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I

Introduction

SCHOLARS interested in compositional process have by now turned their attention to several composers of the eighteenth century. Musicologists have not only explored the compositional methods of prominent figures such as Bach and Mozart; even composers such as Hasse, who are today relatively obscure, have been studied.[1] Yet Handel's compositional process in the most familiar of his works, the oratorios, has (apart from the specific area of borrowing) been by and large neglected, and only very recently have compositional revisions in his operas been evaluated.[2] This fact becomes even more surprising in view of the source situation: virtually all Handel's composing scores are housed in the British Library, his sketches in the Fitzwilliam Museum. This attractive state of affairs contrasts dramatically with Beethoven, whose autographs and sketches are strewn all over Europe.

The availability of sources in itself is neither sufficient justification for a full-blown investigation of compositional procedure nor a defence of the relevance of such a study for a postmodern age. Musicology today enjoys a new richness of approaches unlike anything in its past: issues of feminism, gender, and other elements of social contextualization of music are bringing us fresh ways of understanding music history. Unfortunately, academia sometimes privileges new methodologies for their own sake over new knowledge. There are those who go so far as to argue that sketch studies, in their attempts to come to grips with musical structure, exclude other avenues of research. Philip Bohlman believes that 'by using the analysis of chord progressions to show that a passage in Beethoven has nothing to do with sexuality but everything to do with a set

[1] See Robert Marshall, *The Compositional Process of J. S. Bach* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Frederick Millner, *The Operas of Johann Adolf Hasse* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979); and Alan Tyson, *Mozart: Studies of the Autograph Scores* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

[2] Two important contributions to the field of Handel's compositional process have appeared during the last decade or so: Paul Brainard, 'Aria and Ritornello: New Aspects of the Comparison Handel/Bach', in Peter Williams (ed.), *Bach, Handel, Scarlatti Tercentenary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 21–34; and C. Steven LaRue, *Handel and his Singers: The Creation of the Royal Academy Operas, 1720–28* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

of obvious, though still brilliant, compositional decisions, we continue to keep the body out of Western music'.[3]

Yet at the same time that a new generation of musicologists begins to question the validity of sketch studies, French literary critics have become increasingly involved in manuscript studies that analyse earlier versions of texts—what Peter Brooks calls 'genetic criticism'.[4] We thus see the reverse of the typical relationship between the two disciplines: normally what has begun to look 'passé' in literary criticism becomes 'cutting edge' for musicologists. At any rate, it is not surprising that studies of the gestation of works, no matter what the endeavour is called, should not vanish. For the sheer number of issues that it raises and potentially illuminates, the investigation of compositional process (or perhaps we should now rename it 'genetic music criticism') constitutes a particularly bountiful field of enquiry. This is particularly true of a composer like Handel, whose autographs, unlike Bach's or Mozart's, contain numerous corrections and revisions that reveal remarkable transformations in the composer's musical thought. By analysing these changes I seek to identify many of Handel's creative tendencies: among others, his attempts upon revision to achieve a continuous musical surface, his use of 'cut and paste' techniques akin to eighteenth-century *ars combinatoria*, his concern with musical imagery and drama, and the roles of specific singers in the creation of the oratorios. In short, analysis of compositional process involves more than 'just looking at notes': it also has much to say about music's context, social and otherwise. The inherent interest of these issues—which is the ultimate justification for any scholarly endeavour—strikes me as self-evident.

In many ways, the oratorios are ideal subjects for an investigation of Handel's compositional process. Winton Dean has sorted out the numerous versions of the dramatic oratorios made for performances in Handel's lifetime, and has even provided discussion of some striking compositional changes.[5] Studies devoted to analysing musical revisions must be preceded by source studies, and recently, with the valuable work of Donald Burrows and Martha Ronish, which provides detailed information about Handel's paper types, the necessary groundwork for an investigation of Handel's revisions has been laid.[6]

Moreover, the oratorios deserve further study simply by virtue of the fact

[3] See Philip Bohlman, 'Musicology as a Political Act,' *Journal of Musicology*, 11 (1993), 411–36 at 424.

