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Handel's Bass Solos in His Oratorios

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HANDEL'S BASS SOLOS IN HIS ORATORIOS

A covering Paper
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
Ronald E. Jones
August, 1971

An integral part of this covering paper
is a tape recording of a graduate recital
performed on August 12. 1971 as part of the
requirement for the completion of the thesis.

APPROVED FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

Joseph Haruda, COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Odin C. Westgaard

Wayne S. Hertz



DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

presents in Graduate Recital

RON JONES

Baritone

Dana Sisson, Pianist

P R O G R A M

I

Arm, Arm, Ye Brave Handel
from "Judas Maccabaeus"
Thy Glorious Deeds inspir'd My Tongue Handel
from "Samson"
How Willing My Paternal Love Handel
from "Samson"

II

Si mes vers avaient des ailes! Hahn
Avant de quitter ces lieux Gounod
from "Faust"
Vittoria, mio core! Carissimi
Di Provenza il mar Verdi

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Wonne der Wehmut Beethoven
Allerseelen Strauss
Urlicht Mahler

IV

Pilgrims Song Tchaikovsky
The Heart Worships Holst
Silent Noon Williams
Preach Not Me Your Musty Rules Arne
from "Comus"

HERTZ RECITAL HALL
August 12, 1971
8:15 P.M.

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts Degree in Education

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Handel, recognized as a great Baroque composer, has had his vocal compositions performed by most serious singers. Many of these would agree that his compositions are, in general, very considerate of the singer and seldom vocally awkward. Since Handel wrote for all types of voices, most singers may find appropriate literature in his oratorios.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

All singers should have some acquaintance with Handel's vocal compositions. Unfortunately, much of the present repertoire represents little of the bel canto techniques of the golden age of singing of which Handel was a part. This writer believes every serious vocal student should at least know some of the airs from his English oratorios.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is limited to only the bass solo literature of Handel's oratorios. More specifically, the solo literature investigated in this study is confined to five

oratorios. This author performed three airs from two of these oratorios in his graduate recital.

DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Basso Continuo

An instrumental bass which duplicates the lowest vocal part (1:80).

Bel Canto

Italian vocal technique of the eighteenth century with its emphasis on beauty of sound (1:82).

Choral Cantata

An oratorio in which the text deals with English History and tradition (4:335).

Choral Drama

The hero is presented essentially as the spokesman of his people. The Old Testament is the source for the text (4:336).

Choral Opera

May or may not deal with a biblical source but always allows the hero to be presented as an individual character as in traditional opera (4:335).

Da-capo Aria

The established form for the aria of the Baroque Era. The first section is repeated after the second, thus leading to the ternary scheme A B A (1:50).

Diatonic

Denotes the natural scale consisting of five whole tones and two semitones. Music is called diatonic if it is confined to the notes of this scale, to the exclusion of chromatic tones (1:208).

Oratorio

A composite narrative poem, completely sung with orchestral accompaniment, but without scenery, costumes, or dramatic action (1:516).

Recitative

A vocal style designed to imitate and to emphasize the natural inflections of speech. It is usually employed in connection with prose texts of a more or less narrative character (1:516).

Chapter 2

HANDEL'S ENGLISH ORATORIO

Handel, aware that his operas in London were financially unsuccessful, began his composition of oratorios about 1730. This composite vocal form without scenery and action could be produced much cheaper than an opera, and in the English vernacular, appealed to the large middle class public (6:403). Although Handel at first was known for his operas and cantatas, the oratorios probably eventually represented the peak of his musical achievement.

TYPES OF ORATORIOS

The oratorios of Handel, generally performed in the concert hall, are both sacred and secular.

Handel, with his early Italian training, was influenced by Italian models of opera, oratorio, and cantata. This influence was particularly evident in his English oratorios, based as they are on the choral centered oratorios of the Italian seventeenth-century composer, Carissimi (6:408). Furthermore, Handel, as most late Baroque composers, wrote typical Neapolitan da-capo arias employing various standardized types of the time. His recitatives employed the traditional style with basso continuo (12:243).

