

THE EFFECTS OF THE OPERAS AND ORATORIOS THAT HANDEL
COMPOSED WHILE IN LONDON, ENGLAND

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George Frideric Handel was a great musician who composed many operas and oratorios especially in London. He is an inspiration of many due to his hard work in both music and other fields. For instance, in Hanover, Handel was made the Kapellmeister to the Elector, George Louis who favored him and sent him to visit England for twelve months. During his first visit in London, he was received at Queen Anne's court and stayed there for the first eight months. However, his great interest was in Vanbrugh's new opera house. This was a great chance for her to indulge in her favorite activity of producing quality music. In 1711, the first Italian opera that was composed in London was performed and was very successful.¹ London was yearning for highly qualified musicians such as Handel and his arrival was greatly appreciated. The Queen granted Handel a pension of 200 pounds for his performances and appreciation for the work he was doing in London.² Compositions of Handel in London had great influence on the love for operas and oratorios since they were full of style and high quality, and his style is adored all over the world.

George Frederic Handel was born on February 23 in the year 1685 and realized that he had a talent in music at very tender age.³ He loved to sing and hoped to become a famous musician one day and leave a great record. Handel longed to study music, but his father was against the idea since he doubted that music would give him enough income to live on and raise a good family. However, Handel's mother was very supportive and encouraged him to continue building his talent. By the time, he was ten years, he had mastered composing the

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- ¹1. Anthony Hicks, "Handel, George Frideric," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40060pg13>
 - ²2. Anthony Hicks, "Handel, George Frideric," *Grove Music Online*, 13
 - ³3. Anthony Hicks, "Handel, George Frideric," *Grove Music Online*, 13

oboe and violin, and when he was 17 years, he was composing church cantatas.⁴ Handel's father insisted that he study another course. He enrolled for the law course but did not stay for long because he did not want to suppress his passion for music. Learning law was to please his father and he was not interested in anything not related to music. He, therefore, committed himself fully to music at the age of 18 and he completely accepted violinist's position at the Goose Market Theater for the Hamburg Operas.⁵ Moreover, he got his income from teaching music in private schools during his free time. This allowed him to learn more and have experience that he wanted to begin his music career. The son and the heir of the Grad Duke invited Handel to Italy where he stayed for about three years. Handel reached Rome in the year 1706 and was employed by Francesco Ruspoli as a household musician. In this place, Handel was able to compose many of his Italian operas.⁶ Handel's lifetime was preoccupied with operas due to the influence of Italy's love for the type of music he was offering. Italy became a great center of Handel music in the first 20 years as he met and exchanged ideas with the leading composers of the time as well as the musicians and noble Italian people.

Handel used a choral style, when he was in London, which allowed the singers to participate by singing the choruses. The style that Handel used was appropriate to oratorios because it emphasized on communal and not individual expression that was used in operas. His choruses were admired especially the oratorios in his song "Judas Maccabaeus and the "Israel in Egypt".⁷ The most conspicuous feature of Handel choral writing is the musical

^{44.} Anthony Hicks, "Handel, George Frideric," *Grove Music Online*, 13

^{55.} Anthony Hicks, "Handel, George Frideric," *Grove Music Online*, 13

^{66.} Anthony Hicks, "Handel, George Frideric," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40060pg14>

^{77.} Anthony Hicks, "Handel, George Frideric," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*,

symbolism as well as the pictorial. For example, in the Messiah, he had stressed on the line "all we like sheep have gone astray" have diverged melodic lines with turning figure that never got away from its starting point.⁸ This makes Handel one of the greatest composers who knew how to write choruses. Another style used was the open fugal text with solid blocks of harmony, which was also loved by fans. Handel's compositions were very much harmonized that they never brought confusion to the listeners. In his music, Handel brings the four parts tightly together such as the bass and the tenors, the sopranos and the altos in the middle register. Handelian closing cadences have been in used in this group as an Allegro chorus. A chorus is an important outburst of sounds as it gathers the entire meaning of the composition and allows others to participate in singing. In this case, Handel's use of chorus was the most important innovation in the oratorios. His early training had made him familiar with the choral music of Germany in which it had a combination of the chorus with the orchestra and soloists. Overall, what impressed Handel very much was the English choral tradition. Everyone admired his skills making him quite famous in every place he visited. Everybody wanted to listen to the rich pieces of music since it brought a beautiful sensation to the listeners.