[4] See his review of Julia Kristeva's *Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature* titled 'Proust on the Couch', in New York Times Book Review, 19 May 1996.

[5] Winton Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

[6] Donald Burrows and Martha Ronish, *A Catalogue of Handel's Musical Autographs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

that they are products of Handel's mature years, when his compositional skill was at its height, and they remain the most popular of his works. Containing a number of different types of pieces and musical forms—choruses, arias, accompanied recitatives, and instrumental pieces—and at the same time exemplifying Handel's concern for drama, the oratorios offer a summary of Handel's entire compositional career.

Because of the wealth of compositional changes that they contain, the works examined here must somehow be limited, but this is not easily done. The oratorios do not divide neatly into groups. One cannot choose a set of 'typical' works, because the differences are so great between individual pieces called oratorios that none can be described as typical. Indeed, scholars even disagree as to which works can be called oratorios. Jens Peter Larsen's 1957 definition of the genre, encompassing a variety of types, included works such as *Alexander's Feast* and *Ode to St Cecilia* as 'non-biblical concert or cantata oratorios'.[7] Winton Dean narrowed the topic by choosing to write about only the dramatic oratorios, but he thereby included some secular works that were apparently not called oratorios by contemporary sources, *Semele* and *Hercules*,[8] and which Howard Smither dismisses from his discussion of Handel's oratorios.[9] The simple fact is that any definition of the genre is open to criticism, and it is quite difficult to identify works as either typical or atypical. All choices thus being to some degree arbitrary, I have chosen works that represent what I think are the two most significant avenues of Handel's creative endeavours in the period 1743–8: secular 'musical drama' and biblical oratorio.

With the composition of *Semele* in June and early July 1743 Handel embarked on a new path. Before *Semele* the dramatic oratorios were on biblical subjects and easily distinguished from operas not only in subject matter and language (English versus Italian), but often in musical content as well—while choruses and a variety of aria forms characterize oratorios, the most common aria form in opera by far is the da capo, and operas contain few elaborate choruses.[10] In *Semele*, however, there are numerous da capo arias, and

[7] Jens Peter Larsen, *Handel's Messiah* (New York: Norton, 1972).

[8] Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios.*

[9] Howard Smither, *A History of the Oratorio*, ii: *The Oratorio in the Baroque Era: Protestant Germany and England* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977). The *London Daily Post* of 10 Feb. 1744 advertised 'SEMELE: After the manner of an Oratorio', and *Hercules* was called 'A Musical Drama' on the title-page of the libretto. Charles Jennens tells us in his annotations to his copy of Mainwaring's biography of Handel that Semele was called 'by fools' an oratorio. See Dean, 'Charles Jennens's Marginalia to Mainwaring's Life of Handel', *Music and Letters*, 53 (1972), 160–4.

[10] Choruses at the ends of operas are generally brief, simple, homophonic pieces for the solo singers. Even when choruses appear more frequently in Handel's operas, they are less complex in design than oratorio choruses.

in general the choruses lack the weight of earlier oratorios.[11] *Semele* is in fact an English opera libretto, written by William Congreve for John Eccles, probably in 1705.[12]

Carole Taylor has advanced a theory to explain Handel's unexpected operatic turn in *Semele*.[13] According to a July 1743 letter of John Christopher Smith, Handel had been offered £1,000 to compose two operas for Lord Middlesex's opera company. He did not accept the offer, but instead composed *Semele*, which Jennens called 'a bawdy opera', quite possibly in competition with Middlesex's company.[14] Certainly the opera party, which was apparently upset by *Semele*, considered the production of *Semele* a competitive act.

