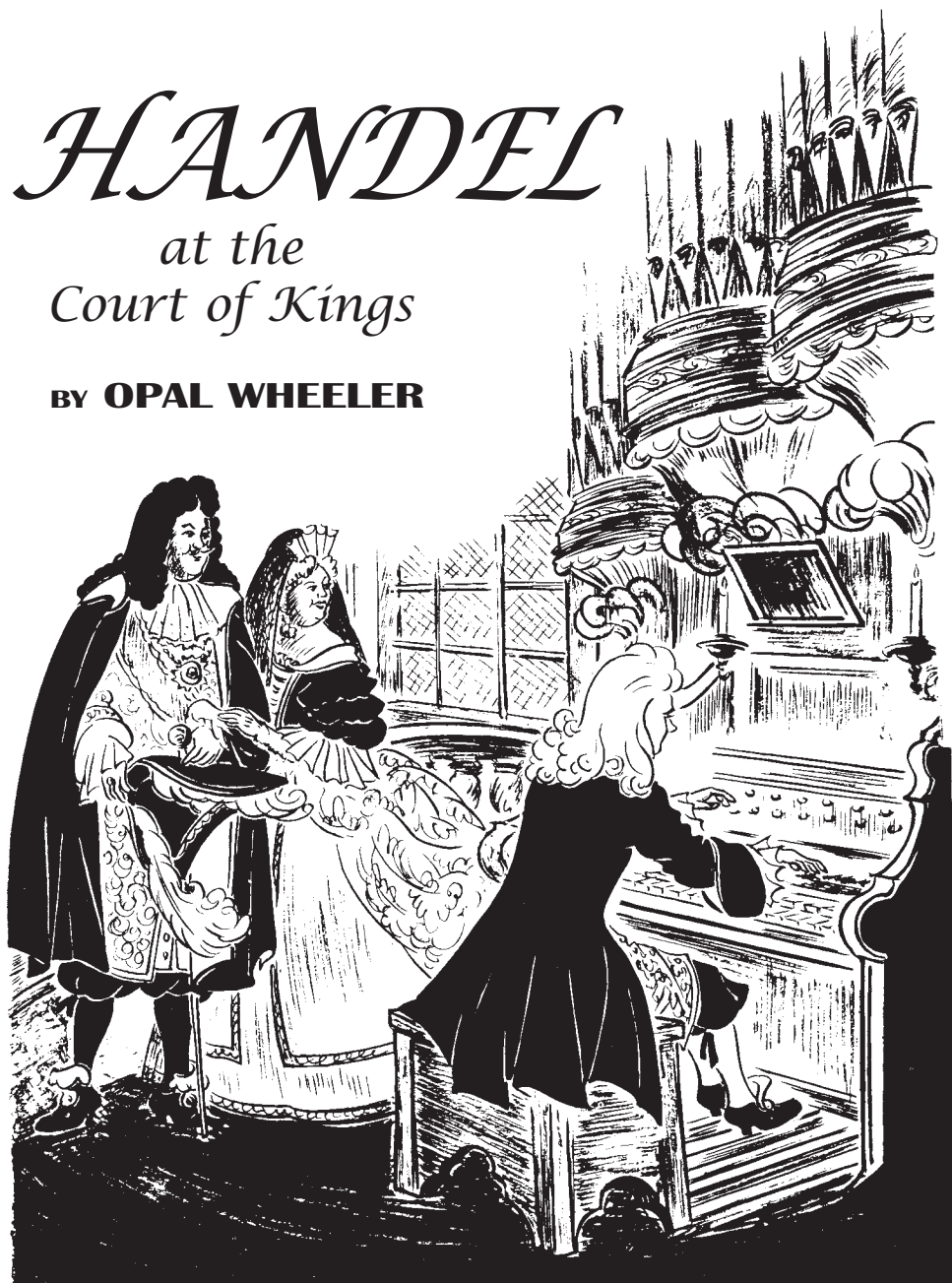


HANDEL

at the
Court of Kings

BY OPAL WHEELER



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CHAPTER ONE

IT WAS FAST growing late in wintry little Halle, and the low, thatched-roof cottages lining the crooked streets seemed to huddle more closely together to shut out the cutting wind and whirling snowflakes, driving in white clouds through the darkening village.

Old Anson, the crier, was covered from head to boots with the heavy flakes until he looked like a giant ghost, plodding along the winding roadway. Beating his hands to keep them warm, he called in a sing-song voice the news of the hour.

But tonight his bell sounded louder than usual and his voice had an anxious note, and hurrying to their frosty windows, the good neighbor-folk poked out their heads to listen.

“Sev-en o’clock and a little boy lost! Sev-en o’clock and a little boy lost!”

Putting down his unfinished boot, lame cobbler Nils hobbled to the doorway of his small shop.

“Bell ringer, what child then, is lost in Halle on such a night as this?”

“George, son of old Doctor Handel, gone these two hours past. Sev-en o’clock and a little boy lost!”

Wrapping their warm shawls snugly about their

shoulders, the good neighbors hurried to the big Schlamm House, just around the corner, where tall Doctor Handel stood at the window, his long hair falling over his fine white lace collar.

As he peered anxiously into the whirling storm, the heavy door was flung open, and Mother Handel and Aunt Anna burst into the room.



“We have searched everywhere, good husband, but the little one cannot be found,” cried Frau Handel in alarm.

Aunt Anna shook her head sadly and a puzzled look came into her gentle eyes.

“So quickly it happened,” she murmured. “There he was, walking quietly by my side, and the next moment, when I turned to him, he had vanished!”

Suddenly from the end of Nicolai Street came sounds of music and there, led by a flickering torch, a band of wandering singers moved slowly along, their feet keeping time to their music.



As they drew nearer the Schlamm House, Mother Handel leaned quickly toward the window.

“There he is — see — the little one bearing the light!”

Father Handel looked out sternly.

“What! The son of George Handel with a band of wandering singers? Surely it cannot be!”

Aunt Anna smiled to herself as she slipped away quietly. So the child had loved the music and run off with the band. Closing the door softly, she hurried to the snowy little figure.

“Come quickly, George. Your father is displeased with you for following the singers.”

“No, Tante Anna — I must finish the song first.”

With glowing cheeks and shining eyes, the small torch bearer went on with the melody until the very end, and the singers had moved on down the street.

Father Handel looked seriously into the bright, eager face of the six-year-old boy, his fair hair shining like gold in the light.

“They let me hold the torch, Father, and we sang for everyone in Halle! The music was beautiful!”

“Music! Music! Everything is music!” exclaimed Father Handel. “But it is not for you, my son. From this day on, let