, where entrepreneurship predominated. London suited the young musician, who had set out to pursue as independent a career as possible—a goal attainable, however, only by having the right friends. Handel was good at friendship, to the extent that his life and theirs—six in particular, whom Harris chronicles as extensively as she does her main subject—are inextricable. The composer followed their leads in business (his first opera company was structurally similar to the East India and other great trading companies); negotiated with them, by means of carefully ambiguous roman à clef scenarios for his operas, the politics of a kingdom with a contested throne and, by similar means in his oratorios, the religious contention of the day; sympathized with them about loveless, arranged marriages (well he might, since he was socially ineligible to marry at all) via many an opera's plot; and privately entertained and taught them music with his instrumental works. Handel's life in Harris's hands becomes a compelling plunge into the social history of his time. --Ray Olson

“Surely no one knows the life and music of Handel more intimately than Ellen Harris. Her daringly original approach to his biography reveals surprising and enlightening connections between contemporary events and his music. This is one of the most insightful—and one of the most humane—composer biographies to appear in quite some time.” - Robert L. Marshall, Brandeis University
“This book is an awesome tribute, and an undertaking beyond imagination.” - Gilbert Blin, opera director
“Admirable in its scope and boldness. A fascinating, joyful achievement!” - Dame Emma Kirkby
“A fascinatingly pure application of [Handel's] music to history—a interesting, unique, and significant work of nonfiction.” - Weston Williams, Christian Science Monitor
“An illuminating, refracted portrait of Handel's previously obscure inner life—a large-scale fugue, with a series of themes that appear, metamorphose, and interact with one another.” - David Weininger, Boston Globe
“Readers will have a much clearer picture of how Handel lived and worked, and how his music relates to events of the day as well as to the lives of his friends—This quirky biography repays careful reading.” - Melinda Bargreen, Seattle Times

ellen harris is a top handle expert...this is another of her outstanding books about this fascinating composer.

Fabulous unorthodox biography of that other Saxon giant of the Baroque. Handel was famously private. Ms Harris does a masterly job of bringing him to life through the letters and recollections of

his many friends and admirers. You might want to give a cursory look at the Wikipedia article on Handel before reading Ms Harris's book. I like Christopher Hogwood's biography if you have the time.

This is a good read, and you can't say that about many books by musicologists. A tour-de-force of detective work, starting from Handel's wills, the book illuminates both Handel's life and life in eighteenth-century England by uncovering his circle of friends and associates. Beautifully illustrated, and with a clarity of structure that keeps the needs of the reader always at the fore, this is a book I recommend to anyone interested in music, in eighteenth-century England, and in how to "do" humanities research. It takes newly discovered documents and makes them tell a compelling story. A very fine book.

Just not particularly interesting in any way. All useful information contained in this book could be condensed to possibly one page.

A fascinating book on Handel and his friends..... excellent for my collection, ordered and sent so quickly. THANKS

This is a brilliant and enthralling book by one of the finest of Handel scholars. It is so wise and full of marvellous insights into Handel's life, times, and music. It should be read by everyone interested in this truly great composer. Highly recommended

This splendid new book by a leading Handel scholar offers new insights into the composer's life, times, music and social circle. It is highly recommended to music lovers at all levels of expertise and belongs in all libraries.

I was excited for this book. I sat in my favorite chair, glass of wine within easy reach, and opened it. The binding immediately cracked. This is the hardcover edition. I thought, "That's odd," and turned to another page. The binding cracked there as well. I turned to another page and. . . . you get the idea. Don't buy it.

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