In contrast to Italian influences, his overtures were based on those established by the French composer Lully, generally slow, fast, slow, i.e., opposite to the Italian overture.

Many sources, such as Bukofzer (4:335-6), classify Handel oratorios as choral opera, choral cantata, and choral drama. This last class is representative of most of Handel's oratorios, including Judas Maccabeus and Samson, from which airs were performed by this writer in graduate recital.

Of his twenty-four English oratorios, perhaps the most famous is Messiah. As in his other oratorios, Messiah is replete with excellent airs for the bass voice.

Chapter 3

ELEMENTS OF STYLE IN SOME BASS SOLOS

Most sources agree that Handel's style of writing for the solo voice was most considerate. As opposed to the term "instrumental vocal line", Handel's generally could be called a cantabile or bel canto vocal line. Exceptions to this may be found even in his most popular oratorio, Messiah. This writer in performing Handel airs, found sections which represented both of the above types although the most predominate style must be considered bel canto.

RECITATIVE

Most Baroque arias are preceded by a more dramatic section in recitative style, with basso continuo only. The first oratorio, Rappresentazione di anima e di corpo, by Cavalieri, like opera, was completely in recitative style (1:516). Gradually as the aria developed the recitative became more autonomous with a definite cadence between recitative and aria. The following example is typical of Handel's recitative style.

Example 1. O Memory, from Belshazzar, meas. 1-3

Recitativo Stromentato

This style goes beyond the dimensions of the basso continuo, employing full orchestration. Though the singer has perhaps less rhythmic freedom, the style is nevertheless dramatic and effective.

Example 2. For Behold Darkness Shall Cover The Earth, from Messiah, meas. 5-7

MELODY

More obvious in his operas and cantatas, his melodic line attempts to reflect the meaning of the text. In certain lyric textual phrases his diatonic bel canto style is

so evident that some sources have even considered it too simple and folk-like. On the other hand, informed scholars and singers believe such smooth melodic lines require great control of sustained legato singing.

Example 3. How Willing Thy Paternal Love, from Samson, meas. 8-10

with tenderness

p How will -ing my pa -ter -nal love *p* The

p

Frequently, Handel's melodic line is disjunct and florid. The following example displays great floridity.

Example 4. Thy Glorious Deeds Inspir'd My Tongue, from Samson, meas. 22-24

p airs of joy

p

Melodic Progression

The melodic lines employed by Handel are, regardless of intervallic progression, usually diatonic. They are

apparent in a variety of ways. The following example demonstrates an ascending stepwise progression in B-flat major.

Example 5. Honour And Arms, from Samson, meas. 17-18

Though I could end thee at a blow,

p *CRES.*

Stepwise progressions are evident in florid passages, with step movement on accented beats.

Example 6. Thus Saith The Lord, from Messiah, meas. 19-21

- sire

p *CRES.*

Melodic skips frequently follow a diatonic chordal outline.

Example 7. Arm, Arm, Ye Brave, from Judas Maccabaeus, meas. 13

The image shows a single musical staff with a treble clef. Above the staff, the word "marcato" is written in italics. Below the staff, the lyrics "Arm, arm, ye brave!" are written. The music consists of a few notes with stems pointing upwards, and there are some markings above the notes, possibly indicating accents or breath marks.

However, some disjunct melodic lines are employed, particularly in bass airs.

Example 8. Honour And Arms, from Samson, meas. 81-83

The image shows three musical staves. The top staff is a vocal line with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It contains a long melodic line with many notes, some with accents. The lyrics "I dis-dain, I disdain," are written below the staff. Above the staff, there are markings "f" and "rall.". The middle staff is a piano accompaniment with a treble clef. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment with a bass clef. It contains a rhythmic pattern of notes. Above the bottom staff, there are markings "rall." and "mf".

