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Styles of Singing

The term style, defined by John Turner (1833: 194) as the 'cast, or manner, in composition or performance, on which the effect chiefly, if not wholly, depends', encompasses the activities of both composers and performers, the first group creating and the second giving a dramatic and just expression to the two classes of melody which 'present themselves to the notice of the singer', recitative (unmeasured melody) and air (measured melody) (Molineux 1831: 25). The style of singing to be employed in these two classes was suggested by the specific nature of the composition and the place of its performance. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, four main styles were recognized—church, chamber, concert, and theatre. Although in all four styles singers expressed the same sorts of natural feelings, the character of the expression conformed to a particular style (Addison 1850: 32). In the church, for example, singers sought to impress listeners with due veneration for the divine presence, and a noble and dignified solemnity governed the delivery (Egestorf 1815: 13). Even the most vehement exclamations of anguish, complaint, and joyfulness were to be tempered with chastity and purity (Bacon 1824: 31), and ornament should be kept to a minimum, cadenzas being completely inappropriate (Addison 1850: 32). On the opposite end of the spectrum, theatrical singing sought to excite the passions, and singers adapted their delivery to the character they represented (Egestorf 1815: 13). Voice and action united to produce an elaborate and varied performance in which singers employed the stage, with its attendant bustle and scenery, to excite them to action (Gardiner 1832: 145). Concert singing, however, occupied an intermediate position between the church and the theatre. Orchestra songs admitted all of the force, elocution, and expression which could be conveyed into them but fell short of true theatrical performance (Bacon 1824: 37). Chamber singing, on the other hand, lacked not only scenery and acting but also the orchestra. Its success depended upon elegance of ornament and extreme delicacy of execution (Anfossi *c.*1840: 71), John Addison comparing the finely polished performance of the chamber singer to the finish of a highly wrought miniature (1850: 32).

These styles regularly contained both recitative and air, and many writers carefully detailed the differences between the two classes of melody. Recitative is an expressive and elegant manner of speaking in 'musical notes', most writers describing it as a species of musical declamation designed to approximate ordinary discourse, whereas the measured strains of an air produced a more continuous or connected style of delivery (Bacon 1824: 83; Gardiner 1832: 71). Joseph Corfe (1799: 8) notes that recitative expresses action or passion and frequently provides an introductory story to a song or chorus, and singers, he felt, needed to pronounce their words 'with the propriety and energy of a public speaker', William Gardiner encapsulating the approach taken in recitative with the axiom 'we recite the best when we sing the least' (1832: 85).

Perhaps the most revealing single account of recitative performance was given by Charles Smyth in 1817:

> Singers are apt to deliver the words [in recitative] *too strictly* according to the time of the notes to which the composer has adapted the words. It was necessary for the composer to fill up his bar: but he never intended the singer should pay *mechanical* attention to his notation. Some passions require *rapidity*; others should be delivered *slowly*. . . . Do not in plain narrative deliver the words *too pompously*. It is disgusting—it is contrary to Good Sense. Do not make words, which ought to be separated according to the principles of just elocution, *stick too close* to each other. I am disposed to think (I speak with due deference to professional information) that little breaches in singing frequently produce a most admirable effect. All good readers make perceptible pauses, where not even a *comma* is, or ought to be, found in the typography of a sentence. *The finest reader*, if he had a voice and intonation, would probably be the *finest singer*. (Smyth 1817: 17–19)

Smyth's comments resonate throughout the period, tutors regularly advising performers to pay more attention to expressing the passion of the subject than to following the notation mechanically.[1] Domenico Corri observed that 'the respective duration of the notes [in recitatives as well as airs] is scarcely even hinted at' by composers (*c.*1781: 2), and John Addison, writing in 1850, considered the composer's notation, especially in recitative, to represent only 'the Skeleton of his ideas'. The rest, he continued, 'is left to the Singer, who must give the finish according to his taste and judgment' (p. 29). For convenience, recitative was written in common time (Hoyle 1791: 113; Hamilton 1853: 20; Pergetti 1850: 54), but in practice, singers altered the notated text to suit the passions of the words, some notes being prolonged and others curtailed according to the dictates of the sentiments to be conveyed. In short, recitatives were delivered *ad libitum*.

