

Handel and Musical Borrowing

Throughout the history of the creative arts, young artists have acquired the skills of their trade through the imitation and transformation of preexisting models. During George Frideric Handel's lifetime (1685-1759) "transformative imitation,"¹ less aptly known as "borrowing," was often used by visual artists, writers and composers alike as an educational tool and as a compositional approach. Yet in spite of the universality of this method, Handel's borrowing has garnered more attention both during and after his lifetime than that of his contemporaries, and has "consumed more ink than any other aspect of the man or his music" to date.² It is undeniable that Handel practiced transformative imitation more frequently than others. Even so, the vast body of literature concerning Handel's compositional approach is filled with a wildly disproportionate amount of condemning accusations, the most serious of which is plagiarism.

The accusations of plagiarism, however, miss the point: Handel's borrowing was the result of a uniquely developed and highly refined approach to composing that often revolved around, and indeed thrived upon, the practice of transformative imitation. Because Handel truly made an art out of this practice, he necessarily borrowed and transformed material composed by himself and by others more frequently than perhaps any other composer in history. Yet the artistic nature of Handel's borrowing has generally been overlooked since the inception of Handelian criticism, obscuring the true context in which Handel's compositions must be understood, and instead emphasizing the supposedly plagiaristic nature of his works. Despite the fact that musical borrowing was a

¹ Winemiller 448.

² Dean 50.

widely implemented practice, and despite the fact that Handel used it to great effect, he was “the only great composer to be open to English charges of plagiarism.”³

However, the percentage of borrowed material in Handel’s works cannot alone account for the vast body of literature on this matter. Winton Dean (a modern Handel scholar) states that “In the whole body of Handel’s work the proportion of borrowings to newly created matter (even if allowance is made for a good many still undetected) is so small that it cannot possibly affect his stature as an artist.”⁴ Yet Handel’s musical reputation certainly has been affected (more strongly in certain centuries than in others) by accusations of plagiarism. Beginning in 1722 with the first published exposé of Handel’s borrowing, critical ideas on this topic have continuously been explored, although such discussions have evolved over time. Well over two hundred years after Handel’s death, many are still “harbouring a subversive discomfort, a puzzlement of judgment, about Handel’s compositional practices, adding controversy to his art and threatening to diminish the stature of his genius.”⁵

I propose that the origins of this historical and continued discomfort with Handel’s musical borrowing are much more complicated than a simple matter of volume of borrowed material, and can be traced back to two eighteenth-century English phenomena: the gradual association of imitation with plagiarism, and Handel’s complicated ascent as a non-native composer to a position of unprecedented popularity and English national importance. The confluence of these circumstances meant that Handel was at once projected into an exceptionally visible and long-lasting position of influence by his supporters, while this very visibility and longevity provided his

³ Buelow “Originality, Genius, Plagiarism” 127.

⁴ Dean 51.

⁵ Buelow “The Case for Handel’s Borrowings” 61.

detractors the means to expose his supposed faults as both a foreigner and a plagiarizer. Although countless other composers borrowed music as a practice (oftentimes with a great deal less artistry than Handel), it was only Handel, a highly visible and oftentimes contentious figure in English life, that received unrelenting criticism for such an artfully implemented practice.

As it is essential to set out with an understanding of Handel's compositional approach as an art rather than a crime, I will begin in Chapter 1 with an explanation of Handel's borrowing practices. I will next address in Chapter 2 the eighteenth-century English shift away from imitational practices, the development of the concept of plagiarism in England, and its relevance to Handelian criticism. In Chapter 3 I will elaborate upon Handel's first few years in England, because they were instrumental in his later ability to achieve a status of national importance. In order to illuminate the conditions under which Handel was able to become a figure of national identity in England, I will next detail in Chapter 4 Handel's progression from foreign composer of Italian opera to naturalized composer (and indeed creator) of English oratorio. In Chapter 5 I will demonstrate Handel's ultimate achievement as an English national composer and as a figure of unmatched popularity in England. Finally, in Chapter 6 I will consider the convergence of both phenomena in order to demonstrate that plagiarism and national identity were diametrically opposed ideas in eighteenth-century England, despite the fact that Handel was simultaneously vaunted as a national composer and criticized as a plagiarizer.

Handel's Borrowing: The Art of Transformative Imitation

Understanding Handel's borrowing as a necessary part of his compositional genius is crucial. A great deal of the negative light that has been shone upon Handel's works stems from an ignorance of Handel's compositional style and of the context in which Handel's works were created. To make the distinction between the plagiaristic approach that Handel is often accused of, and the creative imitational approach that Handel capitalized upon, one need only look at the method by which Handel learned to compose, the nature of the music Handel borrowed, and the manner in which he used this borrowed music. Just as any composer has his poorly constructed pieces, so too does Handel, yet these few instances must not be held as examples of borrowing gone awry. Instead, these must be seen as examples in which a compositional practice did not particularly succeed in relation to the numerous other immensely successful works composed by this same method.

Handel, like most budding Baroque composers, was taught composition by playing, improvising, copying, and elaborating upon preexisting compositions or themes.⁶ Just as a beginning sculptor might have studied canonic Greco-Roman statuary in order to develop a sense of basic artistry, so too were "style, expression, and taste"⁷ bred in young composers through exposure to well-known musical themes and pieces. This method was universal in the late Baroque, but it seems as though Handel particularly took these lessons to heart, and in this practice found his calling. He excelled precisely at taking an existing fragment or whole piece of music and refining it into a more perfect

⁶ Burrows 47.

⁷ Buelow "Originality, Genius, Plagiarism" 120.

version of itself. As will later be discussed, Handel possessed the remarkable talent for recognizing potential in a piece of music (whether his or someone else's), and polishing and refining that music until its full potential was realized. This practice that so defines Handel's music clearly has its roots in the Baroque approach to compositional pedagogy. In light of this, any piece in which Handel borrowed music and elaborated upon it, recontextualized it, integrated it, or bettered it in any way is not an instance of plagiarism, as his critics often claim, but is rather a mark of Handel bringing his training and talent to fruition.

While Baroque pedagogy provides theoretical justification for the argument that Handel was inventive rather than plagiaristic, the musical evidence solidifies the validity of this argument. First, in looking at the nature of the music that Handel borrowed, it becomes apparent that "Handel seemed to borrow only from common musical phrases and undistinguished ideas from other composers."⁸ Had he been a lazy plagiarizer, Handel would surely have capitalized on the most successful elements of the music available to him. Instead, he largely borrowed musical ideas because of their potential to be developed, reworked, or put in a new context. An unremarkable, little-known passage in one composer's work often showed itself to Handel as being capable of greater things (or, at least, new things).

A fine example of Handel's ability to take one composer's metaphorical rags and turn them into musical riches can be seen in his masque, *Acis and Galatea* (1718). While there are many examples of borrowing in this work (most often from his own arsenal of compositions) one particular instance involving the work of one of Handel's contemporaries, Reinhard Keiser, stands out. The borrowed music originally appeared in

⁸ Buelow "The Case" 76.

the aria “Wann ich dich noch einst erblicke” in Keiser’s opera *Janus* (1698). In *Acis and Galatea*, Handel used transformative imitation to take the simple ostinato bass figure of Keiser’s aria and turn it into the melodic basis of “O Ruddier than the cherry,” where it effectively worked to convey meaning and humor in a completely different dramatic context (Figures 1 and 2). In the context of Handel’s *Acis and Galatea*, the borrowed figure gets reworked and integrated into the continuo voices of the aria while depicting an awkward, unwelcome suitor in its melodic contour, and humorously contrasting with the instrumental voices that Handel composed around it.⁹

Beyond even considering the craftsmanship that it takes to integrate another composer’s idea into a different context, it is worth noting Handel’s talent for spotting fragments of music worthy of such integration. For a composer to hear the jagged bass figure of an emotional, lyric aria and to recognize it as being capable of creating a comic effect in the aria of a blundering giant is remarkable. Handel clearly did not “cut and paste,” but carefully selected a rather obscure musical passage because of the potential that it showed, and intricately integrated it into a new context. In true Germanic Baroque style,¹⁰ Handel’s talent lay in taking existing material and sculpting it until it became something different and better.

The vast majority of all [Handel’s] borrowings from whatever source involve some reshaping of the material, nearly always to its advantage, and this reshaping is concerned with the balance and proportion of themes, phrases, and whole movements, wherein, as we have seen, lay one of the secrets of Handel’s genius.¹¹

⁹ Winemiller 456-458. Harris (223-228) also discusses *Acis and Galatea* and Handel’s indebtedness to Keiser. Because Handel and Keiser were rivals, Harris conjectures that this borrowing instance allowed Handel to playfully present Keiser’s musical material to an English audience that would not have known his original works.

¹⁰ Buelow “The Case” 62.

¹¹ Dean 55.

While Handel often used material from other composers as fodder for transformative imitation, he also borrowed from his own musical store as well. Regardless of the source of the material, Handel was generally pursuing at least one of three goals when he borrowed music: to produce a work quickly, to produce a work that would almost certainly appeal to the audience, and most importantly, to produce a work in which a musical fragment or whole (whether belonging to Handel or another composer) could achieve its ultimate potential and thus complete its musical journey.

In *Rinaldo* (1711), the first of Handel's operas to be performed in London, all three goals are illustrated. As an extremely prolific composer with many demands on his time, Handel needed to produce music quickly. While borrowing didn't necessarily save time overall, it allowed him to start with a general framework and to then work "in the odd moments, as gaps in his other commitments allowed."¹² As *Rinaldo* was composed in this relatively rapid manner (said to be finished in a fortnight), Handel was required to make use of a great deal of self-borrowing. Knowing that he had to compose something rapidly and wanting it to be well received, Handel then frequently incorporated music from his previously successful works.¹³ But since Handel always strived to perfect preexisting material until it had reached its full potential, the borrowed music appearing in *Rinaldo* was greatly improved upon, and as always, carefully incorporated and reworked to fit its new context.

While there is much original music in *Rinaldo* that has no apparent root in a previous composition (the "marches for the rival armies," for instance¹⁴), it also contains recycled, yet improved material. Both the opening of the overture as well as the song "Il

¹² Burrows 234.

¹³ Burrows 65-84.

¹⁴ Burrows 84.

vostro maggio” came from Handel’s cantata *Aminta e Fillide* (1708), and both found great success in their new settings. Rinaldo’s “Abruggio, avampe e fremo” and Almirena’s “Lascia ch’io pianga” likewise both originated in Handel’s *Almira* (1705), and both were deemed to be “much improved” as they appeared in *Rinaldo*.¹⁵ While this borrowing allowed Handel to produce scores quite quickly, it also served the purpose of providing recognizable material that the audience could relate to. By reusing his most popular melodies in new contexts, Handel provided a common thread for an audience member to move from enjoying one opera to enjoying the next. Again, this shows Handel’s borrowing to be an effective creative approach that required a great deal of artistic effort, rather than a lazy “copy and paste” form of plagiarism.

While some of Handel’s tried and true popular melodies were intricately woven into new contexts (sometimes even to the extent that they became unrecognizable), other borrowings were undisguised. Again, *Rinaldo* provides a fine example. The melody of Almirena’s aria “Bel piacere” was taken straight from *Agrippina* (1709) without modification. Since this material was also used in Handel’s oratorio *Il trionfo del Tempo* (1707)¹⁶ it would seem that Handel found this to be a successful piece of music that would both serve him well in many contexts and also appeal to his audience. The fact that Handel did not alter the tune before using it in *Rinaldo* simply shows that he deemed it to be a refined, versatile and popular piece, in contrast to the previously mentioned borrowed materials to which Handel made many transformations before using.

Handel—and other Baroque composers—often used borrowed material for a referential purpose. For example, in the overture to *Orlando* (1733), Handel used

¹⁵ Burrows 83.

¹⁶ Burrows 84.

transformative imitation to indicate a sense of imminent “seriousness.” The music here was informed simultaneously by “Amor, nel mio penar” from Handel’s *Flavio* (1723) as well as by some of Handel’s church music that contained “penitential or supplicatory texts.”¹⁷ Just as “Bel piacere” in *Rinaldo* drew on the audience’s knowledge of Handel’s popular melodies, so too did these imbedded references draw on the audience’s musical familiarity in order to heighten the meaning of the drama.

Borrowing allowed Handel to create large works with great speed, and also helped ensure that his music was well received (and neither strategy required that he sacrifice his artistic integrity). However, it is in the goal of striving to realize a piece of music’s full potential that Handel’s practice of transformative imitation can best be understood. It is almost as if Handel were able to hear a fragment or full piece of music and know exactly how much promise it held. Whether he heard this promise in a brief musical sketch he made, in an aria from one of his own operas, or in a passage from another composer’s work was irrelevant. One of Handel’s chief talents as a Baroque composer was to take a piece of music and to show what could be done with it.

According to Friedrich Chrysander, “it was the impulse of [Handel’s] artistic nature to save from perishing musical ideas which he saw lying half-developed or in an alien environment.”¹⁸ Dean adds that “Chrysander long ago observed that *Agrippina* and other works of the Italian period are full of pregnant and beautiful ideas not always happily continued or fully worked up, and Handel was returning to *Agrippina* as late as *Jeptha* [one of Handel’s last English oratorios, composed in 1751].”¹⁹ It is for this reason

¹⁷ Burrows 219.

¹⁸ Dean 55-56. Chrysander was a nineteenth-century musicologist and Handel scholar who compiled and published many collections of Handel’s music and who was one of the first Handel biographers.

¹⁹ Dean 55.

that melodies, harmonies, and sometimes even whole pieces appear again and again in different forms throughout Handel's compositional history. Handel was apparently willing to revisit and rework a musical idea as many times as he thought necessary until he had extracted and exposed all that it had to offer.

Indeed, one of many such refining processes can be traced through an aria already mentioned. The "lament" sung by Almirena in *Rinaldo* (1711) entitled "Lascia ch'io pianga" originally appeared as a "sarabande tune" in *Almira* (1705),²⁰ Handel's first attempt at Italian opera. He must have recognized some potential for improvement and greater musical effect in this material and so revisited it and worked it into the context of *Rinaldo*. Again Handel seems to have felt that there were still unexplored areas in this musical material, and so in *Alcina* (1735) it was again revisited and revamped. Here Ruggiero's aria entitled "Verdi prati" is "in some ways a more mature successor"²¹ to "Lascia ch'io pianga." In this third revisiting, Handel released the full potential of the original musical idea, no matter how much the material had changed from its original conception. What became one of Handel's most popular tunes²² was thus the result of his ongoing practice of reconceiving and revisiting a piece of musical material in the process known as transformative imitation. It was only through the practice of borrowing music and presenting it in a new way, and in a different context that allowed Handel to have such results. An understanding of this creative process makes it impossible to see lazily composed, plagiarized music. Handel's borrowing clearly served a higher creative purpose and was a crucial element of his compositional approach.

²⁰ Burrows 83.

²¹ Burrows 224.

²² Burrows 224.

