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The Lives of George Frideric Handel (Music in Britain, 1600-2000)

David Hunter

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To evaluate the familiar, even over-familiar, story of Handel's life could be seen as a quixotic endeavour. How can there be anything new to say? This book seeks to distinguish fact from fiction, not only to produce a new biography but also to explore the concepts of biography and dissemination by using Handel's life and lives as a case study. By examining the images of Handel to be found in biographies and music histories - the genius, the religious profound, the master of musical styles, the distiller into music of English sentiment, the glorifier of the Hanoverians, the hymner of the middle class, the independent, the prodigious, the generous, the sexless, the successful, the wealthy, the bankrupt, the pious, the crude, the heroic, the devious, the battler of ill-fortune, the moral exemplar - and by adding new factual information, David Hunter shows how events are manipulated into stories and tropes. Onesuch trope has been employed to portray numerous persons as Handel's enemies regardless of whether Handel considered them as such. Picking apart the writing of Handel's biographers and other reporters, Hunter exposes the narrative underpinnings - the lies, confusions, presumptions, and conclusions, whether direct and inferred or assumed - to show how Handel's 'lives' in biographies and histories have moulded our understanding of the musician, the man andthe icon.

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