[1] D. Corri *c.*1781: 2; Hoyle 1791: 113; Callcott 1792: 17; Corfe 1799: 8; Bennett 1807: 3; D. Corri 1810: 70; Lanza 1826: ii. 15; Bacon 1824: 79; Cooke 1828: 61; M. Corri *c.*1830: 39; Le Camus *c.*1835: 85; Anfossi *c.*1840: 72–3; Fontana 1849: 188–9; Addison 1850: 28; Pergetti 1850: 54; Hamilton 1853: 19–20; García 1857: 70–1.

STYLES OF SINGING

In order for singers to 'speak in musical notes', the voice needed to be a 'medium of sound between speaking and singing' (D. Corri 1810: 70), and this was achieved by elongating vowels less in recitatives than in airs. In fact, several writers, notably Anselm Bayly (1771: 60), Thomas Bennett (1807: 3), James Alexander Hamilton (1853: 20), and Manuel García (1857: 71), thought singers should align singing with speaking by attending to the 'laws of prosody'. This approach required the accents, emphases, and pauses of normal speech, as well as the quantities of syllables, to be as keenly observed in singing as they were in speaking. Indeed, the musical press praised a singer like Michael Kelly because he knew how to 'speak recitative' (*Harmonicon* 8 (1830): 95), but someone like Signora Calderini, who apparently did not perform recitative well, was chastised for a delivery which amounted to nothing more than 'a series of unconnected *staccato* shrieks, without variety of emphasis or modulation' (*Examiner*, 2 July 1809: 425).

Recitatives were classified in a number of ways, but perhaps the most fundamental division was between the spoken or simple and the sung or accompanied. Spoken recitative was predominantly syllabic and resembled 'conversation, in as much as the singer speaks while he sings', whereas sung recitative expressed elevated and pathetic sentiments and was performed in a broader and more sustained style (García 1857: 71). These two styles date back at least to the early eighteenth century,[2] and some of the nineteenth-century descriptions of recitative seem to hark back to earlier times. Maria Anfossi, for example, wrote of simple recitatives 'being divested of sentiment and passion' and of accompanied recitatives containing so much 'impassioned feeling' that the 'vehemence of the feeling does not allow any continued sense in the words, or strain in the melody, yet these very interruptions speak to the heart more eloquently than any language' (*c.*1840: 72).

But beyond these two general categories, writers also discussed sacred, theatrical, and concert or chamber recitative. Singers performed the sacred variety with a noble majesty that precluded ornaments but benefited from the frequent application of *messa di voce* (Bayly 1771: 60; D. Corri 1810: 71). Theatrical recitative, on the other hand, consisted of two types, serious and comic. Domenico Corri described the performance of serious recitative as a graceful, dignified imitation of speaking which was accompanied by appropriate action (1810: 71), and Gesualdo Lanza suggested that in the serious style singers should preserve more of the musical intonation than would be appropriate for the comic variety (1826: ii. 15). Comic recitative, then, seems to have differed from the serious only by being a 'more free, familiar delivery approaching still more nearly to speaking' (D. Corri 1810: 71). Recitative written in the chamber or concert

[2] On this point, see *New Grove Opera*, 'Recitative'.

style, however, was not so narrative or requiring of action and admitted more ornaments (ibid.: 71), Maria Anfossi referring to the delicacy and grace with which chamber recitative should be delivered (*c.*1840: 74).

The style of delivery in all of these categories was ultimately governed by the impassioned feelings conveyed in the words, and the *ad libitum* approach that resulted from the vivid and natural expression of feeling made it difficult for accompanists to follow singers. John Callcott discusses this problem in 1792 and warns keyboard players that in phrases which conclude with dominant–tonic progressions, 'let the Voice part be entirely finish'd before the two last Notes are struck in the Bass' (Callcott 1792: 17; see Ex. 1.1*a*). Callcott's advice is echoed in later treatises, Thomas Welsh making the identical observation in 1825 (p. 34; see Ex. 1.1*b*) and Manuel García suggesting that chords ought 'either to be played in advance, or not struck until the voice has ceased' (1857: 72).[3] García takes his description of the freedom singers require in recitative one step further than the others, however, with his recognition that chords which are separated by the composer may be united in performance. A passage from Bellini's *Beatrice di Tenda* illustrates the procedure (see Ex. 1.1*c*).

