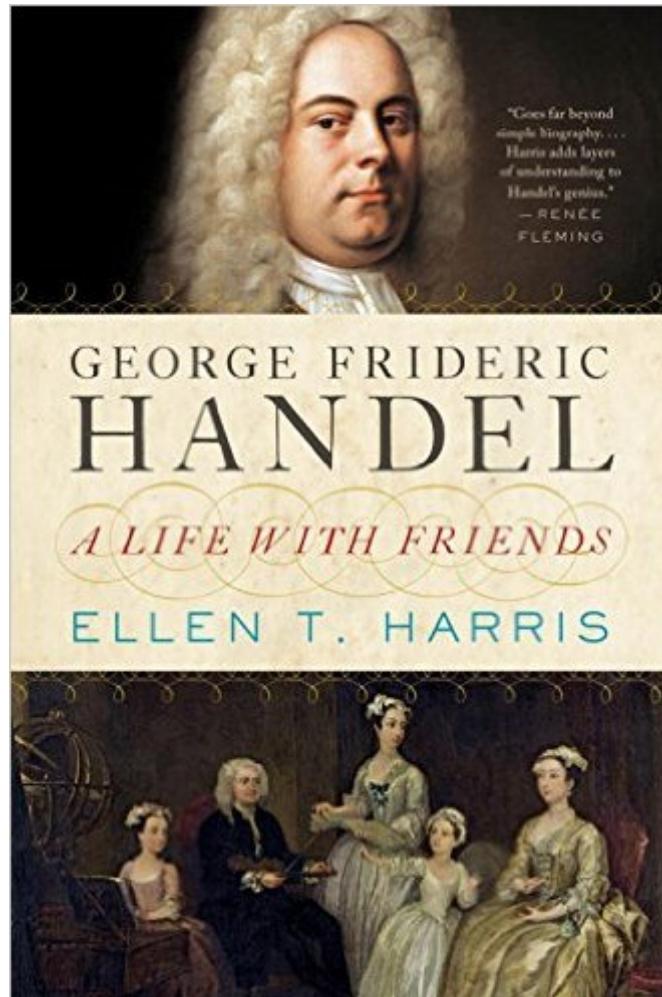


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George Frideric Handel: A Life With Friends



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

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.

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.

Have tried other biographies of Handel, which were too dry for me. I am not a musician so some of the musical detail went right over my head, but I loved the information from the 18th century perspective on the topics covered. Interesting approach, using friendship to illuminate Handel and his times. As a Mary Delany fan, I enjoyed all the passages about her. Loaned the book to a musicologist who is also enjoying it. PS The house in London is worth a visit.

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 am not a musicologist but I enjoy Handel's music. I received this book as a gift and started in without carefully reading the introduction. As I read chapter after chapter, each of which seemed to take me back to a restart, I had a little bit the feeling of "Groundhog Day." (Wait, we're in 1737 again?) Finally I caught on. What the author has done, and I belatedly realized this was brilliant, was to try to compartmentalize Handel's various lives to explain the effects of social status, law, trade, collecting, religion, etc. on his major compositions. Aha! moment. I expect the author realizes that all the various phases of his life bled into one another, but this effort to explain by categories gives one a unique perspective on the man and the music; by deconstructing a life, we can put it back together in a fresh and interesting way. The voluminous section of notes and a thorough index will make this book invaluable for musicologists.

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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