Viewed in the light of his later works, however, *Semele* is not merely an interruption in the steady flow of biblical oratorios, but the beginning of a new trend. Certain of its operatic features—mythological subject and frequent da capo arias—can also be found in *Hercules*, composed a year later.[15] Of course Handel continued to compose biblical oratorios as well, such as *Joseph and his Brethren*, at the same time as *Semele* (1743), and with *Hercules* in 1744, *Belshazzar*; but even so, operatic elements—da capo arias, for example—were to become more frequent in later oratorios. Both *Theodora* (1749)—based on a sacred but not a scriptural story—and *Jephtha* (1751), for instance, parallel Italian opera in that they include long stretches filled with da capo arias separated by simple recitative, and without choral participation. Significantly, both have been criticized for these qualities, mirroring twentieth-century criticisms of Baroque opera seria.[16]

[11] This is a tricky matter. Certainly the moralizing choruses in Semele, such as 'Oh terror and astonishment' in Act III, scene 7, constitute a typical type of chorus found in oratorios, as do the act-ending choruses. Many choruses, however, are short and lightweight, and there are long stretches during which no choruses appear.

[12] Dean (*Handel's Dramatic Oratorios*, 366) gives 1706. According to Calhoun Winton a letter by William Cleland dated 6 Dec. 1705 relates that 'Eccles [has] another [opera] the words by Congreve'. See Calhoun Winton, *John Gay and the London Theatre* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 178–9.

[13] See Carole Taylor, 'Handel's Disengagement from the Italian Opera', in Stanley Sadie and Anthony Hicks (eds.), *Handel Tercentenary Collection* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 165–81 at 165.

[14] Handel's *Alessandro* was arranged by Lampugnani under the title *Rossane* and produced by Middlesex in 1743/4. It is thought that Handel may have agreed to this arrangement to compensate for his refusal to compose new operas for the company. (See Taylor, 'Handel's Disengagement', 172.)

[15] The Opera of the Nobility was unable to undertake the 1744–5 season at the King's Theatre. That year Handel produced oratorios at the King's Theatre in lieu of the opera company. Hercules was composed for this season, and Handel revived *Semele* in Dec. 1744. (Taylor, 'Handel's Disengagement', 173.) Handel's ultimately unsuccessful efforts to attract the opera company's audience with his secular oratorios might explain why he inserted five Italian arias from his operas with their original Italian texts into the Dec. 1744 revival of *Semele*; it was perhaps an attempt to make the work even more like an opera.

[16] Dean writes of *Theodora*: 'Act I is long and diffuse. Eight out of ten airs have the full *da capo*, and although the leisurely pace of the action might be pleaded in justification the effect in modern performance is wearisome' (Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios*, 563). *Jephtha* fares no better: 'As in Act I of *Theodora*, and for the same reason, there are too many mechanical *da capos*; in these two sections [Act II, scenes 1–2 and the 'later stages of Act III'] eight out of fourteen airs and one long duet follow the strict form' (ibid. 597).

This slow transformation of Handelian oratorio, a path full of works that point both ways, may cast light on Handel's true musical interests. Upon leaving Halle and changing the direction of his artistic training, which pointed to a career as a church composer and organist, Handel became an opera composer. After spending the greatest part of his career writing Italian operas, he gave the genre up in 1741. But in his last years it was perhaps in part an abiding interest in opera that transformed his oratorio production.[17] In this sense, Handel remained an operatic composer until the end of his life.

By the time he was composing his last oratorios, however, Handel had already attempted a synthesis of the two genres of large-scale vocal composition characteristic of the period beginning with *Semele*. The first such amalgamation was *Alexander Balus* of 1747, and the second attempt was *Susanna* of 1748, both laying claims to being the most operatic of Handel's biblical oratorios. Thus the period from the composition of *Semele* in 1743 and ending with *Jephtha*, Handel's last original oratorio, in 1751 may be described as a period in which he wrote operatic oratorios and biblical or religious oratorios with continuous influence of the one on the other. Six works from this period representing each important type of endeavour form the basis of this book: *Semele* (1743) and *Hercules* (1744), secular music drama; *Belshazzar* (1744) and *Solomon* (1748), biblical oratorio; and *Susanna* (1748), which represents a synthesis of the two types. Later chapters of the book also include examples from *Jephtha* (1751), another 'operatic' biblical oratorio.[18] (See Table 1.1 for the dates of composition and first performance for these pieces.) Apart from their musical worth, these works embody a network of interesting compositional matters. In addition, I occasionally draw upon other works to clarify the issues raised.