By blending elements of speaking and singing, performers transformed the inexpressive notation of recitative into passionate musical declamation. But airs also needed to be liberated from their notation, for an air, like a recitative, came to life only when performing traditions which remain latent in the notation were made manifest. On this matter, Domenico Corri states:

> Indeed, either an air, or recitative, sung exactly as it is commonly noted, would be a very inexpressive, nay, a very uncouth performance; for not only the respective duration of the notes is scarcely even hinted at, but one note is frequently marked instead of another, as is the case where a note is repeated, instead of that note with its proper *appoggiatura* or grace. Sometimes again, an *appoggiatura* is marked instead of a note which ought to receive, perhaps, the particular emphasis of the voice, and be even longer than that which immediately follows. (Corri *c.*1781: 2)

In fact, the principles of delivering recitative were, according to Richard Bacon, 'all capable of being applied to [the] air, but in a degree limited by the nature of such compositions, by the time and by the melody, which is more continuous, more connected, and more strictly vocal than recitative. The elocution must therefore be more uniform, and the transitions, if not less marked, yet not so sudden' (Bacon 1824: 83).[4] Similarly, John Molineux maintained that in an air the duration of the syllables and words was dictated by the notes, but in recitative the opposite happened (1831: 25). Not surprisingly these two classes of

[3] See also Lanza 1820*b*: 90; Cooke 1828: 61; Molineux 1831: 25. Collins (1984) discusses this procedure in 18th-cent. Italian recitative.

[4] See also Anfossi *c.*1840: 69.

Ex. 1.1. Accompaniment in recitative

melody were also differentiated by the manner in which they were accompanied. According to Molineux, 'the Accompaniments to Airs should keep pace with the singer, exactly,—and yet in a manner so indescribably delicate, as not to fetter him', whereas 'the Accompaniments to Recitatives should very rarely concur with the singer' (p. 25). Nonetheless, despite the obvious differences between recitative and air, spoken recitation lay at the heart of all singing, performers being taught to base the delivery of both recitative and air on speech.[5]

Along with these basic divisions of style, writers of the period described a number of other modes of execution (*canto spianato*, *cantabile*, *canto fiorito*, and *canto declamato*), as well as the differences not only between Italian and English singing but also between oratorio (especially those by Handel) and opera. The broad or plain style of singing (*canto spianato*) figures prominently in the treatises of Manuel García and Maria Anfossi,[6] and Anfossi describes this style as an expansive manner of singing (*c.*1840: 10). It is distinguished by melodies delivered in a smooth and unbroken way, the chief resources of the style being steadiness of the voice, delicacy of timbres, swelled sounds of every variety, delicate shadings of *forte* and *piano*, and *tempo rubato* (García 1857: 72).

Closely connected to *canto spianato* is the *cantabile* or pathetic style.[7] *Cantabile*, an expressive manner of singing 'soft, slow movements' which reaches from the heart (Corfe 1799: 6; D. Corri 1810: 69), required singers to possess great sensibility in communicating the sentiments of their songs to listeners (Jousse 1815: 37). A tender, majestic, and simple delivery of perfectly connected notes characterizes the style, and *tempo rubato*, *messa di voce*, and *portamento* were seen as important components of *cantabile*, singers using these devices to awaken the passions of listeners (Corfe 1799: 6; D. Corri 1810: 69). The great or grand style probably shared many of the same attributes, except that it addressed the loftier sentiments of the mind and carried the listener away by the grand and majestic tone of the singer and by the force and vehemence of the delivery (Bacon 1824: 36; Anfossi *c.*1840: 7). Many of the airs in Handel's oratorios benefited from this mode of execution, Richard Bacon specifically mentioning 'I know that my redeemer liveth' (*Messiah*), 'Total eclipse' (*Samson*), and 'In sweetest harmony' (*Saul*).