While Handel could not possibly have refined every musical idea to this extent, the mindset with which he approached composition revolved around this general notion. In looking at the frequency with which Handel borrowed, and the history that can be traced for each borrowed musical idea, one gets the idea that Handel was constantly working towards creating a more perfect musical interpretation. It is almost as if the pieces with the most potential remained, and indeed continued to move forward, ever being refined, while the music of lesser potential was allowed to sift through the cracks. When at last Handel was able to find the perfect setting in which a musical idea might reveal its full promise, only then did the refining process stop. In the words of Arthur James Balfour “They [the borrowed ideas] are wanderers, which have at last reached their home—migrating souls, which not till then, have found their fitting and perfect embodiment.”²³

Handel’s practice of borrowing, or transformative imitation, had never seen its counterpart prior to, or during Handel’s lifetime.²⁴ Indeed, much of the criticism directed towards this practice can be understood in light of the fact that Handel may have been the first, and indeed the only composer to make a true art out of transformative imitation: “At all periods of his life Handel showed a partiality, unique among prominent composers,

²³ Buelow “The Case” 74. Balfour was an active English politician and Handel admirer who was Prime Minister in the early twentieth-century. This quote comes from his 1887 publication in the *Edinburgh Review*.

²⁴ It is now well known that J.S. Bach borrowed material from his own compositions quite frequently, but rarely borrowed from other composers’ work as Handel did. Norman Carrell’s *Bach the Borrower* (1967) catalogues these self-borrowings. Because Bach largely borrowed only from himself, because his music was not widely published until the mid-nineteenth century, and because he composed in his native country, wrote music intended for the church rather than for the wider public, and didn’t achieve a “celebrity” status in his day, Bach’s borrowings did not garner attention during his lifetime as Handel’s did, and have received little notice over the centuries. Vivaldi is also now known to have borrowed, but because he (like Bach) did not put his name on the compositions in which he incorporated another composer’s work, his practices have been less contentious (Roberts 87). The borrowing practices of other English Baroque composers, such as Purcell and Croft, have similarly garnered little attention, as the circumstances of these composers’ lives and careers differed so much from Handel’s.

for taking up an idea he had used before and refashioning it into a new composition.”²⁵

Without any precedent for how to respond to such a style of composition, critics then and now discuss Handel’s practice of borrowing as if it were a crime, despite the fact that Handel practiced what his pedagogical experiences had encouraged him to pursue with great success. Carefully sculpting and shaping musical ideas until they “...changed [from] pebbles into diamonds,”²⁶ Handel was a true master of transformative imitation.²⁷

²⁵ Dean 55.

²⁶ Buelow “The Case” 76.

²⁷ Taken in part from a paper I wrote in May, 2008.

Shifting Values: Imitation, Originality, Plagiarism and Genius

Just as Handel began to develop a compositional approach in the early eighteenth century that called heavily upon transformative imitation, contemporary thoughts on the matter of imitation began to shift. Because of an increasing number of excessive and poorly practiced musical and literary borrowings, eighteenth-century English creative thought began to favor originality over imitation as the marker of quality, and indeed of genius.²⁸ Handel was caught in the middle of this creative shift, as he aligned himself with the older practice of imitation despite its new plagiaristic connotations. Beginning in the early 1720s, contemporary composers and music critics both in England and abroad began to express concerns at Handel's borrowing practices. Such concerns only grew in severity throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the delineation between imitation and plagiarism gradually disappeared. This near obsession with criticizing Handel's musical borrowing has somewhat diminished today, as supportive schools of thought have developed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, yet modern Handel scholars are forced to address the issue if only to counteract this historically large body of criticism.

This shift in values from imitation to originality cannot easily be pinpointed, as it slowly began as early as the sixteenth century, but didn't become widespread until the middle of the eighteenth century. While imitation, and to some extent originality had been a topic of discussion amongst poets even in ancient times, originality was then still tied closely with the notion of imitation: "To the ancients, then, combining old material

²⁸ Buelow "Originality, Genius, Plagiarism" 117.

with new and expressing the combination in an original manner constituted originality.”²⁹ By the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, the concepts of imitation and originality were becoming increasingly divorced from one another, until eventually it would seem inconceivable that one could at once practice imitation and be original. Although this was not yet a widespread belief, Italian poet Ludovico Castelveto expressed in 1570 the notion that *originality* was “the essence of the poet, and without invention he is no poet...That which a man has invented is his very own.”³⁰ Although most poets in Europe continued to accept and even expect the practice of imitation throughout the sixteenth century, dissenting opinions such as Castelveto’s began appearing much earlier than is often recognized.

Even in England, examples of the rising frustration with poor or excessive imitative practices can be found in the sixteenth century. A 1535 publication by Thomas Lupset explicitly condemns the “trifles and vayne inventions that men nowe a daies write” because they either fail to imitate the ancients, or because they imitate poorly, using material “piked out...of aunciente books,’ which ‘for the mooste part [are] defaced and broughte out of good fashion with theyr yevl handelynge.”³¹ John Hooper’s *A Declaration of the Ten Holy Commandments* (1549) likewise expressed frustration with poorly practiced imitation by modifying the commandment “Thou shalt not steal” to encompass literary offenses as well: “Here is forbidden also the diminution of any man’s fame; as when for vain glory any man attribute unto himself the wit or learning that another brain hath brought forth.”³² By the turn of the seventeenth century, the practice of

²⁹ White 8.

³⁰ White 26-27.

³¹ White 39-40.

³² White 41.

imitation had slowly begun its fall from favor, despite the fact that the concept of originality had not yet taken root to any great extent. A new term, “plagiarism” had even been developed in England around this time to describe the increasingly frowned-upon practice of “literary thieving,” although the term was not yet widely used until the mid-eighteenth century.³³ The more a negative light was cast upon excessive imitation, the more originality came to be favored until eventually (in the mid-eighteenth century) the terms “plagiarism” and “imitation” became practically synonymous.

Roughly coinciding with this shift in values was the rise of the notion of “genius.” Although the idea of genius dates back as far as the Greeks, it has been an ever-shifting term, and definitions vary from century to century.³⁴ It wasn’t until the early- to mid-eighteenth century in England that it came to mean an “instinctive and extraordinary capacity for imaginative creation, original thought, invention, or discovery.”³⁵ The emphasis on originality in the latter definition of genius reflects how closely connected these two concepts were perceived to be. Logically, as originality became more and more associated with genius, imitation became increasingly associated with a lack of creative genius, and eventually, with plagiarism. Edward Young’s *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), which ignited the mania for originality that swept England in the mid-eighteenth century, demonstrates the level of obsession with the subject.³⁶ Young wrote:

The mind of a man of Genius is a fertile and pleasant field, pleasant as *Elysium*, and fertile as *Tempe*; it enjoys a perpetual Spring. Of that Spring, *Originals* are the fairest flowers: *Imitations* are of quicker growth, but fainter bloom.

³³ White 120.

³⁴ Murray 9.

³⁵ Bate 76.

³⁶ Ricks 37.

An *Original* may be said to be of a vegetable nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of Genius; it *grows*, it is not *made*: *Imitations* are often a sort of *Manufacture* wrought up by those *Mechanics*, *Art*, and *Labour*, out of pre-existent materials not their own.

Tread in his steps to the sole Fountain of Immortality; drink where he drank, at the true *Helicon*, that is, at the breast of Nature: Imitate; but imitate not the *Composition*, but the *Man*. For may not this Paradox pass into a Maxim? viz. “The less we copy the renowned Antients, we shall resemble them more.”³⁷

While these notions had long been brewing in England, Young’s commitment of these ideas to paper solidified (coincidentally in the year of Handel’s death) the already widespread belief that imitation was the mark of creative ignorance.

It is important to note that eighteenth-century conversations about imitation, plagiarism, originality and genius were largely and principally focused on literature, namely poetry and stage drama. Plagiarism was seen to be an issue with regards to authors and poets because it “threaten[ed] literary livelihoods,” whereas musicians made their livelihoods primarily through other means (through private patrons and concerts, for example.) An increased access to published materials along with the “rise of the commodity culture,” and the rise of the means to purchase allowed consumers to compare an original with an imitation, whether it be a printed source or otherwise.³⁸ This in turn led to the question of intellectual property and authorship, which gave rise to the notion of plagiarism.³⁹ Dr. Johnson’s 1755 definition of plagiarism highlights the literary nature of the term, defining a plagiarist as “A thief in literature; one who steals the thoughts or writings of another.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Young 9-21.

³⁸ Groom 79-80.

³⁹ Donaldson 128.

⁴⁰ Terry 191.

Likewise, the notion of genius has, from its birth, been identified almost exclusively with poetry. It was not until the sixteenth century that genius was extended to the visual arts (specifically to Dürer)⁴¹ but the concept still largely remained confined to the world of poets. In the early eighteenth century there was still “an unquestioned assumption that genius is a term used to praise writers, especially poets, and above all those poets whose strength comes from nature rather than art or learning.”⁴² Shakespeare in particular was considered a poetic genius in England, specifically because his work was perceived to be free of the imitational practices that were so frowned upon at this time⁴³ (despite the fact that Shakespeare’s very talent lay in imitative practices, much like Handel’s). It is therefore important for modern scholars to keep in mind that discussions about musical plagiarism and musical genius are those in which appropriated literary terms are being applied to a different art form.

However, just like literature, music certainly was a part of the commodity culture as it entered increasingly into the realm of publication. Although composers often made their livelihoods through performance, the increase of published music from the late-seventeenth century on eventually allowed music to be considered in the realm of intellectual property, at which point plagiarism became as much an issue to composers as it was to writers. Before the mid-seventeenth century, the cost of printing and publishing music outweighed the potential monetary returns so much (as there was so little public interest) that very few English composers published their works. Byrd, Tallis, Morley, and Barley all held “music patents,” but as the only market for printed music was in psalm books, little came of their publishing efforts. However, by the end of the century

⁴¹ Kemp 32.

⁴² Bate 78.

⁴³ Bate 82.

with the rise of the bourgeoisie, there were more people with a surplus of time and money, and the market for published music became viable.⁴⁴

In 1720 after the Royal Academy of Music for Operas opened, the market for music greatly increased, especially with regard to Handel's works. The London Italian opera where Handel composed "created a musical public in England, and thereby encouraged industrial inventions and advances [in publishing] which, without this impulse, might have long been delayed."⁴⁵ It was in London that publishing efforts in the musical arena were really pioneered, as London publishers began to sell "sheet music for both voice and instruments, designed for amateurs to play at home, and editions of instrumental works for purchase mostly by music societies."⁴⁶

Publishers such as John Walsh began taking advantage of this increased market by publishing music without the authorization of the composer. Although the Act of Anne (1709-10), one of the first copyright acts in England, protected literary works from such exploitation, it was not interpreted to protect music, and so unauthorized musical publishing continued legally until 1777, when J.C. Bach forced the courts to extend Queen Anne's Act to cover music. While composers such as Handel were given a Royal Privilege of Copyright that was intended to provide the composer with "the exclusive publication of his own works for fourteen years.... [that would forbid] unauthorized persons not only to print, reprint, or abridge his works but 'to Import, Buy, Vend, Utter, or Distribute any Copies thereof Reprinted beyond the Seas,'" such rights were difficult

⁴⁴ Hunter 270-272.

⁴⁵ Chrysander 586.

⁴⁶ Weber 18.

to enforce.⁴⁷ Unauthorized versions of various composers' music appeared all over Europe and little could be done to protect an individual's ownership.

Because of this gross exploitation by various publishers, excessive unauthorized musical publishing began to be frowned upon in eighteenth-century England, just as the notion of intellectual property in the musical realm began to take root⁴⁸. While these notions of authorship and intellectual property had originally led only to the rise of the concept of plagiarism in literary publications, the increased market for published music ultimately led to the appropriation of the literary term "plagiarism," and its application, at least conceptually, to music.

The concept of the "sister arts" also supports the notion that plagiarism was relevant to music as well as literature. There was a strong sense in the eighteenth century that all art forms somehow paralleled each other, or were related to each other, and "examples of the analogies drawn between the arts could be multiplied almost indefinitely by bringing together the novel and the engraving, poetry and sculpture, play-acting and painting, music and gardening."⁴⁹ As parallels were constantly being drawn between all art forms, the common experience of unauthorized "stealing" in both the musical and literary realms allowed plagiarism to be seen as an issue for writers and composers alike.

One well-known scandal of musical plagiarism (the direct result of a printed music book) occurred in 1731, and clearly demonstrates that plagiarism was relevant to music and literature alike. Bononcini, a respected composer with whom Handel had worked at the Haymarket Theater, claimed to have composed a five-part madrigal, "In

⁴⁷ Dean 86.

⁴⁸ Hunter 272.

⁴⁹ Hagstrum 133.

una siepe umbrosa.” It was soon discovered in the Academy of Ancient Music that there was a publication of Lotti’s works in which this same madrigal appeared in identical form, and the Academy immediately set upon the task of resolving the apparent issue of ownership. Through undeniable evidence provided by Lotti, it was determined that the madrigal in question was definitely his, and that Bononcini had, for reasons unknown (certainly not for lack of compositional talent), plagiarized the entire work and had claimed it as his own.

While initially, Bononcini insisted that Lotti had stolen the work from one of Bononcini’s own compositions written thirty years previously, he remained mute on the subject once it became undeniable that Lotti composed the madrigal. According to John Hawkins (a well-known eighteenth-century music writer), this embarrassingly blatant theft tarnished Bononcini’s image forever, making his “reputation... sink in the world.”⁵⁰ Although such incidents were not unique to the eighteenth century, the rise of published material made it easier to plagiarize, while also providing the means for proving such cases. The increased ability to identify acts of stealing only served to make the public less and less comfortable with the deed, whether material was taken wholesale, as in this example, or partially, as in many imitative compositions. Although plagiarism began as a literary term, it clearly became just as applicable to musical compositions once music entered the realm of publication and the notion of intellectual property became solidified.

By the mid-eighteenth century, plagiarism was becoming an increasingly common term. One of the major indicators that plagiarism as a concept had arrived and taken root in England came, in the literary realm, when William Lauder accused Milton of plagiarism in his *Paradise Lost* in 1747. The truth of the matter was that Lauder himself

⁵⁰ “The Fall of Bononcini” 12-14.

had framed Milton for plagiarism by plundering from Milton's already published work, and attempting to present his plunder as the original source.⁵¹ While excessive imitation or wholesale stealing combined with the growing concept of originality had led to overzealous accusations, this was the culminating episode, and it sparked a huge amount of controversy and conversation.⁵² Not only was Milton initially believed to be a plagiarist, but the accusation of plagiarism itself had also involved plagiaristic acts in order to implicate an innocent man.

The severity of [English criticism] indicates an anxiety of originality becoming an obsession, with the concomitant fears that the sacred well of individual genius can be poisoned or simply drawn dry by intruders. Plagiarism is therefore a fear, a panic, a plague—and a lethal threat to an order of knowledge. And like other aspects of social abnormality, such as illness, madness, and death, it is imagined as a despotic signifier—contagious, sickening, unnatural, and terminal; to be guarded against only by the utmost vigilant surveillance.⁵³

It was through the uncovering of such musical and literary scandals that the meaning of imitation gradually shifted from “‘after the manner of,’ to ‘copy,’ and thence to ‘mimic,’ ‘counterfeit,’ and ‘ape’”⁵⁴ as plagiarism came to be seen as an “intensification of what is suspect about imitative writing in general.”⁵⁵ In the early eighteenth century, it was still permissible to borrow from and imitate the Ancients but less acceptable to borrow from the Moderns.⁵⁶ By the mid- to late-eighteenth century, however, almost all borrowing came to be seen as an unacceptable signifier of a plagiaristic act. This only served to reinforce the notion that original composition was the true indicator of genius, as those who relied upon the materials of others simply became plagiarists.

⁵¹ Groom 80-81.

⁵² Buelow “Originality, Genius, Plagiarism” 121.

⁵³ Groom 77.

⁵⁴ Groom 80.

⁵⁵ Terry 183.

⁵⁶ Terry 188.