Most Baroque composers of vocal music displayed considerable "word painting" technique (11:127). One example is evident through the chromaticism employed in the aria al unisono below:

Example 9. The People That Walked In Darkness, from
Messiah, meas. 24-25

The image shows a musical score for Example 9. The top staff is a vocal line starting with the instruction *CRSC.* and the lyrics "peo-ple that walk-ed in dark -". The bottom two staves are instrumental accompaniment. The music is in a minor key and features a melodic line with various ornaments and a rhythmic accompaniment.

Ornamentation

Baroque composers expected singers to add extra notes to the outline of their melodies. Some of these were indicated by signs written in by the composer. Most of these ornaments were intended to enhance the meaning of a particular word; for example, the "trill" is frequently employed by Handel.

Example 10. From The Heart That Feels My Warning, from
Time And Truth, meas. 13-15

The image shows a musical score for Example 10. The top staff is a vocal line with the word "warn" and several trills indicated by the symbol *tr*. The bottom two staves are instrumental accompaniment. The music is in a minor key and features a melodic line with trills and a rhythmic accompaniment.

TONALITY

Handel apparently had a strong predilection for the keys E major and E-flat major, both considered serene keys. He believed these two keys displayed considerable color and emotion in slower sections (5:60).

Example 11. How Willing Thy Paternal Love, from Samson, meas. 8-10

with tenderness

p

How will-ing my pa-ter-nal love

p

As major and minor tonality was established in the late Baroque period, assertive or extrovertial emotions became associated with the major mode. Many airs with instruments such as the trumpet, are written in the keys of C major or D major (5:60).

Example 12. Arm, Arm, Ye Brave, from Judas Maccabaeus, meas. 33-34

f ^

Arm, arm, Arm, arm, ye brave!

Expressive emotion is displayed through harmonic color in both major and minor modes. The following Jewish lament also demonstrates Handel's use of both modes within a few measures (5:60).

Example 13. Thy Glorious Deeds, from Samson, meas. 60-64

Largo. ♩ = 80.

To sor - rows now I tune my song,

RHYTHM

As with many Baroque composers, the rhythmic pattern of a dotted eighth followed by a sixteenth was employed by Handel, apparently to enhance his "word painting."

Example 14. Arm, Arm, Ye Brave, from Judas Maccabaeus, meas. 66-67

strength

At other times the triplet rhythm figure is employed, particularly in florid passages.

Example 15. Thy Glorious Deeds, from Samson, meas. 40-42

Recurring rhythm patterns are employed at times, though the text changes.

Example 16. Arm, Arm, Ye Brave, from Judas Maccabaeus, meas. 21-23

FORM

Handel, like most late Baroque composers, employed the da-capo form in his airs. However, his later composi-

tions were less formal in this respect and tended to follow more closely to the textual requirements. Of the 157 airs in his last eight oratorios, fifty-seven were da-capo, and 100 were in free-form (5:627).

Da-capo Form

Handel reserved this form for a character that expressed the general theme of the oratorio or when there was no need for continuity to the next section (5:68). This author performed, in his graduate recital, one da-capo air and two airs not repeating the first section.

Frequently, as in Thy Glorious Deeds, from Samson, Handel, in a fast moving plot abandons form. This air begins with considerable floridity, and ends with a sustained legato lament.

Chapter 4

SUMMARY

Handel's airs and songs were greatly influenced by the Italian bel canto style of singing. His recitatives and airs, typically Baroque, have definite cadences between them. Of several melodic lines employed by Handel in this study, two are especially noteworthy. One is a sustained melody in slow tempo, moving with a graceful rise and fall to cadences. The other shows great floridity with the melodic or rhythmic motive repeated many times. His melodic progressions were invariably diatonic, but some exceptions are evident in his "word painting", through the use of disjunct or chromatic melodic lines.

As major and minor tonality was established in the Baroque period, Handel's major keys became associated with extrovertial emotions. On the other hand, minor keys frequently reflected more expressive emotions.

Rhythmic figures typical of Handel's time included dotted rhythms, triplet figures, and recurring patterns.

Handel employed the da-capo form in his compositions as did other Baroque composers, but departed from this pattern in his later airs.

Handel's consideration of the voice, his departure from da-capo form, and other innovative features have established him as one of the greatest Baroque composers.

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