The more florid styles of singing, described by García under the heading *canto fiorito* (1857: 73–4), include *canto di agilità*, *di maniera*, and *di bravura*. *Canto fiorito* is rich in ornament and allows singers to display the fertility of their imaginations and the elasticity of their voices. It uses a number of the techniques of

[5] Bayly 1771: 62; D. Corri 1810: 68; Jousse 1815: p. xi; Smyth 1817: 20; Lanza 1820*a*: iii. 43; Bacon 1824: 78; Welsh 1825: 23; H. Corri 1826: 32; Philipps 1826: 5; Molineux 1831: 19; Anfossi *c.*1840: 66; Addison 1850: 29–30; Balfe 1850: 11; Maynard 1853: 32; Wass 1855: 32.

[6] See also Pergetti 1850: 40.

[7] Corfe 1799: 6; Bennett 1807: 4; Jousse 1815: 37; Bacon 1821: 8; Hamilton 1834: 67–9; Le Camus *c.*1835: 85; Fontana 1849: 190; García 1857: 72.

canto spianato, such as *messa di voce*, *tempo rubato*, and shadings of *forte* and *piano*, but focuses on brilliance of ornament. The *canto di agilità*, which abounds with roulades, arpeggios, and trills, should be 'light and moderate in force', and it is well adapted to the allegro of lively airs and to the quick movements of rondos and variations. In considering the *canto di maniera*, García opines that it was introduced by singers whose voices were deficient in power and whose organs were not endowed with any high degree of flexibility. As a consequence, these singers eschewed showy ornaments in favour of passages composed of small figures executed with delicacy. The style suited graceful sentiments, García commenting that all exaggerations should be excluded from the style, all intervals should be produced by supple movements of the throat, and all high notes should be softened down to the sweetest *pianissimo*. In the *canto di bravura*, however, power and passion are added to the *canto di agilità*. The animated feelings of the performer, which pass from the gentlest to the strongest and fiercest passions, dictate the style and movement of a *bravura*. By combining a flood of passionate feeling with the richest embellishments, singers depict through a torrent of sounds what is passing in the soul more quickly than can possibly be conveyed by words (Gardiner 1832: 83–4). A marvellous description of the power of *bravura* appears in *The Times* of 16 January 1812:

> [Angelica Catalani's] song, *Soa' Regina* [in Portugal's *La morte di Semiramide*], is a bravura of the most superb and spirited style . . . Her voice is now bold, rapid and resolute, sweeping through the scale, and full of the ardour and animation of successful passion . . . in those swift and sudden springs,—those rich and sparkling flights of voice,—we could almost image the shooting of a meteor, with all its train of scintillation, brief, brilliant, and sublime. (p. 3)

The other form of passionate singing, *canto declamato*, excludes ornamental display and divides into two categories, the serious and the *buffo* (García 1857: 74). In serious dramatic song, a style which was created for impassioned feelings, the actor constantly prevails over the singer. The diction should be noble and elevated, and the chief resources of the style are 'syllabication, grammatical quantity, a well-regulated strength of voice, the *timbres*, strong accents, sighs, expressive and unexpected transitions, appoggiaturas, and slurs [*portamenti*]' (García 1841: ii. 70, trans. Paschke 1975: 200; García 1857: 74). James Hamilton, in his explanation of the impassioned style, advances a similar description: 'On the part of the singer are required great sensibility, and warmth of feeling, energy of expression, much power of voice, and a facility of passing rapidly from the extremes of force, to the most delicate shades of softness, and the reverse. Indeed, strong and frequent contrasts of this and similar kinds, form the leading features of this style' (Hamilton 1834: 70). In the diametrically opposed character of the *buffo*, however, singing 'approaches very nearly to speaking, and its delivery should be

free, natural, and animated' (D. Corri 1810: 70). Here the singer should also be secondary to the actor, but the freedom and naturalness to which Corri refers is achieved by a rapid and neat articulation of the monosyllabic text instead of through the noble and elevated diction of the serious style (García 1857: 74).