Because Handel's compositional approach was deeply rooted in imitative practices, criticisms of his works are the ideal reference points from which to understand the progression of thought regarding imitation and plagiarism in eighteenth-century England. Handel's borrowing practices were first publicly revealed in 1722, by composer Johann Mattheson.⁵⁷ As the heyday of plagiaristic accusations was not yet fully underway, and negative ideas about imitation were only beginning to take root, this earliest reference to Handel's musical borrowing did not entirely cast it in a critical light, although it foreshadowed the severity of future criticisms. In *Critica Musica*, Mattheson cited Handel as borrowing an aria from one of Mattheson's own operas, and by revealing this discovery, he was able to publicly draw attention to the fact that he and Handel were close acquaintances; a rather self serving accusation. Yet Mattheson also made a point of discussing his opinions on the practice of musical borrowing, ultimately concluding that while it is an honor to be borrowed from, "All elaboration is only the interest; the invention, however, is to be compared to the capital."⁵⁸ Although this was written in 1722, it is very much evocative of the sentiment in Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition*, written over thirty years later. Although Young's work provides a convenient date at which to point for the climax of the imitation/originality argument, Mattheson's musings make quite clear that original compositions were becoming more valued than imitations long before that date.

Next in 1733, Abbé Prévost wrote of Handel's borrowings in a similar manner; saying that although it is an undeniable practice in Handel's works, it is an honor for the composers from whose works Handel borrowed. Yet Prévost does not attribute this

⁵⁷ Mattheson and Handel were both friends and rivals at various points in their relationship.

⁵⁸ Buelow "The Case" 63.

borrowing to an intentional compositional approach, rather saying that “The crime would be venial, were it even certain; and besides...it is extremely difficult for there not to be occasionally coincidences with other composers’ works.”⁵⁹ The fact that Prévost believed Handel’s borrowings to be accidental “coincidences,” and labeled them “crimes” while supposedly attempting to make a case for their legitimacy indicates a level of discomfort with the practice. Just as in Mattheson’s criticism, there is a distinct sense that borrowing was becoming an increasingly uncomfortable topic that had to be justified in some way as an unintentional accident, rather than an intentionally practiced art of imitation or borrowing.

Again in 1743, Handel’s practices were revealed, this time by one of his own librettists, Charles Jennens, who discussed in a letter how he had caught Handel “stealing” from printed collections of music, specifically referencing Scarlatti and Vinci as composers whose collections Handel had plundered.⁶⁰ According to Chrysander, Handel’s “practice of employing as models and material existing pieces of his own and others, was in him not an affair of accident, but of principle, and pervades all his writings.”⁶¹ In order to work from pre-existing material, Handel kept manuscripts in which he transcribed fragments or whole works he planned to use, essentially “laying up stores for future use, like a squirrel in the nutting season.”⁶² Although decades earlier the practice of copying out other composers’ works would hardly have been considered

⁵⁹ Buelow “The Case” 64. Prévost was a French journalist and writer who spent many years in England, and whose work *L’histoire du Chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* (1731) was the basis of many stage productions, including Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut*. This particular quotation first appeared in a publication in Paris in Prévost’s journal *Le pour et contre: Ouvrage Périodique d’un gout nouveau*.

⁶⁰ Buelow “The Case” 64. Jennens and Handel had successfully collaborated for many years before this date, but in 1743, Jennens became resentful towards Handel for various reasons regarding *Messiah*. This particular criticism may have surfaced because of Jennens’ frustration with Handel.

⁶¹ Dean 53.

⁶² Dean 53.

“stealing,” the Baroque approach to composition was clearly beginning to erode even by the 1740’s. Such negative connotations as “stealing” were already being attached to a once innocuous, and even encouraged practice, indicating a serious shift in the general public’s perception of appropriate compositional approaches. Importantly, this particular example references the presence of printed music, which at once made it possible for Handel to borrow so extensively, while simultaneously allowing for the exposure and subsequent criticism of this borrowing. Yet the fact that Handel didn’t “advertise or conceal” his borrowings, and consciously took material from published works demonstrates a level of transparency that only a well-intentioned composer would allow.⁶³

In the 1773 publication *Über die musikalische Composition*, J.A. Scheibe (a German composer) similarly identified Handel’s borrowing practices, specifically in relation to his borrowing from Reinhard Keiser. Yet unlike the previous criticisms, Scheibe seemed to think that Handel had a true ability to turn these borrowed fragments into his own “original thoughts.”⁶⁴ While most of the publications addressing Handel’s borrowing practices during his lifetime contain ambiguous sentiments at the very least, Scheibe’s association of Handel’s practice with originality indicates that there was not a unanimously formed public opinion at this time regarding musical borrowing. Clearly some critics still gave credence to the notion that originality could be achieved through transformative imitation, a notion that Handel himself obviously believed.

⁶³ Dean 51.

⁶⁴ Buelow “The Case” 64.

Yet largely by the mid-eighteenth century, when public opinion was moving closer and closer to the nearly unanimous favoring of originality over imitation, criticism of Handel's compositional practices became more serious and more thorough.

While the urge to discover the sources of [Handel's] borrowings accumulated, critical opinions about Handel soon organized into two sharply divided camps. The one, whose members revered Handel as an English national treasure, found themselves defending Handel against a second camp whose members grew ever more vigorous and louder in their accusations that Handel was a plagiarizer.⁶⁵

In 1755, upon hearing a composition of Handel's that supposedly had its origins in a Scarlatti composition, William Mason compared Handel to Lauder,⁶⁶ hardly a favorable analogy, considering Lauder's much criticized role in the *Paradise Lost* scandal. If Handel's artful transformation of another's musical ideas was being compared to the premeditated and selfish framing of another man's reputation through overt plagiarism, it is clear that the boundaries between the terms "imitation" and "plagiarism" were becoming increasingly blurred. A 1760 manuscript by Francesco Maria Veracini (although unpublished) likewise was rife with the "condemnation of borrowing practices" of multiple composers including Handel.⁶⁷ Even John Hawkins revealed, in George Buelow's words, a "growing unease at the spreading awareness of Handel's practice of borrowing."⁶⁸

Later in the eighteenth century (after Handel's death) even more critical discussion appeared, and in a 1785 publication by Charles Burney, it was revealed for the

⁶⁵ Buelow "The Case" 72.

⁶⁶ Dean 52.

⁶⁷ Veracini was an Italian composer and instrumentalist who was active in London as a composer and a performer at various times throughout his career. The manuscript, *Il trionfo della pratica musicale*, in which Veracini criticized Handel's borrowings also contained criticism of the borrowing practices of Geminiani and other Italian composers.

⁶⁸ Buelow "The Case" 64. Hawkins was one of two well-known music writers in eighteenth-century England, who is best known for *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (1776), in which he lightly touched upon Handel's borrowing.

first time that Handel's music had come under fire for lacking originality. In an attempt to respond to those who claimed that "Handel was not the original and immediate inventor of several species of Music, for which his name has been celebrated," Burney expressed the belief that "it is impossible for any composer to invent a genus of composition that is wholly and rigorously new, any more than for a poet to form a language, idiom, and phraseology, for himself."⁶⁹ Although Burney obviously favored Handel, his need to publicly justify Handel's practices reinforces the notion that public accusations were becoming more and more numerous.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, criticism of Handel's borrowing took on a seriously ominous and accusatory tone, as the term "plagiarism" was finally applied to Handel's music without any reservations. The sentiment of the century is epitomized by Irish musician F.W. Horncastle's 1822 essay on plagiarism, published in *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review of Scotland*:

...may the plagiarism I am about to notice be called musical felonies when whole passages, subjects of fugues, and other equally important parts of a composition are pilfered by men whom perhaps, from their previous good character, we may be inclined to recommend to mercy; yet, as a warning to others, they must certainly be brought up to the Harmonic Old Bailey, where they are to receive the reward of their crimes by the verdict of a jury of critics. The petty larcenies are those stolen passages which, from their shortness or want of interest, or being clothed in varied harmony by their adaptor, call for a much less rigorous punishment...

Mr. George Frederick Handel!! Yes, ye votaries and admirers of this celebrated musician, G.F. Handel is certainly about to undergo his trial; attend therefore to the catalogue of his crimes.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Buelow "The Case" 65. Burney is the second of the two well-known music writers in eighteenth-century England, and is best known for his *History of Music* (1776-89) (in which he mentioned Handel's borrowing) and for his documentation of the Handel Commemoration. This particular reference is from his essay "Character of Handel as a Composer," appearing in *An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster Abbey*.

⁷⁰ Buelow "The Case" 67.

Horncastle then provided a list of Handel's borrowing, drawn largely from Burney's *History of Music*. The exceedingly moralistic and severe tone of this accusation can be found again and again in nineteenth-century writings on Handel's borrowing. There was little awareness of the spirit of transformative imitation with which Handel's compositions were created,⁷¹ as the morally and artistically offensive notion of plagiarism blinded critics to the true nature of Handel's genius.

A near obsession with Handel's borrowing practices emerged around this time, and in 1831, William Crotch (a music professor at Oxford) became the first person to systematically discover and reveal the presence of borrowed material in Handel's compositions, ultimately compiling a list of thirty-five composers from whom Handel borrowed (although this number is now considered to be exaggerated). Although Crotch did not use these discoveries to brand Handel as a plagiarist (on the contrary, he was one of the few critics who considered Handel "the greatest of all composers"),⁷² the exposure that Handel's borrowing received through this publication only acted as fodder to fuel the sweeping plagiarism mania of the nineteenth century. By 1880, this criticism progressed so far as to have even infiltrated Handel's entry in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in which it was documented that "the wholesale plagiarism carried on by him is perhaps unprecedented in the history of music."⁷³ Although many critics were unsure as to whether Handel's unfavorable practices should jeopardize their enjoyment of his music, the "Victorian moralist"⁷⁴ viewpoint was unfaltering in its certainty that Handel's plagiaristic tendencies were unethical.

⁷¹ Buelow "The Case" 67.

⁷² Buelow "The Case" 65-66.

⁷³ Buelow "The Case" 73.

⁷⁴ Buelow "The Case" 73-75.

The twentieth century likewise saw the continuation of this obsession with Handel's music and its construction, with frequent articles in the *Monthly Musical Record* and *The Musical Times* in which Handel's "plagiarisms" were discussed, as well as with the publication of whole books devoted to the topic. The 1910 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* contained an even more elaborate entry on Handel's plagiarism than had been seen in the 1880 version, and it was not until the mid-twentieth century that any sympathetic school of thought was formed with regards to Handel's compositional practices.⁷⁵ Although today it is largely discussed and accepted that Handel's borrowing constituted an ingenious compositional approach, one can still find surprisingly archaic discussions of the reasons for Handel's borrowings in relatively current scholarly literature. As recently as 1987, one scholar proposed that the "obvious answer" to why Handel borrowed was because "he had a basic lack of facility in inventing original ideas."⁷⁶ While most modern scholars continue to address Handel's borrowing only in order to deconstruct past criticisms, or to gain an understanding of his compositional genius, discomfort with the topic still exists, and is manifested in such odd justifications of Handel's borrowing practices.

Despite such examples of continued criticism, most modern scholars seek to shed the negative light that has so long been cast on Handel and his compositions by truly attempting to understand the nature of Handel's genius as a transformative imitator. George Buelow, a contemporary Handel scholar, calls for an extensive scholarly study of the nature of Handel's imitative practices, saying that "No Handel scholar interested in understanding Handel's music from the broadest and deepest viewpoints can be satisfied

⁷⁵ Buelow "The Case" 75-76.

⁷⁶ Roberts 88.

with the piecemeal way we have been trying to study the question.” Buelow, who laments the mistreatment and misunderstanding of Handel’s compositional genius over the last three centuries encourages future scholars to delve into Handel’s music and to judge whatever they might find “based on a thorough and detailed examination of the evidence, motivated not by moral prejudices but by the joy of discovering Handel’s genius at work.”⁷⁷

Although it took a great deal of time for this approach to develop, a field of study revolving solely around “musical borrowing” is just now emerging, in which it is recognized that “the practice of basing new works on existing music has its own traditions and its own history” and so deserves to be studied as such.⁷⁸ According to J.

Peter Burkholder:

The relative lack of discussion until recently about musical borrowing across the normal divisions of a period and composer results from and contributes to a failure to see it as a field of study...No book or article has yet laid a firm foundation for studying borrowing across eras and traditions.⁷⁹

Since the time of Burkholder’s article (1994) he has set out to accomplish just such a goal, and has established an online bibliography of musical borrowing that crosses musical genres and time periods, as well as having developed a “typology of musical borrowing,” and a “chronology of uses of existing music.”⁸⁰ This emerging field of study is at last creating a context in which to understand and appreciate musical borrowing on its own terms, the development of which would have saved Handel and his music a great deal of strife had it been recognized as a viable field of study much earlier in history.

⁷⁷ Buelow “The Case” 80.

⁷⁸ Burkholder 861.

⁷⁹ Burkholder 861.

⁸⁰ Burkholder 867-870.

As it was, Handel was caught at the crux of change in eighteenth-century England, and as the balances tipped in favor of compositional originality, his reliance on transformative imitation as a compositional approach became detrimental to his musical reputation. Although other composers likewise practiced this method of composition, none had built their entire approach upon this principle as successfully as Handel had, and so none exposed themselves so greatly to cries of plagiarism. Because the discomfort with imitation had slowly begun to develop long before Handel began to compose, the climax of this frustration broke just as Handel came into his own as a Baroque composer, and continued long after his death.

As will soon be discussed, Handel's unprecedented popularity as a symbol of English national identity, and the controversial nature of his position as such led to his extreme visibility, which in turn made him into a particularly exposed target of criticism. Although the true peak of plagiarism mania did not come until after Handel's death, his incredibly long-lasting impact on music in England allowed for his music to be constantly scrutinized and criticized even after he had passed away, to the extent that only today are scholars beginning to untangle and decipher this body of criticism.

Handel's Arrival in England and Three Important Compositions

While shifting attitudes towards imitation and originality played a large role in the perception of Handel's musical practices both during and after his lifetime, Handel's complex role in English society was also a contributing factor. It is the intersection of these two factors that provides an answer to the question of why Handel was the only composer in England to be subject to such serious charges of plagiarism, and why such criticisms have been so abundant and long lasting. As Chapter 2 dealt with the first of these two circumstances, the subsequent Chapters will begin to examine the second circumstance, which is that of English national identity, and Handel's role within this national construct.

As Handel moved from being a foreign composer of Italian operas in London to being a naturalized citizen composing native musical products, he achieved an unparalleled level of popularity and importance in England. Yet while a great many people felt that Handel's English music embodied national sentiment, others felt a strong resistance to Handel's role as a representative of their country because of his status as a foreigner and his perceived status as a plagiarizer. In order to examine Handel's complicated situation in relation to English national identity, it is best begin with a discussion of the state of music in England in the early eighteenth century, and the ways in which Handel played a role in this area. Handel's early years in England provided the foundation upon which he was able to ultimately build a legacy as a composer of unmatched popularity and of national importance.