Each performance, particularly each run of an oratorio, presented Handel with changes of cast and audience. These physical differences as well as his own creative spirit made alterations necessary, and every run of performances involved recomposition. In order to delve into Handel's creative endeavours as musician and dramatist this book is limited to discussion of changes made

[17] Handel's operatic interests might also have had a pragmatic element in them. In Ch. 10 I suggest that the use of Italian-born singers experienced in Italian opera in England might, *pace* Larsen, have influenced Handel's increased use of the da capo aria in his late oratorios.

[18] Because this study aims to clarify Handel's 'normative' compositional process, it approaches *Jephtha*, whose composition was anything but typical, with due caution. As is well known, Handel began *Jephtha* unusually late in the season, and its composition was interrupted and protracted by his failing sight. (See Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios*, 617–18 and Donald Burrows, 'Handel's Last Musical Autograph', *Händel-Jahrbuch*, 40/41 (1994/5), 155–68.) Thus the whole concept of 'precomposition' (see Ch. 3), for instance, might take on new meaning in *Jephtha*. In Chs. 7 and 9 to 11, therefore, I have drawn upon only those revisions in *Jephtha* that illustrate particularly well points that would have arisen even without considering that work.

TABLE 1.1. *Dates of composition and first performance*

Work	Period of composition	First performance
Semele	begun 3 June 1743; Act I draft completed 13 June; Act II draft completed 20 June; entire completed 4 July 1743	10 February 1744
Hercules	begun 19 July 1744; Act I draft completed 30 July; Act II draft completed 11 August; Act III draft completed 17 August; entire completed 21 August	5 January 1745
Belshazzar	begun 23 August 1744; Act I completed 3 September; Act II completed 10 September; entire completed 23 October 1744	27 March 1745
Solomon	begun 5 May 1748; Act I draft completed 23 May; orchestrated 26 May; entire completed 13 June 1748	17 March 1749
Susanna	begun 11 July 1748; Act I draft completed 21 July; Act III draft completed 9 August; entire completed 24 August 1748	10 February 1749
Jephtha	begun 21 January 1751; Act I draft completed 2 February; Act II draft to 'How dark, O Lord' reached by 13 February; Act II draft completed 23–7 February; Act III through 'Theme sublime' composed 28 June–15 or 17 July 1751; entire completed (without quintet) 30 August	26 February 1752

before first performance, where alterations for purely practical reasons—such as cast changes—are not the primary type of revisions found.

While devoted to several different aspects of Handel's compositional process, this book is divided into three large parts. The first extends through Chapter 3, and deals with introductory matters such as Handel's music-writing process as well as 'precompositional' concerns as reflected by sketches and drafts. The second part, comprising Chapters 4 to 8, addresses compositional revisions that Handel made primarily for musical reasons (though Chapter 8, which deals with changes of musical form, also begins to examine issues of text-setting and drama). The third section of the book, beginning with Chapter 9, explores the

'extramusical' issues of text, word-setting, and the role of certain singers in the compositional process.

Within this three-part framework a number of specific issues are addressed. In analysing Handel's surviving sketches and borrowings in Chapter 3 I address an inconsistency in the Handel literature that has hardly been realized, much less resolved: was Handel predominantly a spontaneous, 'improvisatory' composer or did he plan his compositions before the event? Although the question cannot be answered definitely, posing it allows us to create new models for Handel's compositional acts.