Singers, in employing the various styles of singing, identified the nature of each air and delivered it in an appropriate style. Mrs Billington, for example, sang the airs 'If o'er the cruel tyrant love' and 'Let not rage' from Arne's *Artaxerxes* in *cantabile* style, whereas she sang 'The soldier tir'd of war's alarms' from the same opera more like a *bravura* (*Harmonicon* 8 (1830): 96). Some singers, however, were noted for their abilities in one style over the others, and reviewers did not miss the opportunity to point out the defect. *The Times*, for instance, wanted Mary Anne Wilson to add a pure *cantabile* style and a more varied expression to her already well-developed *bravura* (2 March 1821: 3). Occasionally, however, singers were forced to abandon the *bravura* as a natural part of the ageing process. Madame Banti excelled in *bravura* in her youth, but when she lost a few of her upper notes, she acquired 'a taste for the *cantabile*' and gave herself up almost entirely to that style. Madame Grassini, on the other hand, specialized in the *cantabile* throughout her career, so much so that her singing 'bordered a little on the monotonous' (*QMMR* 9 (1827): 101–2). Conversely, Madame Catalani had such a flair for airs of agility (see the quotation cited above), indulging so continually in the most elaborate and difficult ornaments, that she, like Mary Anne Wilson, was said to have had virtually no plain style whatsoever (*QMMR* 1 (1818): 181). Nonetheless, a few singers mastered all of the prominent styles of their day, John Braham regularly receiving glowing reviews in the musical press for his consummate skill in this area. *The Times*, for example, reported that from the *bravura* to the ballad there was no style of singing of which he was not complete master (24 October 1817: 3), and the *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* stated that 'Mr. Braham at the [Italian] Opera or in an Italian Scena, is a totally different man from Mr. Braham at Covent Garden [in the English opera], or in the Orchestra [style] of an Oratorio or a Concert' (*QMMR* 1 (1818): 90). Braham writes about the various styles he introduced into his performances, especially about the need to avoid monotony, in a letter to Mr Perry, the editor of the *Chronicle*, dated 4 March 1814:

> A Theatrical style of singing must differ from that of a Concert, that in a theatre when you perform to a mixed audience, you must be rather more ornamental than in a Cathedral. Would you be pleased with Mr Kean, were he to recite Richard in the chaste subdued tone of an excellent Preacher? or with Dr Andrews, were he to preach in the brilliant theatrical tone of Mr Kean—certainly not—My greatest professional pride is, that I can assume different styles—and avoid that worst of all defects—monotony—versatility of style is as great a beauty in vocal performers, as it is in dramatic performers. (BL: Add. MS 52,337A, fo. 60^{r-v})

STYLES OF SINGING

In general, the style of singing employed by Braham and other English singers was mixed rather than purely English. In 1817, Charles Smyth declared that 'with very few exceptions, the only good English singing-masters have either been taught by Italians, or have adopted the sterling principles of the Italian school' (1817: 24). Three years later, Richard Bacon, writing in the *London Magazine*, summarized the state of vocal instruction in England: 'the English, having no musical school of their own, are compelled to erect the superstructure of their national performances upon foreign foundations' (June 1820: 618).[8] The national trait to which Bacon refers was, of course, the more restrained sensibility of the English and the foreign foundation was the Italian method of voice production, which many English singers adopted. The feelings of the Italians, Bacon continues, 'being more vivid, more violent, perhaps, more intense, and more short-lived than ours, they [the Italians] give a more sudden, more rapid, more vehement, more tender, representation of them' (p. 621). The English, on the other hand, 'wish to have their higher affections, rather than their lower appetites, moved and excited' (p. 621). In a later publication, Bacon encapsulated the differences between the Italian and the English characters with customary candour: 'They esteem us cold and spiritless; we esteem them vehement if not violent, and given to excess. The discrepancy begins with nature and is carried into art' (Bacon 1824: 54). But Bacon's stereotypes did not represent the reality of the situation: not all English singers were 'cold and spiritless' (see the description of John Braham below), and Italian singers who performed in England, such as Angelica Catalani, were by no means always 'given to excess', especially when singing recitatives and airs extracted from Handel's oratorios.[9]