Just prior to Handel's arrival in England, the decline of the court had led to the emergence of London as the new center of fashion, and the managed concert became a staple of musical life in London for wealthy patrons.⁸¹ The French musical aesthetic had been dominant in England during the Restoration due to Charles II's penchant for such music, but by the turn of the century the country had begun to develop a taste for Italian music, specifically, Italian opera.⁸² As early as 1704, English composers such as Daniel Purcell and Thomas Clayton were setting English translations of Italian operas to music, and by 1705, Italian singers had already begun to trickle into London. By 1710, enough Italian singers had arrived and enough interest had been mustered (especially due to the arrival of Nicolini, the famous castrato) for a full-fledged Italian opera to be performed at the Haymarket Theatre, which thereafter arose as the center of Italian opera in London. The additional arrival by 1710 of competent Italian scene designers, and talented instrumentalists such as Johann Christoph Pepusch, Johann Ernst Galliard, Jean Christian Kytch, and Nicola Haym, left the Italian opera in London wanting only for a composer capable of commanding such forces.⁸³

Although English composers had attempted to introduce Italian opera to the London theatre, these first attempts at staged dramas were somewhat less than successful. With little depth of knowledge about the Italian aesthetic and language, the results were often hardly recognizable as "Italian" opera. According to Handel's contemporary Colley Cibber:

The Italian Opera had long been stealing into England; but in as rude a disguise, and unlike itself, as possible, in a lame, hobbling translation, into our own language, with false quantities, or metre out of measure, to its original notes, sung

⁸¹ Weber 7-9.

⁸² Burney 651.

⁸³ Burrows 61-65.

by our own unskillful voices, with graces misapplied to almost every sentiment, and with action lifeless and unmeaning through every character.⁸⁴

Often, these operas would simply be “pasticcio works converted locally from pre-existing Italian scores,”⁸⁵ yet as there was no established precedent for operatic excellence, these “rudely disguised” Italian operas were met with some success. For example, Thomas Clayton’s *Arsinoe Queen of Cyprus* (1705), considered by Charles Burney to be the “first musical drama that was wholly performed after the Italian manner” in England, translated into English from Italian, and set to music by Clayton, was performed twenty-four times in its first year, and eleven in its second; a substantially large number of performances considering the quality of the music.⁸⁶ According to Burney, Clayton’s music drew heavily on pilfered passages drawn from a collection of popular Italian opera airs, which were poorly adapted to English words. Out of respect for Italian composers, Burney says:

...it may be allowed to be [Clayton’s] own, as nothing so mean in melody and incorrect in counterpoint was likely to have been produced by any of the reigning composers of that time. For not only the common rules of musical composition are violated in every song, but the prosody and accents of our language. The translation is wretched; but it is rendered much more absurd by the manner in which it is set to Music. Indeed, the English must have hungered and thirsted extremely after dramatic Music at this time, to be attracted and amused by such trash.⁸⁷

Furthermore, the mixture of Italian and English singers led to a “confusion of tongues” (as the operas were sung partially in both languages), the acceptance of which further demonstrates the depth of the musical cravings of English patrons at this time. Italian opera was an “exotic species of music” that had infected wealthy London patrons with

⁸⁴ Burney 654. Cibber was very active in the theatre. This excerpt is taken from Cibber’s most famous work, *An Apology for the Life Of Mr. Colley Cibber* (1740.)

⁸⁵ Burrows 65.

⁸⁶ Burney 654-656.

⁸⁷ Burney 656.

excitement, and no amount of mediocrity or illogicality could derail the growth, albeit stunted, of Italian opera in London.⁸⁸

However, it is important to note that not all the English so heartily welcomed the advent of Italian opera. Because a majority of listeners favored an intelligible plot line more than they favored the musical aesthetics of opera, the English semi-opera better suited their sensibilities as it consisted of separate scenes and songs through which the plot could naturally unfold. As Italian opera often defies the natural progression of emotions and events, many felt an “innate English opposition to opera,”⁸⁹ supplemented by a “partiality... for English Music and English singing.”⁹⁰ Until his death in 1695, Henry Purcell was able to reconcile this desire for English music with the seemingly conflicting desire for Italian opera by creating the beginnings of what could be considered the new genre of English opera:

Between 1670 and 1695 Henry Purcell had faced the problem of lyrical drama and found a solution of its difficulties perhaps more satisfactory and artistic than any which has been offered by his contemporaries or predecessors. In addition, he had approached his task from a purely English point of view, and had attained to a purely English mode of expression which, in melodic charm, in vivacity of word-painting, and in the general firm handling of situation, was more mature and masterly than any other then existing in Europe.⁹¹

Yet the full-fledged arrival of Italian opera in England came only after Purcell’s death. What steps had been made towards the development of English opera during Purcell’s lifetime had by this time been left to languish by Purcell’s successors. Despite the desire for the continued development of English opera, English composers simply “fail[ed] to

⁸⁸ Burney 657-663.

⁸⁹ Lang 90-94.

⁹⁰ Burney 658.

⁹¹ Forsyth 95.

build on Purcell's foundation,"⁹² leaving a great void in the area of national composition. While the public's desires had not changed at the time of Italian opera's arrival in England, the fulfillment of these desires had indeed changed, leaving the English starved for quality music and for the expression of English sensibilities in this music. The presence of such a musical void in the wake of Purcell's death likely made it easier for the Italian opera to infiltrate London, and to capture the attention of the public.

While the aristocracy was attracted to the fashionable Italian opera and had both the power and financial means to support such a venture in England, there remained a large number of people who regarded the Italian opera as an art form that fundamentally opposed English aesthetics and desires, and who instead wanted to see the development of the English opera. Although this group was a majority in England, it lacked the power and sway held by the minority of Italian opera supporters, and was "only united by this desire [to hear English music] and by their common ignorance of the steps necessary to attain their object."⁹³ As contemporary composers were unable to pick up where Purcell had left off, this group of English opera hopefuls was left with no composer to champion their cause. Thus, just before Handel arrived in England, two simultaneous but opposed desires gripped the English public: the aristocracy were thirsting for a competent composer of Italian opera, while the rest of the "theatre-going public" craved a composer who could develop a form of English national opera.⁹⁴

In the fall of 1710, Handel arrived in England⁹⁵ as a German by birth, and an Italian by musical reputation. The state of Italian opera in England at the time of Handel's

⁹² Forsyth 6.

⁹³ Forsyth 97.

⁹⁴ Forsyth 97-98.

⁹⁵ Burrows 65.

arrival had improved slightly, as operas were no longer being sung half in English, and half in Italian (due to the arrival of Italian singers). However, the music itself was still seriously lacking, and the same operas that had been premiered years before, such as *Camilla*, and *Pyrrhus and Demetrius*, continued to be performed over and over again, with nothing new in sight. English patrons were desperate for a real Italian opera. Likewise, Handel was in need of an outlet for his creative abilities, and was drawn to London specifically by the appeal of the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket, where Italian opera had newly been established, if somewhat shakily.⁹⁶

Handel's arrival in England came just after he had completed a musically enlightening stay in Italy. He had already achieved a reputation for his compositions in the Italian operatic style, an achievement that was indeed conferred upon him by the very creators of this style, and "the fame of [his] abilities had already penetrated into [England]."⁹⁷ Although John Mainwaring's account is influenced by his great respect for and desire to promote Handel, it nonetheless demonstrates the reception that Handel's *Agrippina* (only his second opera) was given in Italy:

...in three weeks he finished *Agrippina*, which was performed twenty-seven nights successively; and in a theatre which had been shut up for a long time, notwithstanding there were two other opera-houses open at the same time; at one of which *Gasparini* presided, as *Lotti* did at the other. The audience was so enchanted with this performance, that a stranger who should have seen the manner in which they were affected, would have imagined they had all been distracted.

The theatre, at almost every pause, resounded with shouts and acclamations of *viva il caro Sassone!* and other expressions of approbation too extravagant to be mentioned. They were thunderstruck with the grandeur and sublimity of his style: for never had they known till then all the powers of harmony and modulation so closely arrayed, and so forcibly combined.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Burrows 61.

⁹⁷ Burney 672.

⁹⁸ Burrows 36. Mainwaring was Handel's earliest biographer, publishing *Memoirs of the Life of the Late George Frederic Handel, To which is added, A Catalogue of his Works, and Observations upon them* in

Because Handel's reputation preceded his arrival in England, the director of the Haymarket Theater (Aaron Hill) requested that he compose for them a real Italian opera nearly as soon as he had arrived. Rising to this task in an exceptionally short amount of time, Handel produced his first London opera, *Rinaldo*, which was seen on stage for the first time on February 24th, 1711.⁹⁹

Although *Rinaldo* was not necessarily Handel's greatest compositional achievement, it far surpassed the meek attempts that had previously been made at Italian opera in England, and was, in fact, the "first original work to be written for, and performed by, the Haymarket company."¹⁰⁰ Charles Burney gushed that "*Cara sposa* [an aria in *Rinaldo*] is one of the best airs in that style that was ever composed by himself or any other master; and by many degrees the most pathetic song, and with the richest accompaniment, which had then been heard in England."¹⁰¹ Aaron Hill himself said in regards to *Rinaldo* that "Mr. Hendel, whom the World so justly celebrates, has made the Musick speak so finely for itself, that I am purposefully silent on that Subject."¹⁰² *Rinaldo* enjoyed fifteen performances between the short period of February 24th and June 2nd, 1711, and no sooner than the season ended had the arias from this opera been printed and circulated by publishers Walsh and Hare.¹⁰³ At a time when it was most desired, Handel delivered Italian opera to England. It seems particularly serendipitous that a composer as passionately devoted to Italian opera as Handel fell into a thriving urban

1760. The great personal detail that Mainwaring relays indicates that he spoke directly with Handel before he died.

⁹⁹ Burney 673.

¹⁰⁰ Burrows 65.

¹⁰¹ Burney 674.

¹⁰² Burrows 67.

¹⁰³ Burrows 67.

center where the only missing element in the newest cultural trend was a capable composer.

Not only did *Rinaldo* reward its English audience with its superior expression of the Italian operatic style, but it also satisfied those looking for a certain amount of English flavor. Evidence that English elements infiltrated *Rinaldo* are numerous. First, “the dramatic structure of *Rinaldo* relies heavily on semi-operatic models... in that all the spectacular scenes grow from and contribute to the drama.”¹⁰⁴ The episodic nature of the opera and the “emphasis on the visual-scenic element” are likewise identified as paying homage to the English masque and semi-opera traditions.¹⁰⁵ *Rinaldo*’s plot, characterization, scenic elements, “political undercurrent” and general “magical effect” are further believed to be derivative of the semi-opera, specifically the popular English semi-opera composed in 1706 called *The British Enchanters*.

In terms of characterization, Rinaldo’s personification of Orpheus is pointed to as a distinctly English element in the opera. Although characters in Handel’s operas are not uncommonly compared to Orpheus, this particular characterization is considered to be a “peculiarly English Orpheus—an imperfect singer who contrasts starkly with the hero of early Italian opera.”¹⁰⁶ Politically, there are hints of contemporary English politics embedded in *Rinaldo*’s libretto, a continuation of a long tradition of “English drama... react[ing] quickly to... political upheaval.”¹⁰⁷ Specifically the adaptation of the *La Gerusalemme liberata* story appears to be a deliberate commentary on the situation involving James Francis Edward Stuart’s attempts to remove Queen Anne in order to

¹⁰⁴ Price 125.

¹⁰⁵ Burrows 83.

¹⁰⁶ Price 123-128.

¹⁰⁷ Price 132.

protect England from the “Protestant succession.” Finally, the ambiguity of this political reading (one that arises from an inexact translation of events and characters to the contemporary reference) is another supposedly distinctive English characteristic of *Rinaldo*, unlike the “forthright, unequivocal politics of most of Handel’s later operas.”¹⁰⁸ It is also apparent that there are musical and literary parallels between *Rinaldo* and both Purcell’s *King Arthur* and *Amphitryon* indicating a less blatant, but still present English influence.¹⁰⁹

Although neither Handel, nor his librettist Giacomo Rossi would have had a thorough understanding of what “distinctively English theatrical traditions” might be, Aaron Hill co-wrote the libretto with Rossi, thereby providing such English influences as a strong foundation in the semi-opera tradition (something that would undoubtedly appeal to Handel’s audience). It is speculated that Hill composed the libretto in English and incorporated many traditionally English plot schemes, character qualities and other elements, which were then translated into Italian by Rossi so that they would fit into the *opera seria* style. The end result contained enough noticeably English influence to make one scholar wonder if Hill’s involvement was part of his effort to create a “uniquely English style of all-sung opera” using Handel as his means to achieve this end.¹¹⁰ Despite the fact that the final libretto was entirely Italian, Hill’s comment in his dedication of *Rinaldo* to Queen Anne that “This opera is a native of your majesty’s dominions”¹¹¹ indicates that Hill perceived the end product to be influenced as much by English traditions as it was by Italian opera. Essentially “Hill tried... to reforge Italian opera in

¹⁰⁸ Price 130-131.

¹⁰⁹ Price 125.

¹¹⁰ Price 120-133.

¹¹¹ Price 120.

the image of his native music drama, to provide Handel with a ready-made tradition.”¹¹² This collaboration allowed for Handel’s English audience, who were both starved for a real Italian opera, and for a musical style that was distinctly English to find in *Rinaldo* a happy meeting of both desires.

Although Handel had an obligation to return to the Hanoverian court soon after he finished *Rinaldo*, he quickly came again to England in 1712, and immediately took to ingratiating himself with the Queen and with England’s nobility. Handel’s earlier success with the opera had shown him that “England offered a wide scope for his abilities,” and he was clearly eager to explore the possibilities that this country held for him. His first step in this endeavor, as suggested by his patron Lord Burlington, was to revive the birthday ode tradition for the occasion of Queen Anne’s birthday on February 6, 1713.¹¹³

As with his success at the Haymarket Theatre, Handel’s entry into the world of court composition would not have been possible were it not for a particularly favorable set of circumstances. Under normal conditions, a foreign composer would never have been chosen to create music for a court occasion, particularly not a foreign composer so recently arrived. However, Queen Anne’s disinterest in music had led to a gradual decay of certain English musical traditions over the years, so that when Handel arrived back in England, the birthday ode tradition had all but died.¹¹⁴ With Lord Burlington’s encouragement, Handel seized upon this neglected tradition as a means of making himself known to an important English figure.

As this was Handel’s first real attempt at composing in the English style, his Italian influences were still strong, although a clear effort to adopt (even if only

¹¹² Price 133.

¹¹³ Lincoln 191-192.

¹¹⁴ Lincoln 192.

superficially) rhythmic, structural and other elements of the English ode style can be seen in Queen Anne's *Birthday Ode*. In order to achieve a sense of unity throughout the ode in the typical English style, Handel inserted choruses after the opening arioso and after each of the following two arias and two duets, (also using dance rhythms in these choruses, typical of choruses in English odes). While these choruses often seem to function as *da capo* sections for the arias that they follow (thus serving Handel's Italian sensibilities) they are at least outward signifiers of an English aesthetic. Furthermore, Handel paid homage to one of the most distinctively English elements of the ode by incorporating a very "angular" ground bass into one of the ode's duets. Although Handel neglected to follow the English practice of making this ground bass harmonically unusual (instead using "obvious harmonic sequences") he achieved the English aesthetic of rapidity and angularity through the use of scales and large leaps. Whether or not the resulting ode sounded at all English, Handel had "paid his proper tribute to the form and no doubt delighted his audience on their own grounds."¹¹⁵ Just as with *Rinaldo*, the *Birthday Ode* demonstrated Handel's willingness to meet his English audience half way, at once providing them with a high quality composition in the fashionable Italian style that he knew well, while making a distinct effort to present this music through an English lens.