As one of the first studies devoted to Handel's compositional process as a purely musical phenomenon, Chapters 4 to 8 concentrate primarily on types of revisions that crop up repeatedly in the autographs—an approach influenced by Robert Marshall's major study of Bach's autographs.[19] In part this approach is meant to safeguard against an objection to genetic musical scholarship, expressed with some frequency and not entirely without justification nowadays, on the grounds that the analysis of compositional changes by no means establishes the *raison d'être* of a musical revision—that what the composer hoped to achieve by a revision and what the analyst believes to be important might not be the same. By its nature, the study of compositional process often conflates analysis with 'speculative reconstruction of the composer's intentions'.[20] Although a distinction exists between the scholar's analysis and the composer's intentions, we may hope that in most cases the analysis sheds light on the composer's compositional efforts. Certainly many aspects of the composer's intentions must remain opaque, but analysis is still our best hope for suggesting likely hypotheses about those intentions. Therefore the attempt is at least worth making. It seems to me that recurrent changes, more than unique revisions, pinpoint important compositional concerns likely to be those of the composer, revealing the 'daily' workings of his or her musical mind. Accordingly, Chapters 4 to 7 are devoted, in turn, to issues of thematic repetition and thematic diversity; revisions of harmonic goals and formal proportion (drawn largely from arias with bi-partite B sections); revisions of texture; and revisions that achieve a more seamless musical surface. Together these four chapters present an overall picture of Handel's compositional art: his manipulation of the discrete units that, on a number of levels, comprise his music while at the same time exploring ways to produce a homogeneous, coherent musical texture. Chapter 8 deals with

[19] Robert Marshall, *The Compositional Process of J. S. Bach*.

[20] See David Shulenberg's review of Paul Brainard and Ray Robinson (eds.), *A Bach Tribute: Essays in Honor of William H. Scheide*, in *Notes*, 52 (Sept. 1995), 88.

revisions of musical form and what these revisions tell us about Handel's approach to his librettos. I also examine changes of form as well as aria substitutions that are interrelated over a large span, such as a scene, and their significance—or more precisely, the significance of the relations between these revisions—for the drama, thereby exploring a second dimension of Handel's compositional process.

In Chapter 9 I address one of the most salient features of Handel's works, their heavy use of musical imagery, and the role of this imagery both in composition and in revisions in which music that originally served one text is reused with a new text. Chapter 10 moves to another aspect of Handel's creative endeavour, his special concerns as an impresario and vocal composer who had to counterbalance the issue of musical expression with that of the capability of the singers. In particular, this chapter focuses on transfers of material from one singer to another, and the changes wrought in the transfer. Finally, in Chapter 11 I ponder the ramifications of the previous chapters for our view of Handel's creative process and musical style.

Editorial Procedure

Since this book covers much music that was rejected before first performance and therefore remains unpublished, it is necessary to include a number of musical transcriptions as examples. I have modernized and sometimes even corrected Handel's own musical notation. For instance, Handel generally placed note stems on the right side of note heads even when the notes are above the middle lines of the staves and point downward. He often drew barlines sporadically. He also dotted notes over the barlines rather than using ties. There being no reason to preserve these notational idiosyncrasies, I have followed modern practice in all of these matters.

Additionally and more important, Handel customarily employs clefs that are no longer in common use—tenor, alto, and soprano—for his vocal parts. Chrysander's practice was to use modern treble clef instead of soprano clef.[21] I have chosen to use modern clefs for the vocal parts, largely for the sake of convenience for the reader.

In order to curb the number of musical examples it has not always been possible to reproduce all the published music cited. In many cases I instead refer the reader to the only complete edition of Handel's works, Friedrich

[21] *G. F. Händels Werke: Ausgabe der Deutschen Händelgesellschaft*, ed. Friedrich W. Chrysander (Leipzig and Bergedorf bei Hamburg, 1858–94, 1902). This edition will hereafter be abbreviated *HG*.

Chrysander's Händel-Gesellschaft edition. References to this edition (*HG*) give the volume, the page number, the number of the system (reckoning from the top of the page), and the bar number within that system. Thus the entry *HG* 8: 49, 3/4 indicates the eighth volume of the Händel-Gesellschaft edition, which happens to be *Theodora*, page 49, fourth bar of system 3.

Because some readers might be using other editions, references to the bar number of the piece cited are also included. In the musical examples, the first bar number always indicates the place where the passage occurs in the final setting.

Aria Forms: Terminology

Differences in scholarly use of terminology necessitate a brief review of five-part da capo aria form and modifications of this form frequently encountered in this study. Other arias in Handel's oratorios comprise forms that are more commonly known, such as strophic and through-composed forms, and need not be described here.