Early nineteenth-century writers frequently refer to a manner of delivering Handel's airs that is simple, plain, and majestic.[10] Thomas Vaughan, for example, was not a singer who took 'by storm' (*QMMR* 1 (1818): 98). The 'dignified simplicity' ('at once the difficulty and the praise of singing Handel') of his approach to the recitative and air 'Oh! loss of sight | Total eclipse' (*Samson*) produced a restrained delivery which allowed 'the shades of passionate enunciation [to be] so nicely and intimately blended, [that] they melt into darker and

[8] For a discussion of Bacon's contributions to the *London Magazine*, see Langley 1983: 500.

[9] The *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* (1 (1818): 184), of which Bacon was editor, gives the following account of Catalani's performance of 'There were shepherds abiding in the field' (*Messiah*): 'she gave a beautiful illumination to more than one of the sentences of the recitative in HANDEL's *Messiah*, beginning "*There were shepherds abiding in the field*," by this power of swelling and of keeping a protracted note exquisitely soft. It was an effort of art simply, which we have never heard exceeded particularly in the close of one of them, "*And they were sore afraid*." The truth is, that she could play with her voice at pleasure. In that respect she resembled, nay she exceeded Mr. BRAHAM.'

[10] Smyth 1817: 11–13; *QMMR* 1 (1818): 83, 97–8, 100, 172, 174; *Harmonicon* 3 (1825): 182; Nathan 1836: 170–1.

darker hues from the first strain of complaining sorrow to the climax of reproachful anguish and misery' (*QMMR* 1 (1818): 97–8). However, this chaste style of singing,[11] also called *cantabile* by a few authors,[12] is not what we today would describe as either plain or simple, for leading exponents of the style not only employed a wide range of passionate delivery but also ornamented their music liberally. John Braham, for example, even though he also was considered a Handelian singer of plain and heroic utterance (Morpurgo 1949: 126), sang in a much more animated way than Thomas Vaughan. His delivery of the recitative 'Deeper and deeper still' (*Jephtha*), a delivery characterized by Isaac Nathan as 'chaste, simple, and affecting' (1836: 170–1), seems to have been a favourite with audiences, and Thomas Welsh's account of Braham performing it reveals just how flamboyant chaste singing could be:

> The tremulous tones, by which he fascinates the ear, and touches the heart in the first four words 'Deeper and deeper still' can only be surpassed by the enchantment of the last line—'I can, no more.' Here the mind of a great Master bursts forth—He stops—breathes hysterically between '*I can*' and '*no more*,' his whole soul seems overwhelmed with feeling, and the words find their way to the heart altho' the ear can scarcely catch them. (Welsh 1825: 23)[13]

Indeed, the following comparison of Braham and Vaughan performing Handel's 'Why does the God of Israel sleep?' (*Samson*) demonstrates that early nineteenth-century listeners equally prized the widely divergent approaches of the two singers:[14]

> We have heard both Mr. Braham and Mr. Vaughan in this song, and there can be no diminution of the praises of these great masters of vocal art, from a comparison of their merits. Mr. Braham was swift, powerful, and impassioned in a more vehement degree, but Mr. Vaughan was more articulate, more natural, more simple, more dignified, and therefore far more forcible. Mr. Braham's was the over stimulated enthusiasm of passion

[11] The word 'chaste' is used to characterize the singing of Handel's music in *QMMR* 1 (1818): 83; *Harmonicon* 3 (1825): 182; Nathan 1836: 170–1. I employ it in the late 18th-cent. sense of that which restrains itself from excess. See *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 'Chaste'.

[12] Jousse 1815: 37; *QMMR* 1 (1818): 181; Hamilton 1834: 67–9; Le Camus *c.*1835: 85; Fontana 1849: 190. See also the definitions of *cantabile* in Corfe 1799: 6; Bennett 1807: 4.