Although Queen Anne was no great supporter of the arts (and would likely not have recognized Handel's homage to the English style), Handel's presentation of the *Birthday Ode* allowed him to gain entrée to the Court, an affiliation that later opened the doors to his musical participation in the celebration of important events in England's history. While Queen Anne may only have recognized Handel because it would have "pleased [her] to have the Kapellmeister from the detested court of Hanover paying

¹¹⁵ Lincoln 195-202.

tribute to her,” it nonetheless served Handel well to be in her good graces.¹¹⁶ Perhaps even more important than the recognition that Handel gained is the implications that this composition had for Handel’s future in England. The text of the *Birthday Ode* is “a celebration of Queen Anne’s role as peacemaker,” indicating that Handel had already decided (as early as 1713) that “wholehearted commitment [to the British political and court establishment] was in order, for he composed works that aligned him completely with the British foreign policy of peace with France.”¹¹⁷ Clearly Handel saw a future for himself in England and was making every effort to gain acceptance into English society. While subsequent compositions further demonstrated this commitment, Handel’s eventual naturalization in 1727 would permanently solidify his wholehearted dedication and loyalty to England.

Soon after Queen Anne’s birthday, and at a time that was crucial to Handel’s success in England, the treaties of Utrecht were signed, successfully ending the War of Spanish Succession with a victory for England and her allies in 1713. As Germany had been an ally to England in this war, Handel found himself in the unique position of representing both the English and the German, and was therefore the perfect candidate to create a victory composition.¹¹⁸ Indeed, Queen Anne seems to have specifically requested that Handel compose the music for the celebration,¹¹⁹ likely because of her exposure to Handel through the *Birthday Ode* composition. Once again Handel serendipitously found himself in the ideal circumstance for ingratiating himself to the English public and court early on in his career in England. He had already begun to satisfy the craving for Italian

¹¹⁶ Lincoln 192-202.

¹¹⁷ Burrows 71.

¹¹⁸ Mainwaring 87.

¹¹⁹ Burrows 70.

opera, and was well on his way to being the established Italian opera composer in London. He had recently made himself known to the Queen of England, and now he had the chance to present himself to the larger public with a state composition, his Utrecht *Te Deum and Jubilate*, that was to celebrate a victorious moment in English history. There could not have been a more opportune moment to “have a special impact on the English,”¹²⁰ and to sow the seeds that would later allow for Handel to emerge as a figure of English national identity.

As with *Rinaldo* and Queen Anne’s *Birthday Ode*, Handel took care to incorporate recognizably English elements into his Utrecht *Te Deum and Jubilate*. Significantly, Handel modeled this composition after Henry Purcell’s composition of the same name: “Handel had turned to Purcell not simply to study English declamation, but to learn techniques for forging more forceful dramatic expression in his music, and to find a nearer approach to the central current of his adopted country’s native traditions of fine music and drama.”¹²¹ William Croft’s *Thanksgiving Anthem* was also employed by Handel as a model of the English anthem style, and elements of both Purcell’s and Croft’s works are evident in Handel’s *Te Deum and Jubilate*. Typical of English anthems, the music of the *Te Deum and Jubilate* alternated between chorus and verse, and had shorter sections that, after the style of Purcell, blended into each other. Also common to the English anthem was Handel’s “juxtaposition of homophonic and contrapuntal styles within a short section,” and his use of the lower register voices for solos.¹²² These efforts on Handel’s behalf at appealing to English aesthetic sensibilities with his Utrecht *Te Deum* paid off, and served to solidify his good standing with the English nobility, an

¹²⁰ Lincoln 193.

¹²¹ Zimmerman 57.

¹²² Lincoln 203-206.

influential and crucial group to win over. While Queen Anne did not attend the celebration, Handel's newly acquired "noble supporters," who found his composition to be particularly worthy, decided to petition Queen Anne to fairly compensate Handel for his work, securing £200 per annum from the Queen. With this act of solidarity, "Handel had thus established himself officially with the English nobility, a task difficult enough to discourage an Englishman and almost an insurmountable one for a German."¹²³

In the course of less than three years, Handel had achieved a status among English opera patrons, nobility and royalty that few domestic, not to mention foreign composers could even have hoped to achieve. Although Purcell's death had left a creative void in England for over a decade that desperately needed to be filled, the English were not about to promptly bestow the title of "Orpheus Britannicus" onto the next half-decent composer who stormed the stage:

According to Johann Cousser, who spent three miserable years in London between 1704 and 1707 trying unsuccessfully to peddle his wares, foreigners had to pay obeisance to the national institution to get ahead: 'Praise the late Purcell to the skies and say there has never been another like him.'¹²⁴

While Handel, too, had realized the importance of paying homage to the great English composers, his approach was more encompassing, as he attempted to fuse his own personal style with the distinctly English elements that he discovered through the study of past English compositions. In *Rinaldo*, Queen Anne's *Birthday Ode*, and the Utrecht *Te Deum and Jubilate*, Handel fit himself into an already established English dramatic and stylistic framework, while also retaining his own individual style of composition. Handel had clearly realized what approach he must take in order to make a serious attempt at becoming an English composer:

¹²³ Lincoln 193.

¹²⁴ Price 123.

First he had to find out what ceremonies and celebrations were particularly dear to the English. He must then discover what was especially English in the tradition of this music, and last (and here is where the adaptability of a genius less than Handel's might have faltered) he must write music in this tradition that presented a happy balance with his own talents. He must outstrip native predecessors on their own terms and not offend by breaking with a tradition foreign to him. The solution of this problem alone meant the difference between being accepted as a national composer in a foreign nation and being merely another name on a long list of migrant musicians in London.¹²⁵

Not only did Handel carefully and effectively craft his music as a palatable mix between the fashionable European and the familiar English styles, but he also presented it to the right people at the right time with an early commitment that implied a long-term allegiance to England. Although circumstances undoubtedly worked in Handel's favor, it is unlikely that any other composer could have taken advantage of these circumstances so effectively. Handel arrived in England at a time of great creative deficit with the necessary skills to fill such a void, and immediately did so in every realm possible: the sacred (with his Utrecht *Te Deum*), the secular (with his Italian operas, notably *Rinaldo*), and the courtly (with his *Birthday Ode* for Queen Anne). With this strong entrance onto the musical scene in England, Handel undoubtedly sowed the seeds of his future success that would ultimately lead to his "displace[ment][of] Purcell from his august patriotic role" and his acquisition of the title of "our English Orpheus."¹²⁶ Yet this early success also sowed the seeds of the extreme visibility that Handel's works would encounter both during and after his lifetime. Had he not established himself so successfully in his early years in England, Handel might never have achieved such an important status, and his borrowing practices would have passed into obscurity along with those of countless other composers.

¹²⁵ Lincoln 191-2.

¹²⁶ Weber 101.

From Italian Opera to English Oratorio: Bypassing the English Opera

Despite the obvious English desire for a new and distinctly English musical tradition, and despite Handel's already demonstrated potential to deliver such a product, Handel's first love was Italian opera, and this venture occupied the greater part of his creative efforts for nearly thirty years in England. Attempts by other composers at creating English operas continually failed to establish a standard new genre, and so the English public was forced to wait for Handel's delayed efforts in this direction. Although Handel had many successful forays into the realm of English composition throughout these years, it was not until the 1740's that he abandoned the Italian opera completely and turned wholeheartedly towards the development of the English oratorio, a genre that fulfilled the longstanding desire for a unique English musical tradition. It was this eventual arrival at the English oratorio that projected Handel into the seat of national popularity and allowed his music to be seen as an embodiment of English national sentiment. Simultaneously, however, Handel was exposed more than any other composer to cries of plagiarism. Had Handel continued to compose Italian operas throughout his lifetime in England, he never would have achieved such widespread and long-lasting appeal, and his borrowing practices would never have become associated with an English style of music.

Although there was an adequate interest in Italian opera in eighteenth-century England, it was a volatile and unpredictable affair that was rivaled by an opposing interest in English opera. There was often just barely enough funding from wealthy patrons and royalty to support an entire season; rivalries between singers, composers, and

opera companies divided audience members, and various other political and social factions affected patronage.¹²⁷ While there generally was enough interest to sustain an entire season, the Italian opera seemed doomed to fail in a country that so favored musical works in its own language and style. Although the aristocracy were willing and ready to “pick up the exotic, Italian Opera, put it in their hot-houses, and water its roots with gold, it had no better chance of flourishing in the ground outside than a pepper-tree has in Nova Zembla.”¹²⁸ Italian opera was simply too far removed from the aesthetics and sensibilities that had historically dominated English music to gain universal support.

[The Italian opera had been] invented more than one hundred years earlier, and developed during that time to express ideals and aspirations in which [the English] had no part. The game had, as it were, been played for a century, and its rules elaborated to suit a strange climate and a strange temperament, and consequently, when it was shipped over to be played on English turf and under English skies, the public viewed it with indifference or even exasperation.¹²⁹

Aside from the opera-satiated aristocracy, most members of the English public wanted a musical style that better conformed to their aesthetic needs.

While the fact still remained that those in favor of the development of English opera lacked the necessary influence, attempts at creating and staging English operas were numerous, even as Handel steered the Italian opera towards its highest level of popularity yet seen in England. One approach in this direction was to “adopt the Italian methods wholesale... and to pass off the whole ridiculous masquerade on their fellow-countrymen as ‘English Opera.’” This approach too much resembled the Italian opera, and so another group of musical nationalists more appropriately developed the ballad

¹²⁷ Burrows 78.

¹²⁸ Forsyth 97.

¹²⁹ Forsyth 106.

opera¹³⁰ (essentially a “play with incidental songs”¹³¹), through which they could simultaneously oppose the Italian opera and develop a uniquely English form. In 1728, Haymarket’s rival Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre produced *The Beggar’s Opera*, which was the first ballad opera to be seen on stage. The “ballad songs” of this dramatic work were purposefully made to seem “primitive by contrast with the full arias of Italian opera, though in the prologue to the play the Beggar informed the audience that he had nevertheless incorporated the fashionable conventions of opera—‘the Similies of the *Swallow*, the *Moth*, the *Bee*, [etc.]’, a prison scene and equal roles for two rival ladies.”¹³² With such satire, *The Beggar’s Opera* embodied the dual sentiment that Italian opera was excessive and foolish, and that English drama was far more sensible.

The Beggar’s Opera further commented on the innate English dislike of the “historical or mythological” subject matter that dominated Italian operas, as well as the “heaviness of treatment” that always accompanied such subjects. By satirizing “people and things with which [the English] were acquainted,” and by insisting that “An opera must end happily,” *The Beggar’s Opera* appealed to the English public’s aesthetic standards.¹³³

In an opera of this sort [the English] sense of humor was no longer outraged at every turn, nor were they called on to make continual mental concessions in accepting sham-heroics in place of tragedy. In a word, they were (for the first time) allowed to participate in the opera as well as to hear its music.¹³⁴

The incredible success that *The Beggar’s Opera* experienced coincided with a period of low patronage, financial trouble, and personal conflict at the Haymarket Theatre where

¹³⁰ Forsyth 98-99.

¹³¹ Burrows 126.

¹³² Burrows 126.

¹³³ Forsyth 109-110.

¹³⁴ Forsyth 109.

Handel composed, at once highlighting the instability of the Italian opera, as well as the great amount of interest generated for anything resembling an English drama.

Another rival opera company called the “Little” Haymarket Theatre (run by the Arne family and by John Frederick Lampe) situated across from Handel’s theatre¹³⁵ also challenged the primacy of the Italian opera, and in doing so, elicited an important response from Handel. The years 1732-1733 “saw the most energetic of all attempts to float English opera as a going concern in London,” and the efforts made by the “Little” Haymarket Theatre during this period were especially important. Rather than composing in the “Ballad opera” style, or translating Italian operas into English, this company truly attempted to develop “new English operas ‘after the Italian Manner,’” in which the music remained largely influenced by Italian form, but the “English language and a credible plot” were featured elements of the composition.¹³⁶ From 1732-33, this rival theatre produced three compositions by Lampe (*Amelia* in 1732, *Britannia* in 1732, *Dione* in 1733), two by J.C. Smith (*Teraminta* in 1732, *Ulysses* in 1733) and two by T.A. Arne (*Rosamund* in 1733, *The Opera of Opera* 1733).¹³⁷

The relative success of the “Little” Haymarket Theatre’s English productions in 1732 and 1733 contributed to Handel’s gradual shift towards the English oratorio, as he respond to their English operas with a production of his first real English oratorio-style work, *Esther*.¹³⁸ The overwhelming success of this production further fueled the competition between the Haymarket Theatre and the “Little” Haymarket Theatre,

¹³⁵ Burrows 168. T.A. Arne was a composer and instrumentalist who played a large role in English musical theatre, and whose father helped establish the “Little” Haymarket Theatre. Lampe was a German composer and instrumentalist who likewise played an important role in developing English music for the theatre.

¹³⁶ Dean 265.

¹³⁷ Dean 265.

¹³⁸ Burrows 168.

although this competition was now on new grounds. Previously, the rivalry had been between the musically superior but much opposed Italian opera and the newly established but musically lesser English opera. With the 1732 production of *Esther*, the rivalry changed into a competition between two versions of English drama: the English opera, and the newly invented English oratorio, a form that maintained the musical integrity of the Italian compositions but with English words and sensibilities. The “Little” Haymarket Theatre responded to *Esther* by staging a version of Handel’s previously composed and published masque *Acis and Galatea*, which in turn led to Handel’s production of a revisited version of the very same work at his own theatre.¹³⁹

Although *Esther* and *Acis and Galatea* were by no means perfected English works (indeed, some portions were performed in Italian, and others were sung in English by Italian singers¹⁴⁰), they represented the beginning of Handel’s recognition (whether conscious or not) that the English public desired English, not Italian compositions. Soon after these productions in 1732, this desire was even explicitly expressed to Handel in a letter from Aaron Hill:

Having this occasion of troubling you with a letter, I cannot forbear to tell you the earnestness of my wishes, that, as you have made such considerable steps towards it, already, you would let us owe to your inimitable genius, the establishment of *musick*, upon a foundation of good poetry; where the excellence of the *sound* should be no longer dishonour’d, by the pooriness of the *sense* it is chain’d to.

My meaning is, that you would be resolute enough, to deliver us from our *Italian bondage*; and demonstrate, that *English* is soft enough for Opera, when compos’d by poets, who know how to distinguish the *sweetness* of our tongue, from the *strength* of it, where the last is less necessary.

I am of the opinion, that male and female voices may be found in this kingdom capable of every thing, that is requisite; and, I am sure, a species of dramatic Opera might be invented, that, by reconciling reason and dignity, with

¹³⁹ Burrows 170.

¹⁴⁰ Burrows 170.

musick and fine machinery, would charm the *ear*, and hold fast the *heart*, together.

Such an improvement must, at once, be lasting, and profitable, to a very great degree and would, infallibly, attract an universal regard, and encouragement.¹⁴¹

Not only does this request indicate an increasingly desperate desire for a distinctively English dramatic form, but it also implies that contemporary attempts at English opera by native composers (including those made by the “Little” Haymarket Theatre) were incapable of successfully initiating this new national dramatic form.

Cecil Forsyth (a late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century English composer and music writer) attributes the unsuccessful establishment of a school of English composition to the lack of continuity between generations of native English composers. According to Forsyth, no English composers during Handel’s lifetime were able to build on Purcell’s successful initial steps into the realm of English opera, and so continuously struggled to reinvent the wheel.

