

Bach and Handel: Ancillary Rivals

Every popular history of music reports with scorn the English bishops' reluctance to permit church choirs to assist in Handel's oratorio performances, which took place in secular halls. But the indignant authors forget that the oratorio was not considered church music but "musical entertainment," even though it had a strong moral, ethical, and religious tone. These bishops may have been unimaginative, but they were not ignorant. They recognized that the Handelian oratorio represented music that was deliberately moving out of the church and into a secular atmosphere; therefore they regarded it with apprehension.

A caustic writer of the times gives a lively picture of this new form of "entertainment."

This oratorio being a new thing set the whole world a-madding. "Haven't you been at the Oratorio?" says one. "Oh, if you don't see the Oratorio you see nothing," says t'other; so away goes I to the Oratorio, where I saw indeed the finest assembly of People I ever beheld in my very Life, but to my great surprize, found this sacred Drama a mere Consort, no scenery, Dress or Action, so necessary to a drama; but Handel was placed in a Pulpit. I suppose they call that their oratory. By him sat

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