The formal plan of the five-part da capo aria includes an A section consisting of two complete statements of the A section text (A1 and A2), the first modulating from tonic to dominant and the second returning to the tonic.[22] These are surrounded by ritornellos: (1) an introductory ritornello in the tonic; (2) a 'middle', 'intervening', or A1 ritornello in the secondary key; and (3) a 'concluding', 'final', or A2 ritornello, which often differs from the introductory ritornello, in the tonic key. In major-key arias the A section generally modulates to the dominant, while in minor-key arias, though there is more variation, the modulation is generally to the relative major (III). The B section, which sets the remaining lines of text, is always shorter than the A section, offers a change of key (and often mode), without ritornellos. Handel frequently—but by no means always—ends the B section in the minor mediant if the A section is in a major key and in the minor dominant if the A section is in a minor key. This is followed by a da capo repeat of the A section. A typical overall plan for the da capo aria can be diagrammed as in Table 1.2.

In Handel's hands the basic da capo scheme is as often as not subject to profound variations in key scheme and form. In fact, arias that follow the five-

[22] This form has previously been described in Frederick Millner, *The Operas of Johann Adolf Hasse*; Eric Cross, *The Late Operas of Antonio Vivaldi 1727–1738* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981). For Handel's da capo forms in particular, see Ellen T. Harris, 'Harmonic Patterns in Handel's Operas,' in *Eighteenth-Century Music in Theory and Practice: Essays in Honor of Alfred Mann*, ed. Mary Ann Parker-Hale (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1994), 77–118.

TABLE 1.2. *The five-part da capo aria*

A section		
Opening ritornello	I	i
First vocal section (A1)	I–V	i–III
A1 ritornello	V	III
Second vocal section (A2)	–I	–i
A2 ritornello	I	i
B section		
Third vocal section with new text	vi–iii	III–v
Da capo repeat of A section		

part da capo model in all parameters are relatively rare in his oratorios. The A1 ritornello is sometimes very short or eliminated altogether. Upon the da capo repeat Handel sometimes either omits the opening ritornello or provides a new one, written after the vocal cadence of the B section, using a dal segno repeat. The A section text may be stated numerous times rather than just twice. These 'modifications' of the standard plan sometimes require decisions about the application of terminology.

In particular, the numerous ways of constructing the A section in Handel's oratorios require some discussion. One must evaluate the importance of tonality, especially cadences, and other elements of formal structure as well as the number of text statements in order to determine how to schematize A sections. For instance, the *Hercules* aria 'Alcides' name in latest story' contains altogether four complete statements of the A section text rather than two. Nonetheless, the A section can be divided into two parts, labelled A1 and A2, on the basis of the strong arrival in the dominant and an extensive A1 ritornello (*HG* 4: 159, bb. 1–7). Thus I would describe the A section of the aria in terms of A1 and A2, each containing two statements of the text.

In other cases, however, the A section may be divided into three parts. 'The Parent Bird' from *Susanna*, a minor-mode aria discussed in Chapter 5, for instance, includes a full statement of the A text modulating to the minor dominant and followed by an abbreviated ritornello in that key (A1); a repeat of the text ending in the subdominant (A2); and a third statement of the text cadencing to the tonic at the end (A3). Each of these statements is discrete enough to invite the labels A1, A2, and A3. While those adamantly committed to the five-part da capo plan might argue that the real 'mid-point' of the aria occurs with the modulation to the minor dominant and that all the material after the A1 ritornello should be called A2, I would argue that such strict adherence to the model distorts the important structural distinction between A2 and A3.

In other cases, such as 'More sweet is that name' in *Semele*, the A section does not divide into parts on the basis of text repeats or ritornellos. There is a cadence to the dominant, so that the A section could be divided into two parts, but this transitory arrival in the dominant is not reinforced in any way.

A number of Handel's aria forms can be related to da capo form. At times Handel's dal segno arias omit the restatement of A1—a form sometimes called a 'half da capo'. An aria that is constructed like the A section of a da capo aria alone is called a cavatina. A written-out da capo has an A section that ends in the tonic, a B section, and a written-out return. A modified da capo follows the same pattern with the significant difference that its A section ends in the dominant or mediant.