[13] Richard Bacon portrayed this recitative as one of those 'which derive all their sublime effects from the power which the singer has to enter into the feelings of the composer, and to illustrate his apparently plain ideas with the full force of dramatic and vocal execution. "*Deeper and deeper still*" is perhaps the most perfect instance, where the ever-varying passions demand all that change of tone, force of elocution, and the most melting pathos can convey—for the most part these effects are produced by the agency of energetic and pathetic declamation' (1824: 83).

[14] The author of the passage laments the lack of a specific term to describe 'songs of division' like 'Why does the God of Israel sleep?' (*Samson*) and 'Thou shalt dash them' (*Messiah*). He rejects the Italian term *aria di agilità*, because it does not 'imply the powerful expression which we venture to call VOCAL DECLAMATION, and which forms the characteristic of those compositions' (*QMMR* 1 (1818): 98).

and the stage. Mr. Vaughan's was the concentrated energy of zeal, strength, and feeling. Mr. Braham gives loose to his fury and boiling spirit.—Mr. Vaughan attempers his imagination with the purity, which in this as much if not more than any other part of his performance restrains, and by restraining, fortifies his manner. In this too, as in '*Total eclipse*' the effect is not instant, as [is] the effect of Mr. Braham's singing, but it grows upon us, and increases, and is fixed for ever by reflection more than by impulse. (*QMMR* 1 (1818): 99)

Although Braham's extravagance in this song appears to test the bounds of chaste singing, he took care, as we have seen, to adjust his manner of singing to suit the music he was performing.

But beyond the passionate zeal of a chaste interpretation, whether of the restrained type practised by Thomas Vaughan or of the more flamboyant variety employed by John Braham, plain singing could include a great deal of ornamentation. In fact, the precise amount of embellishment Elizabeth Billington introduced when singing in the *cantabile* style (in the airs 'If o'er the cruel tyrant love' and 'Let not rage' from Arne's *Artaxerxes*) was recorded by Thomas Busby around 1805 (see Ex. 1.2).[15] As the century progressed, however, writers began to observe a change in the nature of ornamentation. According to Domenico Corri, eighteenth-century singers, such as Giuseppe Aprile, Giuseppe Millico, and Gasparo Pacchierotti, reserved embellishments for the places composers had allotted; that is, their ornaments were 'in subordination to the character and design of the composition, and introduced only on words which will admit of decoration, without destroying the sentiment' (D. Corri 1810: 3). Similarly, John Addison, in recalling the singing of Gertrud Mara, noted that her delivery was free of meretricious ornament (1850: 20). By 1818, however, vocal performance was described as having become 'too commonly a jargon of rapid inexpressive passages' (*QMMR* 1 (1818): 83). In the old days (the turn of the century), ornaments were said to have had meaning; that is, 'not a note was appended to any song, but was of the exact character of the part of the air in which it was placed' (*QMMR* 1 (1818): 83), and writers like Richard Bacon desired a return to a manner of singing Handel that admitted 'very few additional notes' (1824: 102). Thomas Welsh agreed. He took much less licence in ornamenting Handel than the 'natives of Italy', but in order to secure applause for his students, he bowed to a public 'accustomed to ornaments' and allowed Catherine Stephens and Mary

[15] Printed in *The Songs Sung by Mrs. Billington in the Celebrated Opera of Artaxerxes, with all the Graces, Variations, & Embellishments Introduced by her at the Theatres Royal, Drury Lane & Covent Garden* (London, ?1805). Billington may very well have dictated her embellishments to Busby, for the *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* (1 (1818): 178) states: 'All her most popular songs were immediately printed with the ornaments she used, and which were taken down by professors, as she gave them.'

Ex. 1.2. Billington's ornamentation in the *cantabile* style

Anne Wilson to take a few liberties (Welsh 1825: 29, 33). It appears that the older manner of performing Handel, which was thought by some to bestow upon his compositions 'their natural grandeur and effect', made Handel's music too 'heavy' for the 'musical fashion-mongers of the day' (*QMMR* 1 (1818): 174).