Purcell, Arne, Bishop, Wallace, Barnett, to name only a few, wrote successful operas. But these men do not form a school, and no one of them had an artistic successor in any but a purely chronological sense. Each man, labouring under impossible artistic conditions, started afresh, often in the hope of founding a national school. But the conditions in every case forbade progress, and the consequence is that the groups of Operas, which form the so-called ‘English School,’ are isolated and inexplicable to a layman as the rows of specimens in a geological museum.¹⁴²

Considering the constant failure of native composers to fill Purcell’s shoes and establish an English school of composition, it is only natural that Hill and others would see Handel as the only composer in England with the potential to institute an English opera. Handel had certainly become an established compositional presence in England over the previous

¹⁴¹ Burrows 172.

¹⁴² Forsyth 5-6. Forsyth composed operas, as well as orchestral and choral works, and expressed a strong dislike of Handel’s lasting influence on English composers.

two decades, and had recently demonstrated his success with English oratorio-style works. His apparent commitment to England as a home coupled with this obvious talent can surely have done no harm in making Handel an appealing candidate to champion the cause of English composition.

However, while Handel had not forgotten how successful his English dramas had been, the Italian opera continued to call to him. He “enjoyed writing for the greatest singers of his age” and was therefore willing to work hard to “transcend [Italian opera’s] limitations.”¹⁴³ Although he must have known that there was a great desire for English opera, “the stimulus was either not strong enough or came at the wrong time,” and so he continued to compose Italian operas, despite the declining interest and myriad troubles confronting his opera company, effectively ignoring the “heaven-sent opportunity to create an English opera.”¹⁴⁴ Unlike the serendipitous events that created an opening into the English world for Handel when he first arrived, this particular providential opportunity was neglected. It took the complete failure of the Italian opera in 1738 to “force him, still kicking against the pricks, into the arms of the English oratorio.”¹⁴⁵

Yet while Handel ignored the English opera in favor of the Italian opera, he continued to write a few English oratorios after his marked success with *Esther*. The rival Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre continued to fill its 1733-34 season with English works in an attempt to satiate the English appetite for native works, and Handel (at least temporarily thinking in the same vein) composed two new oratorios, *Deborah* and *Athalia*, giving him a more substantial oratorio repertoire. Although these were given multiple performances and were well received, they did not yet establish a regular pattern of

¹⁴³ Dean 28.

¹⁴⁴ Dean 35.

¹⁴⁵ Dean 270.

oratorio composition for Handel. He was consumed with the efforts of keeping his opera company alive in the face of competition from the Opera of the Nobility (a new rival Italian opera company), and produced a large number of Italian pasticcio operas, as “they were derived from scores by composers writing in the ‘modern’ style,” and would therefore have been more popular.¹⁴⁶ The reluctance with which Handel allowed himself to realize that the oratorio would provide him with “all the advantages of the drama with none of its disadvantages”¹⁴⁷ kept him laboring over Italian opera while sitting unwittingly on a musical gold mine.

In 1735, however, Handel’s rivalry with the newly formed Opera of the Nobility seems to have nudged him one step closer to reluctantly embracing the English oratorio. Handel appears to have decided that “it was better to fight the rival company with his own works in his current style than with works by ‘modern’ Italians,” and so was resolved to produce *Esther*, *Deborah*, and *Athalia*, despite having an all-Italian cast.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, for the entire 1734-35 season Handel began to give oratorio performances every Wednesday and Friday of the Lenten period in order to contrast with the performances given on other days of the week by the rival company. Also at this time, Handel introduced into his oratorio performances periodical solo organ concertos performed by himself, which satisfied the audience’s craving for virtuosity that was present in Italian opera, but absent in the English oratorio. These concertos grew to be “more of a draw

¹⁴⁶ Burrows 173-178.

¹⁴⁷ Dean 28.

¹⁴⁸ Burrows 183.

than the oratorios themselves”¹⁴⁹ and were likely instrumental in keeping Handel afloat.¹⁵⁰

The 1735-36 season likewise forced Handel to accommodate a difficult situation (this time a lack of Italian singers) by turning to the English oratorio, albeit reluctantly. The opening of the season with his newly composed *Alexander's Feast* (a composition that will later be seen as having the utmost importance in Handel's career), marked the first time that Handel had ever composed music to a text by a “major English poet” and this production was followed by two more revived English oratorios, all successfully received.¹⁵¹ The sudden reinforcement of the practice of restricting dramatic performances during Mondays and Wednesdays of the Lenten period in 1737¹⁵² again led Handel to produce his English oratorios, as he now had a sufficient number of works from which to choose. While the “patent theatres were forbidden to perform plays” on these days, Handel was able to continuously provide for his patrons, giving him “a competitive advantage in access to the London audience.” Whether because of this advantage, or because of Handel's carefully planned seasons, the Opera of the Nobility buckled under the competition in 1737, leaving Handel's opera company alone in its struggle to maintain interest in Italian opera.¹⁵³

While the English oratorio saved Handel from being consumed by his rivals, this “significant move towards an English repertory... proved to be only temporary.” From 1737 to 1741, Handel erratically bounced back and forth between producing Italian opera and English oratorio “according to the opportunities that presented themselves,” never

¹⁴⁹ Dean 109, 185.

¹⁵⁰ Burrows 185.

¹⁵¹ Burrows 187.

¹⁵² Dean 82.

¹⁵³ Burrows 193, 197.

choosing to remain with one form exclusively until 1741.¹⁵⁴ However, Handel's unwillingness to let go of the Italian opera was no longer the only factor at play. By this time, he had likely realized some of the potential that existed in the English oratorio genre, but was restricted by purely practical reasons, and as a result, never consciously considered turning wholeheartedly towards the oratorio. Instead, production choices and developments in various directions were "stimulated or inhibited by the immediate needs and opportunities of particular theatre seasons."¹⁵⁵ The cancellation of the 1738-39 opera season due to low subscription proved to be the last straw for the Italian opera and provided Handel with the needed impetus to revisit his past oratorio success with the English cast available to him. He not only revived *Alexander's Feast*, and *Il trionfo del tempo* (an Italian oratorio), but also produced two newly composed English oratorios, *Saul*, and *Israel in Egypt*.

Though the Italian opera had failed to garner enough support for the season, Handel was able to keep the company alive with his successful oratorio-filled season. Not only was this technically Handel's first all-oratorio season, but it also was the first time that Handel demonstrated a musical "commitment to English oratorio as the basis of his season [which] brought forth, in *Saul*, a work that surpassed all earlier models."¹⁵⁶ Moving to the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre in 1739, Handel's new season also consisted largely of English oratorios, a decision that was likely based on the relative success of the previous season. While the availability of a number of Italian singers occasioned a return of Italian opera during the 1740-41 season, this was the last time that Handel ever

¹⁵⁴ Burrows 197.

¹⁵⁵ Burrows 233.

¹⁵⁶ Burrows 202-206.

produced an Italian opera in England, at last giving himself over to the English oratorio.

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Despite the long-standing desire for the development of English opera, no native composers appeared capable of firmly establishing such a genre. Handel clearly had the talent but not the impetus to create English compositions, only giving patrons of English music a small taste of his oratorio-style works until the incentive finally seized him, and he fully devoted his efforts to the English oratorio. Bypassing completely the English opera and establishing his own unique genre of English music,¹⁵⁸ Handel created and ultimately embraced the English oratorio, a product that could only have been delivered by Handel on English soil.

¹⁵⁷ Burrows 211-213.

¹⁵⁸ Dean 3.

Handel the English Composer: Achieving Fame and National Significance

It was Handel's arrival, albeit reluctant and delayed, at the English oratorio that at long last allowed him to fully realize his musical genius, and to finally become England's national composer, a role that he had unwittingly been gravitating towards for years. The creation of the English oratorio fulfilled the long-standing desire for a uniquely English musical tradition that had been growing in strength since Purcell's death. As the creator of this genre, Handel was naturally in a position to be viewed as a figure of English national identity. Yet Handel's abandonment of the Italian opera and success with the English oratorio did not instantly elevate his level of national importance. Rather, all through the years just discussed in Chapter 4, as he slowly progressed in the direction of the oratorio, Handel and his music gradually accumulated national significance. When he finally did embrace the oratorio exclusively, it represented the culmination of this already mounting importance, and Handel's popularity and embodiment of English identity peaked as it never had before.

Throughout the time period discussed in Chapter 4, Handel not only composed Italian operas and an increasing number of oratorios, but also composed a number of works for state occasions that aligned him with English national sentiment, and that demonstrated an unwavering commitment to his adopted homeland. It was through these compositions that Handel and his music became increasingly associated with a sense of national pride over the years. These compositional opportunities were made possible by a legal formality that was perhaps Handel's most important demonstration of serious and steadfast loyalty to England. Just before Queen Anne's successor King George I passed

away in 1727, he granted Handel naturalization. Despite the fact that his engagement in the opera was a precarious and unpredictable ordeal that guaranteed him nothing, Handel saw that “his future lay in London,” and so committed to England as his home.¹⁵⁹

Handel’s formalized status as a citizen of England demonstrated that he was not merely trying to make a splash on any stage available to him, but that he had chosen England consciously as his country.

The opportunities afforded Handel once he became a naturalized citizen positively impacted his gradual ability to be seen as a national composer. Although Handel had previously participated in some court ceremonies, his status as a foreigner had prevented him from being chosen to compose for many occasions. For example, Handel’s *Te Deum* was allowed at the Sunday service for the new King George I (as these services were “semi-public domestic occasions”), but William Croft, a native composer, had been chosen to compose the music for the king’s coronation ceremony. Yet once Handel had been granted British citizenship, there were no official barriers left to prevent him from composing for important state occasions. It was Handel and not Maurice Greene (who would have been Croft’s natural successor) who was chosen to compose the music for King George II’s coronation. With a few strong words about Greene’s compositional “insignificance,” King George II even “ordered that G. F. Hendel should not only have that great honour but... choose his own words.”¹⁶⁰

The newly naturalized Handel composed music for the coronation ceremony that was of such fine quality as to garner the respect of the new royal family, the public, and English composers alike.

¹⁵⁹ Burrows 122.

¹⁶⁰ Burrows 123.

It was the 1727 coronation anthems that established a permanent niche for Handel in the English-speaking world as a composer of striking choral music, described in such terms as “grand” and “sublime.” The coronation anthems were to have a tangible effect on the course of Handel’s career five years later: taking a longer view, Handel bequeathed *Zadok the priest* to every subsequent British coronation.¹⁶¹

This “five-year effect” highlights, perhaps more than anything else, the interconnectedness of Handel’s naturalization and subsequent opportunities with the ultimate success of the oratorio and Handel’s rise to greatness as an English composer. In 1732, five years after the successful coronation anthems, Handel premiered his first full-fledged oratorio, *Esther* that “combined the attractions of the opera stars with those of the grand anthem style that had made its mark at the 1727 coronation- all sung in English.”¹⁶² Although Handel did not immediately continue to develop the English oratorio, it was in *Esther* that he “hit on the recipe for his future success,” albeit unwittingly.¹⁶³

After his naturalization, Handel continued to compose music for court occasions such as Princess Anne’s marriage to Willem, Prince of Orange in 1734 (another case in which Handel superseded Greene’s role), the Prince of Wales’ wedding to the Princess of Saxe-Gotha in 1736, and Queen Caroline’s funeral in 1737. Certainly by 1733 “there was no question but that [Handel] was the established leading regular Chapel Royal composer: indeed he had produced orchestrally accompanied music for the Chapel Royal services marking each of King George II’s returns from Hanover.” For the remainder of the 1730s, Handel continued to compose “music for the royal ‘family’ occasions, while Greene retained his duties at the other important Chapel Royal services.”¹⁶⁴ The royal family’s loyalty to Handel seems to have extended even beyond his court compositions

¹⁶¹ Burrows 123.

¹⁶² Burrows 168.

¹⁶³ Burrows 168.

¹⁶⁴ Burrows 181.

and into the realm of opera, such that to patronize any opera other than Handel's was to be against the court: "An anti-Handelist was looked up on as an anti-courtier, and voting against the Court in Parliament was hardly a less remissible or more venial sin than speaking against Handel or going to the Lincoln's Inn Fields Opera."¹⁶⁵

Handel's allegiance to the royal family no doubt served him well in ingratiating himself with the English public and portraying himself as one who had committed entirely to the English way of life. Handel's compositional presence at important moments in English history had been solidified, and for the remainder of his life, important national events were celebrated largely with his music: for example, the *Dettingen Te Deum* in 1743 (celebrating "the king's safe return to Britain") and the *Music for the Royal Fireworks* in 1749 (celebrating the "Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle"), whose public rehearsal drew a crowd of 12,000.¹⁶⁶ Handel's musical presence at these national events projected him into the public view as one who was inextricably entwined with England's pride, patriotism and nationality.

Handel's early efforts in the direction of the oratorio—most importantly *Alexander's Feast* (1736)—similarly contributed to his accumulation of national importance. Although Handel had previously composed three English oratorios and was still composing Italian operas at this time, *Alexander's Feast* was nonetheless a stepping-stone both in Handel's gradual move from opera to oratorio, and in Handel's relationship with the English public.

¹⁶⁵ Burrows 180.

¹⁶⁶ Burrows 275-298.

Importantly, *Alexander's Feast* was the first of Handel's English works in which the libretto was derived from the text of a great English poet, Dryden.¹⁶⁷ By associating himself with a well-respected English literary figure, Handel essentially elevated his own name into the ranks of English greats, while also showing respect for the work of his own (or rather, adopted) countrymen. Because "the eighteenth-century conceptualization of the canon was bound up with the creation of a sense of collective pride and national propriety,"¹⁶⁸ Handel had a lot to gain by drawing parallels between his musical abilities and Dryden's literary talents in *Alexander's Feast*. While other composers were also realizing the benefit of this type of association, Handel seemed to have had particular success in his venture:

For Handel the gambit paid off: not only was *Alexander's Feast* itself an immediate success but—like his later *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, ed il Moderato* (1740), and *Samson* (first performed in 1743)—it served to link his name to an important figure in recent English literary history. That Handel thus not only became part of the British canon but indeed was almost anglicized demonstrates the inextricable association of the cultural canon and national identity.¹⁶⁹

Obviously the association with Dryden alone was not enough to elevate a composer's status, because others had previously attempted to set Dryden's text to music with little success, while Handel's setting was met with resounding success. Indeed, Newburgh Hamilton, Handel's librettist for *Alexander's Feast* believed that Handel was the only composer "capable of doing it justice"; only the "united Labours and utmost Efforts of a *Dryden* and a *Handel*" could ensure perfection."¹⁷⁰ While this is obviously a biased opinion, the reaction of Handel's audience to *Alexander's Feast* indicates that

¹⁶⁷ Burrows 187.

¹⁶⁸ Aspden 65.

¹⁶⁹ Aspden 65. The opera *Sabrina* (1737) derived its origins from Milton's *Comus*, and made a similar literary association.

¹⁷⁰ Aspden 58.

Hamilton's judgment was correct. The composition proved to be "immediately popular, drawing 1,300 persons and 450 on the first night, and was played five times within a month and six times in the following season."¹⁷¹ Because Italian singers were unavailable to Handel at this time, he made up for the lack of virtuosic singers with "vigorous choral singing, orchestration of unusual brilliance, and an alternative virtuoso appeal in organ concertos played between the acts by the composer,"¹⁷² all of which were compositional elements that the English favored. Just as with *Esther*, four years earlier, Handel struck a balance between the appealing elements of the Italian operatic style and the English preference for grand choral music.

