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HANDEL AND IMPROVED PSALMODY

Graydon Beeks

After his death, Handel's music was frequently enlisted in the service of worthy causes, sometimes in ways that he would almost certainly not have anticipated. The performance of *Messiah* and other oratorios to raise money to support charitable foundations such as hospitals paralleled the composer's own activities in support of the Foundling Hospital, while the adaptation of some of his operatic melodies for use as hymn tunes enjoyed a partial precedent in his setting of three texts by Charles Wesley for the same purpose. He was unlikely, however, to have foreseen other uses, including the adaptation of selected works for the purpose of raising the standard of metrical psalm singing in England.

The Rev. William de Chair Tattersall (1751–1829) was a Church of England clergyman and amateur musician who was particularly involved in this endeavor. The late Nicholas Temperley's article on Tattersall in *Grove Music Online* succinctly summarizes his career as far as music is concerned.¹ This present article expands on Temperley's work, with special emphasis on Tattersall's last published collection of metrical psalms.

Tattersall became Vicar of Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucestershire in 1779, took over the running of the choir, and replaced the metrical psalm translations of Sternhold & Hopkins and Tate & Brady—the so-called Old and New Versions—with translations that the Rev. James Merrick (1720–1769) had published in 1765.² Tattersall divided the psalms into stanzas and prepared musical settings of them for the use of his own parishioners, employing both traditional and newly composed melodies. These were subsequently published as *A version or paraphrase of the Psalms originally written by the Rev. James Merrick, A.M. . . . adapted to the purposes of public or private devotion* (London, 1789). It was apparently well received and was reprinted in 1797, 1801, 1804, and 1822.

Tattersall's next project was to provide entirely new musical settings for Merrick's versions of all 150 psalms. He persuaded many of his musical acquaintances to contribute, including Benjamin Cooke, John Wall Callcott, and, most notably, Franz Joseph Haydn, who provided six tunes. Tattersall published the first 75 psalms in 1794 as the first volume of *Improved Psalmody*, with an extensive List of Subscribers including the King and members of the Royal Family.³ In another collection published in 1802, Tattersall announced that he hoped to deliver the settings of the remaining 75 psalms by

A WEALTH OF MUSIC: HARRY CHRISTOPHERS AND THE HANDEL AND HAYDN SOCIETY

Teresa M. Neff



Photography by Robert Torres

On January 24, 2019, Boston's Handel and Haydn Society announced that Harry Christophers, CBE, would conclude his twelve-year tenure as artistic director with the end of the 2020–2021 season. Christophers is the founder and conductor of the UK-based choir and period-instrument ensemble, The Sixteen, as well as the principal guest conductor of the Orquesta Ciudad de Granada, and a regular guest conductor with numerous other symphony orchestras and opera companies.

Christophers began his tenure as H+H artistic director with the 2009–2010 season. His association with H+H, however, began three years earlier when, in September 2006, he led the ensemble in a performance of music by Handel and Haydn at the Esterházy Palace as part of the Haydn Festival in Eisenstadt, Austria. He conducted H+H's annual *Messiah* performance in 2007 and led

¹ I have had the honor of working with the Handel and Haydn Society since 2009 as the Christopher Hogwood Historically Informed Performance Fellow; Harry Christophers and I talked about H+H's oratorio performances on July 17, 2020.

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¹ <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.27551>.

² J. Merrick, *The Psalms Translated or Paraphrased in English Verse* (Reading, 1765, 2/1766).

³ Tattersall, ed., *Improved Psalmody vol. 1 containing the first twenty-five Psalms* (London, 1794). This publication was apparently first issued as three separate numbers, each containing musical settings for 25 psalms in score. These three numbers were then issued together as volume 1, which was followed by a publication of all 75 psalms in separate part books. Each state of the publication also included an Appendix containing a number of metrical psalm tunes by earlier composers including Thomas Ravenscroft and William Croft, but the contents vary and the texts are by Sternhold & Hopkins in some issues and Merrick in others. The preface to volume 1 is dated June 4, 1794, but some or all of the issues may first have appeared in 1795.