

Handel and Locatelli

A pastoral idyll



Handel House Museum has been graced recently by the arrival of a magnificent pastoral landscape by the 18th century Italian artist Andrea Locatelli (1695–1741), kindly loaned by Glenda Weil. The artist enjoyed commissions from both the Ruspoli and Ottoboni families, as did Handel, and we know from the inventory of Handel's possessions made shortly after his death that there was at least one Locatelli landscape in his collection.

Along with many musicians and painters of the period, Handel and Locatelli made significant contributions to the Pastoral tradition. A master of idealised Italian landscapes, often including figures of herdsmen and shepherds, Locatelli was celebrated in his own lifetime and was the subject of a biography as early as 1724.

Handel, of course, tackled the Pastoral

theme in a number of his works, including *Il pastor fido* and *Acis and Galatea*. But, as well as building entire operas within the tradition, he skilfully used the imagery of the bucolic lifestyle epitomised by the Pastoral to illuminate the feelings of his characters in individual arias. So, Erissena in *Poro* compares her confused emotions to those of a shepherdess lost in a forest at night, in the aria 'Son confusa pastorella'. Handel clearly imitates the shepherdesses bagpipe drone under one of his most lyrical melodies – a melody that became an instant hit when first performed in 1731.

Similarly, and perhaps more famously, Grimoaldo in the final act of *Rodelina* longs to give up the tormented life of a court schemer and live the more simple life of a shepherd, without cares and worries. Once again, Handel elegantly evokes the rustic

simplicity of pastoral life, and hints here at the origins of the 18th-Century fascination with the bucolic life. As urban centres expanded rapidly throughout Europe, and London for the first time became a vibrant metropolis, weary town-folk began to long for the quiet life that the shepherd's life seemed to offer. Pastoral landscape paintings and music gave a glimpse of what that life might be like.

If anything, London has become even more frantic than it was in Handel's day. What a comfort it is then to have our own little piece of the beautiful Italian landscape here in Handel House. Be sure to stop by and glimpse this idealised and idyllic life the next time you visit.

Martin Wyatt, Deputy Director

Italian Landscape (detail), Andrea Locatelli 1695–1741
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