Although the continued development of the oratorio was derailed somewhat by Handel's insistence upon keeping the Italian opera alive, the year 1738 saw an important change in Handel's standing with the English public based on his eventual shift towards English composition. Perhaps due to the financial troubles facing the Italian opera, Handel was granted permission to give a benefit concert on March 28 at which he chose a nearly all-English repertoire; a choice, he may have realized, that would guarantee him financial success. This concert, entitled "An Oratorio," was comprised of selections from his previously composed anthems and oratorios (including the coronation anthems, and the oratorio *Deborah*). Whether Handel had finally made a substantial enough turn towards an English repertoire, or whether the English had been holding out on their judgment indefinitely, this benefit concert "seems to indicate that [Handel] was at a turning-point in his reputation with the London public. Although he might still have had

¹⁷¹ Dean 268.

¹⁷² Dean 268.

‘enemies’ among both influential theatre patrons and rival musicians, Handel was becoming an accepted part of London life.”¹⁷³

Handel’s increasingly universal appeal, and its implications for his role as a figure of English national identity were further evidenced not in musical terms, but in the commissioning of a statue of Handel in this same year. In 1738, just as Handel’s oratorio career began to truly sprout, he was monumentalized in a statue created by François Roubiliac at the Vauxhall Gardens, marking the “first time [in history] a living artist had been memorialized in this way.”¹⁷⁴ While the existence of this statue alone might be enough to indicate Handel’s unusually important place in English society, the significance of the statue’s location adds a key dimension to the understanding of Handel’s role in England.

The Vauxhall Gardens, just as all London pleasure gardens, were a “forum for self-display and social intercourse,” and were “among the constructions of public space that most helped to foster a sense of collective identity in eighteenth-century Britain.” Although the Vauxhall Gardens were in conception a place for “polite society,” they were, in fact, a place where all types of people, regardless of social status were welcome, provided they could pay for the cost of admission. Just as Handel’s English compositions enjoyed immense popularity because they broke down social barriers, so too were the Vauxhall Gardens popular because of the “democratization of a previously elite experience of the landscape.” The commissioning of Handel’s statue by Jonathan Tyers (the proprietor of Vauxhall Gardens) thus represented a conscious effort to “bring the

¹⁷³ Burrows 199-200.

¹⁷⁴ Aspden 39.

nation together emotionally, just as the Gardens did physically.”¹⁷⁵ In a place where national identity was cultivated through the equal enjoyment of a public space, the presence of Handel’s statue indicates that he too cultivated a sense of English identity through nation-wide musical appeal. As English society had a “naturally divergent populace,”¹⁷⁶ it was important for commonly appreciated elements of English life to be recognized and emphasized as the glue of patriotic sentiment.

The physical qualities of the statue itself further reinforce the nationalistic reading of Handel’s statuary presence at Vauxhall, and demonstrate that his important contribution to English national sentiment had allowed him to finally be viewed as an Englishman himself. By simultaneously embodying symbols of mythical and realistic qualities, Handel’s statue portrayed him both as an approachable human, and as a venerable, almost god-like figure. In order to stress Handel’s embodiment of the “down-to-earth, relaxed nature of the English private gentleman,” Roubiliac made the statue life-size, cross-legged, casual and relaxed. It is this “naturalism” that can be read as a reinforcement of the notion that Handel had come to be seen as an Englishman, rather than a foreigner, as naturalism was “favored as a supposedly national trait throughout the eighteenth century.” Yet at the same time, the presence of the “lyre and putto,” and the elevation of the statue draw on classical references, portraying Handel as an “Orphic (or Apollonian) genius.” The placement of this statue in the Grove of the Vauxhall Gardens made Handel the “social focus of the Gardens,” allowing people from all levels of

¹⁷⁵ Aspden 44-50.

¹⁷⁶ Aspden 42.

English society to be united under the at once casual and legendary presence of the great English composer Handel.¹⁷⁷

Not only did the commissioning of the Roubiliac statue solidify the notion that Handel had gradually been accepted into English society, but his strong initiative in the creation of the “Fund for the Support of Decay’d Musicians” in 1738 further demonstrated Handel’s involvement in and commitment to England. Two years later, the appearance in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* of an ode extolling Handel’s music showed that “[Handel’s] works seem to have become an accepted topic for such literary exercises...[and] may be taken as indicators of his current social status.”¹⁷⁸ Thus, after thirty years in England, Handel had finally been absorbed into the foundation of English society, a process of assimilation that had progressed slowly under the careful observation of the English public. Although Handel in the late 1730s was simultaneously a composer of Italian operas and of an increasing number of English works, “the seeds of the broad appeal that was eventually to lead to the popular myth of ‘The Great Mr. Handel’ had already been sown.”¹⁷⁹

After Handel’s complete abandonment of Italian opera, he experienced “instant success” with his oratorios, and delighted his English audiences with the notion that Italian operas would no longer have to be endured. In a personal letter sent from London that appeared in *The Dublin Journal* in 1743, this sentiment was expressed:

Our Friend Mr. Handell is very well, and Things have taken a quite different Turn here from what they did some Time past; for the Publick will be no longer imposed on by Italian Singers, and some wrong Headed Undertakers of bad

¹⁷⁷ Aspden 50-54.

¹⁷⁸ Burrows 200-210.

¹⁷⁹ Burrows 201.

Opera's, but find out the Merit of Mr. Handell's Compositions and English Performances: That Gentleman is more esteemed now than ever.¹⁸⁰

In his public appeal to revive a low-subscription season in 1745 (due to circumstance, rather than a “dip in [Handel's] popularity”)¹⁸¹ Handel himself even expressed a similar sentiment in a letter published in *The Daily Advertiser* (the primary publication for London's theatre news). Regardless of Handel's motives for writing this letter, his words demonstrate an apparent desire to appeal to his English audience on their own terms:

Having for a Series of Years received the greatest Obligations from the Nobility and Gentry of this Nation, I have always retained a deep Impression of their Goodness. As I perceived, that joining good Sense and significant Words to Musick, was the best method of recommending *this* to an English Audience; I have directed my studies that way, and endeavour'd to shew, that the English Language, which is so expressive of the sublimest Sentiments is the best adapted of any to the full and solemn Kind of Musick.¹⁸²

While previously, Handel's English compositions seemed merely the result of circumstance (whether it be the lack of Italian singers, or a cancelled season), his personal communication with the English public in 1745 indicated that, at long last, Handel had fully committed to being a composer of English music. By 1749, any rough patches that Handel had previously encountered were erased: “his seniority as London's prime public composer was without question, and his reputation was now founded on English-language works that were potentially accessible to a wider audience in London than his Italian operas had ever been.”¹⁸³ Handel had at last pioneered a distinctly English musical genre that satisfied the desires and aesthetics of his English audience.

Since the oratorios were in English, Handel's music no longer required the virtuosic Italian singers that English sensibilities had so opposed. Instead, the oratorio

¹⁸⁰ Burrows 269.

¹⁸¹ Burrows 284.

¹⁸² Burrows 281.

¹⁸³ Burrows 301.

“grew into an independent art-form demanding teamwork and dramatic consistency. Handel underlined this by entrusting important parts to artists who were primarily not singers at all, but actresses.”¹⁸⁴ By removing virtuosity from the stage, Handel liberated the natural progression of drama from its operatic bonds, and created a new genre in which the English preference for plot clarity was able to reach fruition. Furthermore, Handel was able to abandon the *da capo* aria form, and could “follow the sense of the words as he thought fit, without reverting automatically to his first half and turning the action back on itself.”¹⁸⁵ Moreover, Handel’s comfort with the English language had greatly increased to the extent that he “developed a genuine susceptibility to [the English language’s] rhythm and undertones.”¹⁸⁶

Another element of the oratorios that would have appealed to an English audience, and that was one of the greatest contributing factors to the oratorio’s unprecedented success and embodiment of national sentiment was its religious subject matter. Although Handel was not largely interested in religion, and didn’t intend his oratorios to take on great religious significance, the biblical origins of their texts and the fact that they were often performed during Lent inevitably led to their religious association. But Handel’s librettos remained ambiguous enough to be universally appealing and to avoid denominational polarization: “Since the librettos had a moral as opposed to a metaphysical focus, they established a common ground for expressing certain basic religious beliefs that reunited the English as no other area of the nation’s culture had done.”¹⁸⁷ Because England was no longer allowed to have “universal

¹⁸⁴ Dean 107.

¹⁸⁵ Dean 67.

¹⁸⁶ Dean 64.

¹⁸⁷ Weber 121.

religious rites, [or a] common liturgy” the oratorios took on a substantial significance as they “establish[ed] a new ground where the English could relate to the biblical tradition and communicate about their faith but not necessarily be divided among sectarian lines.”¹⁸⁸ Handel’s oratorios united disparate members of English society to such an extent that “by the end of the eighteenth century, Anglicans and Dissenters were able to sit down together in public halls—in some instances even in churches and cathedrals—to hear Handel’s oratorios, odes and masques.”¹⁸⁹

Once Handel’s oratorios fully gained the support of the English public, the two became “fused...almost inextricably with the fibre of English life and character; their past reputation still governs the attitude of many Englishman not only to Handel but to the whole art of music.”¹⁹⁰ Indeed, the oratorios “gave to the English was of life—an entity as hybrid and as accidentally conceived as the oratorio itself—a congenial nourishment on which it thrived for two centuries.”¹⁹¹ While neither the English opera nor the Italian opera were able to take root in England, Handel alone struck upon the perfect formula for success with a uniquely hybrid form that the English could call their own. As the architect of this grand new English style, Handel too became the English public’s own, and so entered the pantheon of national English composers. No one before or after Handel has been able to duplicate what he achieved with the English oratorio, and so “it remains the property of one man, evolved by friction of accident upon his genius, which

¹⁸⁸ Weber 123.

¹⁸⁹ Weber 14.

¹⁹⁰ Dean 128.

¹⁹¹ Dean 128-129.

it fitted like a new skin. It had no English forbears; [and] its numerous progeny were boneless wonders unable to survive the rigors of infancy.”¹⁹²

Handel’s slow and seemingly reluctant arrival at the English oratorio cannot detract from the incredible achievement represented by the music of Handel’s oratorios, nor can it diminish the impact that this music has had on the English public. The oratorios undoubtedly represent “the peak of Handel’s achievement...fulfilled his genius as nothing else ever did, and stand unchallenged as one of the grandest musical creations of the eighteenth or any other century.”¹⁹³ Although he had spent a good deal of his lifetime composing Italian opera and trying his hand at various other genres, nothing seemed to fit so well as the English oratorio:

Italian opera and cantata had cramped his leaning towards structural and particularly choral architecture; German Passion had demanded a religious spirit he did not possess; English anthem cut him off from the idiosyncrasy of the human heart. Oratorio could satisfy not some of his faculties some of the time, but all of them at the same time.¹⁹⁴

The eventual release that accompanied this discovery led to “the extraordinary discharge of creative energy during the years 1738-44, when the operas at last ceased.” Between these dates, Handel wrote ten oratorios, all of which are “works of supreme merit” that represent the “climax of Handel’s search for creative integration.”¹⁹⁵

The far-reaching appeal of Handel’s oratorios in England is clearly shown by the variety of locations in which they were performed, both during and after his lifetime. No longer was Handel the champion of an exclusive art form centered in London and appealing only to England’s nobility. Because the oratorios attracted a much more

¹⁹² Dean 44-131.

¹⁹³ Dean 35.

¹⁹⁴ Dean 36.

¹⁹⁵ Dean 33-36.

diverse audience, they were performed throughout the British provinces by amateurs and professionals alike, and were enjoyed by members from all levels of society, even those who would not usually attend concerts.¹⁹⁶

During the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the oratorios of George Frideric Handel were performed more widely than any other works of the time—in city and country, among many social classes, and all over Europe and the Americas. A kind of social and musical ritual arose around the music which proved remarkably appealing and adaptable. Its grandest settings were not just concerts; they were seen as festivals, events of special importance given to help or honour a cause, carrying with them a broad sense of celebrating the state and the social order.¹⁹⁷

Halifax was one of the earliest provinces to show “expressions of Handel veneration,” and was “eager to celebrate [using Handel’s music] as a matter of local pride and provincial identity.”¹⁹⁸ By the 1760s Handel’s oratorios were “emerging as a focus for communal music-making among industrializing towns and villages across the Pennines, and as a point of stability in a rapidly changing world.”¹⁹⁹ Such “communal music-making” most often took the form of a music festival.

The Three Choirs Festival, established on a regular basis in 1724 and conducted from 1737 by Boyce, came to subsist largely on Handel and would perhaps have succumbed without him...Other festivals devoted to [Handel’s] music were organized at frequent intervals by William Hayes at Oxford, James Harris and the organist John Stevens at Salisbury, the Passerinis, Thomas Chilcot, Thomas Linley and others at Bath, Bristol, and elsewhere. Hayes gave a season of three oratorios at the Sheldonian Theatre to celebrate the opening of the Radcliffe Library in April 1749; the experiment was a great success, and was repeated in 1754, 1756, and 1759...*Acis and Galatea* reached Dublin years before Handel himself, and his visit in 1741-2 made the oratorios fashionable and popular...Occasional performances were given by Avison at Newcastle, Lampe in Edinburgh, and Randall at Cambridge- wherever, in fact, an admirer of Handel’s music held a post. There were of course, countless others after his death; in the next few years there is record of oratorios at Winchester, Leicester, Chester,

¹⁹⁶ Weber 120.

¹⁹⁷ Weber 103.

¹⁹⁸ Cowgill 90, 113.

¹⁹⁹ Cowgill 113.

Manchester, Sheffield, Liverpool, Birmingham, and even villages such as Church and Langton in Leicestershire, in addition to the towns already mentioned.²⁰⁰

Handel's *Messiah* in particular highlights how his oratorios came to be inextricably linked with a sense of English identity, as this work eventually came to be seen as a "part of the Englishman's religion and he would no more find fault with this music than he would with the words of the Bible."²⁰¹

Because Handel's music coincided with, and indeed facilitated the development of the "musical classic,"²⁰² or the canonized repertoire in England, his works were popularized and immortalized to a much more significant extent than any of his contemporaries. According to Dean, there were close to six hundred performances of Handel's oratorios given (by himself and others) throughout the provinces *during* Handel's lifetime,²⁰³ an achievement that surely speaks to an unprecedented level of popularity and appeal (Figure 3). Furthermore, it was Handel's choral music that was "the first of several major waves of classical repertory that swept across Europe during the next hundred years."²⁰⁴ Even after Handel's death this popularity and resulting visibility continued, as the oratorios lived on in English thought as immortal compositions. This national obsession with Handel's oratorios solidified the fact that Handel had become a "national institution," such that even after his death, Handel and his oratorios "dominated English musical thought" for well over a century.²⁰⁵

Nothing better demonstrates Handel's long lasting popularity and contribution to English identity than the 1784 Handel Commemoration. While the Concert of Antient

²⁰⁰ Dean 84-85.

²⁰¹ Lang 87.

²⁰² Weber 13.

²⁰³ Dean 41-84.

²⁰⁴ Weber 5.

²⁰⁵ Lang 97-86.