Nevertheless, despite the public's appetite for elaborate ornamentation, writers in the 1820s routinely grumbled about the inappropriate nature of many of the additions to Handel's works. Critics describe both Angelica Catalani and John Braham as singing cadenzas not suited to the character of the works into which they were introduced, especially in 'I know that my Redeemer liveth' (*Messiah*) and 'Waft her angels' (*Jephtha*) (*Harmonicon* 1 (1823): 172; 5 (1827): 205). Even as chaste a singer as Catherine Stephens was maligned in the musical press for failing to resist a flourish on the words 'most musical, most melancholy' in Handel's 'Sweet bird' (*L'Allegro*) (*Harmonicon* 5 (1827): 144). And Mary Anne Paton was severely criticized for her display of ornament in 'From mighty Kings' (*Judas Maccabaeus*) and 'Farewell ye limpid springs' (*Jephtha*):

She must not condescend to make use of any trickery, by spoiling good music with too florid ornaments, running up and down the scale to a height and depth perfectly useless, in order to shew an audience the extent of her voice, or to lengthen out a cadence at the close of a song, merely in compliance with a false taste. She has no need of this, and can well afford to do without it. (*Harmonicon* 8 (1830): 173)

But quite apart from complaints about the decline of taste in ornamentation, some writers felt that the style of singing Handel's oratorios was becoming tainted with Italian practices. This is not surprising, of course, in a country in which the method of singing was built on Italian foundations. The *Harmonicon*, for example, wished Catherine Stephens would rid herself of the custom, borrowed from the Italian school of singing, of '*sliding* up to a high note from the bottom of her voice, instead of a clear burst upon it, at once:—so sung the fine English singers of old;—so sung Mrs. Sheridan, Mrs. Bates, and Mrs. Billington! and how much sweeter—how much more natural' (2 (1824): 75).[16] Later that year, the same magazine criticized Stephens for an Italianate pronunciation of certain words in *Acis and Galatea*, particularly when 'the fair Galatea' invoked 'her prop*ee*tious powers' (2 (1824): 143). However, aside from these sorts of Italian borrowings, English vocalists generally seem to have eschewed the stronger and more impassioned expression of the Italian opera singer in favour of moving and agitating the mind more gently (*QMMR* 4 (1822): 401–2). This was especially important in the singing of Handel's oratorios, for contemporary performers catagorized them not with the excesses of the unrestrained theatre style but with the somewhat more subdued orchestra or concert style. Indeed, Maria Anfossi, writing in 1840, opines that because the manner of performance in an oratorio is intermediate between the church and the theatre, it partakes of both characters (Anfossi *c.*1840: 71). Consequently, singers drew upon the same arsenal of expressive devices for both oratorio and opera, except that in oratorio performances singers used these devices in a less flamboyant way. *Messa di voce*, *portamento*, *tempo rubato*, and ornamentation all played important roles in the expressive singing of Handel's oratorios in the early nineteenth century. Singers even personified the characters they represented, albeit in a more restrained way than would be appropriate for opera:

[James Bartleman's] execution of the song of *Polypheme*, '*O ruddier than the cherry*' [*Acis and Galatea*], which before his time had always been held to be a rude, heavy, and unmanageable composition, is truly theatrical, yet equally just. It is really gigantic. '*Thus saith the Lord to Cyrus*,' from HANDEL [*Belshazzar*], and above all '*Let the dreadful engines*

[16] The occasion which prompted these comments was the performance of the recitative and air 'Ye sacred priests | Farewell ye limpid springs' at the Concert of Ancient Music held on 10 March 1824.

of eternal will,' and *The frost scene* in *King Arthur* from PURCELL, are as legitimate personifications as orchestra singing can admit, or as the understanding can desire from vocal art. (*QMMR* 1 (1818): 327)

In order to achieve this sort of personification, singers were taught to imitate real life, and the next chapter discusses the principles which governed this important facet of delivery.