Music had already begun to canonize Handel's works in England through the constant performance of his music (Figure 4), the Commemoration made this repertoire available to a much larger audience, and so solidified its canonization and national appeal.²⁰⁶ The 1784 Handel Commemoration brought together 525 musicians and 4,500 audience members, and for the first time in England the music of a deceased composer had greater relevance to a contemporary audience than the music of a "modern" composer.²⁰⁷ Indeed, the extreme success of the Commemoration inspired people in provinces across England to stage their own versions of the event, using the Commemoration thereafter as a "model for grand performances of Handel's oratorios."²⁰⁸

The Commemoration also demonstrated the extent to which Handel's music still influenced English national sentiment. Just prior to the Commemoration, there was a great deal of political turmoil in England resulting from the recent American Revolutionary War, as well as from a "constitutional crisis between Crown and Parliament, and the turbulent election of 1784."²⁰⁹ The Handel Commemoration coincided with the resolution of this conflict, and coincidentally turned into a celebration of the reunification of previously dissenting groups. Rather than a simple celebration of the composer himself, the Commemoration instead became "a patriotic celebration" where the "British monarchy [was redefined] in national terms," and at which Handel's music was the unifying factor. Because Handel had not allied himself exclusively with one political party during his lifetime, his music was able to assume a "broad integrating

²⁰⁶ The Concert of Antient music was founded in 1776 with the goal of performing music of the early eighteenth-century. Once the group was firmly established, Handel's works made up about two-thirds of its repertoire, and it was through these performances that Handel's work became canonized.

²⁰⁷ Weber 1-223.

²⁰⁸ Dale 325.

²⁰⁹ Weber 223.

role” at the Commemoration, bringing together those who would otherwise not have had common ground.²¹⁰ Handel’s national significance was demonstrated to an even greater extent by the king’s decision (after seeing the power of Handel’s music at the Commemoration) to “advertise himself as the upholder of an English national tradition and of the best musical taste” by “presenting himself as the nation’s leading Handelian.”²¹¹

Through the gradual accumulation of his adopted countrymen’s allegiance, fueled by Handel’s increasingly obvious commitment to England and his mounting ability to express English aesthetics and sentiments in his music, Handel and his compositions came to embody the essence of English national identity. At long last, the English had a new Purcellian figure whose compositions held nation-wide appeal and who was a point of national pride himself. Never before had one composer achieved such a level of stardom in England. “Giant HANDEL,”²¹² (as Pope had so aptly dubbed him) had become a “colossus astride the musical world of England,”²¹³ unparalleled in the splendor of his success.

²¹⁰ Weber 224-225.

²¹¹ Weber 236.

²¹² Johnson 515.

²¹³ Buelow “The Case” 67.

Handel as National Treasure or National Embarrassment?

With an understanding of Handel's unprecedented popularity and rise to a position of English national identity as a non-native composer, it is now necessary to revisit the perception of Handel as a plagiarist. The vast body of Handelian criticism hardly seems reconcilable with the similarly vast demonstration of awe and respect for Handel and his music both during and after his lifetime. The crux of the matter lies in the point of convergence between the rising notion of plagiarism, and Handel's rise to popularity and national importance in England as a German who exercised imitational practices. In essence, Handel was criticized more than any other composer in history for his practice of transformative imitation because he achieved an unparalleled level of popularity (and therefore visibility) and national importance in a creative, social, and political context that did not favor his practices or his origins.

Pinpointing an answer to the question of why Handel was the only composer in England (and indeed one of the only composers in history) to receive such long-lasting and severe criticism for his supposed plagiaristic practices, one arrives at the very intersection of the two aforementioned phenomena: plagiarism came to be associated with national shame. As Handel had simultaneously gained both increasing recognition as an important national figure and notoriety as an accused plagiarist over the course of his life and after his death, he and his music came to embody a paradox: how could a composer and his music at once exemplify national sentiment and be rife with the

supposed act of plagiarism, that deed which came to be seen as “unethical, [and] even un-English”²¹⁴?

Ever since the end of the seventeenth century, “the problem of illicit appropriation became entwined...in the developments which enhanced the nation’s self esteem and its interest in its own identity.”²¹⁵ By the time that Handel’s fame had flourished and his compositional approach had solidified, there was undoubtedly a feeling in England that plagiarism made one’s country “inferior,” and that figures of English national identity must protect “the integrity of England’s national culture.” Even as early as 1664 a literary attack from Frenchman Samuel Sorbière criticized English writers for being plagiarizers, and blamed this supposed problem on the English being “excessively dependent on influences from abroad.”²¹⁶ Not only had Handel risen to a position of national importance through his unprecedentedly frequent use of a compositional practice that was antithetical to notions of English identity and national pride, but he had done so as a foreigner.

While Handel’s music undoubtedly came to stand for English patriotic sentiment and social unification, there were still many people in England who resisted the notion of a foreign composer just as strongly as they resisted the growth of a foreign musical style. An example of this unwillingness to see Handel as an English composer because of his German origins can be seen in a letter written by an Englishman in 1738. This letter expressed the belief that Maurice Greene should be chosen over Handel to compose music for a national occasion. The reasoning behind this was not that the letter-writer considered Handel an unworthy composer, but because he believed that “Mr Handel

²¹⁴ Buelow “The Case” 74.

²¹⁵ Kewes 15-16.

²¹⁶ Kewes 16.

having the Advantage to be by Birth a German, might probably, even without intending it, mix some Modulations in his Composition, which might give a German tendency to the Mind and therefore greatly lessen the National Benefit.”²¹⁷

A more critical expression of this same sentiment was articulated by Charles Avison, who claimed that he did not believe in a “purely national music” (likely referencing Handel’s oratorios). When Avison was subsequently questioned by William Hayes for “inadequate appreciation of Handel,” he responded ““Is Mr. Handel an *Englishman*? Is his name *English*? Was his education *English*?””²¹⁸ Despite Handel’s apparent commitment to England as evidenced by his continued residence, his naturalization, and his compositional choices, many still refused to see him as anything but an outsider who was incapable of composing English works.

Although in many ways, Handel championed the cause of English national identity, in other ways his position as a national figure was utterly antithetical to it. The English nationalist movement in the eighteenth century was very consciously a “protest against excessive foreign cultural influence in the fatherland.”²¹⁹ While Handel’s German origins would unquestionably place him in the category of “excessive foreign cultural influence,” and would therefore label him a detriment to the development of English national identity, it is undeniable that Handel did, in fact, contribute positively to a sense of collective English identity in his music. The irreconcilable nature of these two opposed facts is difficult to explain, but lies in the fact that Handel on the one hand was an émigré from Hanover who had at once “stifled English music,”²²⁰ and, on the other hand, had

²¹⁷ Harris 20.

²¹⁸ Weber 101. Avison was an English composer who often opposed Handel’s musical presence in England.

²¹⁹ Newman 63.

²²⁰ Lang 97.

developed what is arguably one of the greatest styles of English music ever to be heard.²²¹ Although Handel's music itself became closely linked with English identity, the consequences of its development conflicted greatly with English nationalism. Handel's music thus simultaneously embodied both the realization and the destruction of English national sentiment.

The frustration with external influences that began mounting during Handel's lifetime stemmed from an earlier English obsession with all things "French or foreign," and the parallel notion that "true value, true superiority, came from abroad." This in turn led to excessive "social imitation" (such as the importation of Italian opera and of foreign composers like Handel), which caused the "English sense of national identity [to] drift entirely out of shape."²²²

In such realms as painting and music the native genius suffocated under the influence of foreign-born artists like Kneller and Handel. Commentators today [in the early twentieth century] harbor no doubts about the great extent to which English patrons and connoisseurs lavished their attentions upon foreigners at the expense of English creativity. The upshot was a sense of both personal and national 'grievances and humiliations' which naturally was felt most keenly by native artists, still crucially dependent upon aristocratic tastes and encouragement.²²³

It was only once the English felt sufficiently "threatened" by the infiltration of these external influences that they were compelled to form a movement of English national identity: "Together these conditions produced cries of simultaneous anti-foreign and anti-aristocratic cultural protest which by the 1750s were becoming a full-blooded chorus of lament and execration."²²⁴

²²¹ Dean 35.

²²² Newman 38-46.

²²³ Newman 63.

²²⁴ Newman 56-63.

Examples of opposition to foreigners even before the mid-eighteenth century demonstrate that this was not a sudden change in mindset, but rather a slowly building tension between native Englishmen and non-English invaders. In 1733, when Handel was forced to increase subscription prices for his oratorio *Deborah*, one critic immediately jumped upon the opportunity to accuse Handel of fleeing the city the moment his success ran out, emphasizing the difference between Handel's *own* country, and England:

In these delirious Moments, [Handel] discovers a particular aversion to the City. He calls them all a Parcel of *Rogues*, and asserts that the *honestest Trader among them deserves to be hang'd*—It is much question'd whether he will recover; at least, if he does, it is not doubted but He will seek for a Retreat in his *own Country* from the general Resentment of the Town.²²⁵

Although Handel had already made a clear commitment to England as his home by 1733 (indeed, he had been a naturalized citizen for over five years), he was still considered by many to be a foreigner who was draining money out of England, who was suppressing the growth of English music, and who would turn tail the moment his success waned. While Handel disproved this belief through his actions, the English aversion towards foreigners was only growing in strength at this point in time, blinding some to the true nature of Handel's English commitment. Just as Handel rejected the Italian opera that had so offended members of English society and had at last created and embraced an essentially native musical product of England, he was being considered by some to be a part of the "alien cultural influence and the associated moral disease" that had gripped London for too long.²²⁶ Even in 1911, over a century and a half after Handel's death, Cecil Forsyth (an English composer and writer on music) asks:

How long will it be before we realize the fact that where the foreign musician is here is the enemy? He may come to this island in shoals, but he comes for one

²²⁵ Burrows 177.

²²⁶ Newman 69.

purpose only- the money he can take back across the water, and well he knows that the surest way to make his position firm here is to denationalize our music.²²⁷

Indeed, I do not hesitate to say that every man, English or otherwise, if he fully realized his nationality, should find—must find—in every foreign art-work something in some part repellent to his own individuality.²²⁸

Yet Handel's later compositions can hardly be considered "foreign." While it is not surprising to discover an English opposition to Handel's earlier Italian operas, wholesale opposition to Handel and his music ignores the fact that both the man and his music (in later years) were ultimately more English than they were German, Italian, or otherwise. The English oratorio could only have been developed and nourished by a composer who was deeply sunk into English soil. Although the English were wary of outside influences, Handel made very clear relatively early in his career that he belonged to England, and had as much invested in national sentiment as any other citizen. The reluctance or outright refusal by some Englishmen to see Handel as an Englishman himself and to view his compositions as representative of English national identity thus must have stemmed (in part) from a different sentiment.

One possible source of added resentment towards Handel as a foreigner was his association with the Hanoverian court. In 1710, when Handel returned to Germany from his years in Italy, he almost immediately secured the post of Kapellmeister at Hanover. Yet at this point, Handel's vision for his future already included the possibility of England, and so he accepted the Hanoverian position only on the stipulation that he would be free to leave his post for an extended period of time in order to visit London. This he soon did, but was contractually required to return to Hanover in 1711. In 1712,

²²⁷ Forsyth 261. As an English composer, Forsyth clearly felt that most of his contemporaries were still far too influenced by Handel's compositional style.

²²⁸ Forsyth 270.

Handel again returned to London, as his previous experience there was favorable, and by 1713, he had overstayed his leave of absence from Hanover.²²⁹ In many ways, Handel's constant return to England (in violation of his contract with the Hanoverian court) demonstrated an even earlier commitment to that country than supposed. Yet rather than interpreting Handel's presence in England positively, many were unable to look past his German connections. It was well known that the natural successor to the English throne after Queen Anne's death was the Hanoverian elector,²³⁰ and this undoubtedly elicited resentment from those who so opposed foreign influence.

The London public liked Handel and always stood by in crises, but their dislike of the Hanoverian dynasty was strong, and the German king's favourite German musician was a convenient means both for an indirect attack on the House of Hanover and a more direct weapon to be used on those who supported it...The war was fought savagely...[Handel's opponents] all the while hoping that a defeat for the German composer would reflect adversely on the king himself.²³¹

Handel's association with the foreign court that would soon assume power in England can only have made it more difficult to disassociate himself with the already negative title of "foreigner" as he attempted to make a life for himself in England. Handel was permanently "tarred with the brush of Germany and Hanover,"²³² an offense seemingly worse than just being a foreigner, and no matter the level of his internalized or demonstrated commitment to England, this association weighed upon his reputation.

The refusal by many to recognize Handel as a national composer also sprang from the belief that Handel's musical presence in England suffocated native composers' attempts at developing English music. Yet it is unlikely that native composers would have suddenly been able to develop a national style of music if Handel had never come to

²²⁹ Burrows 40-72.

²³⁰ Burrows 74.

²³¹ Lang 95.

²³² Burrows 115.

England. Prior to his arrival, attempts at developing English operas or other national styles were progressing slowly and poorly, if at all. To put it as bluntly as possible, “most foreign historians, and not a few of them British, have considered eighteenth-century England a musical wasteland...English composers each day took their docile muse out of her stall, gave her a few carrots, then climbed on her back, lettering her go wither she would.”²³³ In this light, Handel’s Italian operas, appealing largely only to the aristocracy (and not to those who desired English compositions in the first place) cannot have done much to stifle the already weak attempts at English opera. If, in the thirty years it took Handel to invest his efforts in developing an English musical genre, native composers were unable to succeed with English opera, it had little to do with Handel’s presence as a composer of Italian operas. The failure of native composers to develop a national style undoubtedly contributed to Handel’s immense success with his English oratorios in the last two decades of his life in England, but it must be realized that his compositional talent was a major factor in this success. English composers were not suppressed by Handel’s presence, but were simply unable to successfully develop an English style of music (as Handel was), despite the ample opportunity given them.

All of this resentment towards Handel as a figure of English national identity (whether it was because of his Hanoverian origins, or because of his supposedly suffocating effect on native music) paired with the notion that plagiarism would bring shame upon England made Handel into the ideal target for criticism. Handel’s unprecedentedly long-lasting impact and incredible visibility, both during and after his lifetime, only amplified and extended this criticism. Had Handel’s music not remained popular (and indeed, grown in popularity) after his death, whatever criticisms existed

²³³ Lang 86.

regarding his borrowing practices and their implications for English national identity would have petered out and fallen into obscurity. His music, however, continued to be performed constantly in England after his death, and for those who revered Handel, his importance as a national figure only grew in strength. The incredible proliferation of concerts of Handel's music meant that his works were endlessly in the public view. For those who opposed Handel's musical hold on England (and even for those who were simply curious about Handel's compositional approach) this visibility provided the means to dissect and analyze his music to an extent previously unheard of.

Although today it is much more common to encounter scholarly research that favorably views Handel's musical borrowing, it is impossible to ignore the impact of the voluminous accusations that have accumulated over the last three centuries. While it is undoubtedly crucial to reconsider Handel's borrowing from a sympathetic and informed perspective, such modern reexaminations cannot erase this body of critical literature. For this reason, it is imperative to look at the accumulated criticisms themselves, and to question their reason for existence. The traditional ideas that Handel borrowed more frequently than other composers, that his music experienced greater visibility, and that he practiced transformative imitation at a time when imitation lost credibility cannot alone be used to justify this body of critical literature. These factors are all important but do not encompass the larger picture. The reason for such harsh, long-lasting, and abundant criticism lies in the intersection of the fact that Handel borrowed more frequently than others at a time when borrowing became associated with plagiarism, together with the fact that Handel, originally a foreigner, experienced unprecedented popularity and visibility as a figure of English national identity. Because the concept of national identity

in eighteenth-century England utterly opposed both foreign influences and plagiarism, Handel's simultaneous status as both a figure of English nationality and as a non-native alleged plagiarizer placed him at the epicenter of a unique set of circumstances. While the former status afforded Handel an unparalleled amount of popularity and visibility even after his death, the latter triggered this vast body of criticism that has been sustained over three centuries by the exposing and contentious nature of Handel's popularity.

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