Handel was a skilled organist and harpsichordist and working as a violinist provided him with opportunities to perform in operas. In 1705, he began composing operas, which were very successful and attained about 20- performance run.⁹ Handel continued composing more operas, and in 1706, he moved to Italy. He continued with his passion and composed Rodrigo and Agrippina in 1707 and 1709 respectively besides writing dramatic chamber

Oxford University Press,
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40060pg21>

^{88.} Anthony Hicks, "Handel, George Frideric," *Grove Music Online*, 21

^{99.} Anthony Hicks, "Handel, George Frideric," *Grove Music Online*, 21

works.¹⁰ Over the opera seasons, Handel toured the major cities in Italy and was able to meet several major Italy musicians. Apart from spreading his musical skills to different regions, he was able to tour and enjoyed new sceneries as he travelled. When Handel was in Venice, he met several people who expressed to him their interest in London's music scene. This encouraged him a lot and was determined to give them more of his talents in form of music. From Venice, he went to London and met the manager of the King's Theatre who advised him to write an Opera. Everywhere he went, there was someone to welcome him, and he never felt let down by his music listeners. He composed Rinaldo, which was released during the Opera season in London and became a hit. This was a great moment for him and he never gave up on doing what he loved and cherished most. After the releases of Rinaldo, Handel spent some years performing for English loyalty, King George and Queen Anne. Performing to the queen gave him more fame and his fan base increased tremendously. He became the master of the Orchestra at the Royal Academy of Music, which was the first opera company in London. Handel managed to produce several operas with the Royal Academy of Music, which were well accepted.¹¹ In the year 1726, Handel made London his permanent home and he became the British citizen. Handel broke away from the Royal Academy in 1727 and formed his company after an Italian opera in London due to the hostile rivalry that existed between two female singers, which frustrated Handel very much.¹² Handel named his

¹⁰10. Anthony Hicks, "Handel, George Frideric," *Grove Music Online*, 21

¹¹11. Peter Burkholder, J., Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 449-461. 9th ed. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015), 449

12. Peter Burkholder, J., Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 449

¹²13. Peter Burkholder, J., Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 449

company New Royal Academy and followed by producing two more operas where Italian opera adopted London style. Handel composed two more operas in Italian and later decided to abandon the opera because it was not doing well. This the time he felt things were not going well and needed to venture elsewhere and give music that is more attractive. However, he had enjoyed a successful period due to acceptance of his work by many people. Although, his studio did not do well he was still determined to do more and entertain the world.

In the spring of 1710, Handel had visited Innsbruck and continued to Hanover. While in Hanover, Handel held the distinguished position of the music director at the court of the Hanoverian Elector.¹³ As the director of the music at the court, Handel used to travel more often, and during the summer, he went to places such as London. In England, Handel discovered that they had been importing singers from Italy and nobody had completed an Italian opera in England. Handel, therefore, started the task of composing the operas in London starting by singing his first Rinaldo in February 1711 in the birthday of Queen Anne.¹⁴ He is a man who felt that performing was his best career and giving up was like an empty dream since he continued singing even after his sickness. He did not think of retiring from the music career even at his weakest moments. In 1711, Handel had returned to Hanover but after a year, he went back to London where he performed his other opera the "Fido". He used a pastoral style at this time, and it was not received like the former opera. He later visited the grander form with Teseo and Amadigi in 1713 and 1715 respectively. By this time,

¹³14. Peter Burkholder, J., Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 449

¹⁴15. Peter Burkholder, J., Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 455

he was interested in writing choral music.¹⁵ In 1713, Handel received commissions from the royal court for special accession where he produced works like the *Eternal source of light Divine and the Deum*.¹⁶ Handel was also dismissed in 1713 from his employment in Hanover, but in 1714, he received a raise in his pension.¹⁷ Later in the same year, Handel wrote a *Passion Oratorio* in German and came up with the famous orchestral suite by the name *Water Music*. In 1719, Handel was invited in the summer to compose in residence at Canons. In addition, Handel completed two more operas where one was sacred while the other was secular, the *Esther*, and *Acis and Galatea*. Handel was sent to the European continent as a scout in the year 1719 to recruit singers for the newly established Royal Academy of Music with the intention of supporting Italian opera in London. As a result, many renowned musicians appeared in the Academy of operas. Among them was Castrato Senesino, the sopranos, and tenor Francesco Borosini. In April 1720, Handel opened the first opera for the project *Radamisto* at the King's Theatre.¹⁸ He had a rival in Giovanni Bocconcini, but due to anti-catholic sentiments that followed the Jacobite conspiracies, he got some English support. The season ended in 1727 when Handel and his supporters in the

¹⁵16. Peter Burkholder, J., Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 853-844. 9th ed. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 201e), 85

17. Peter Burkholder, J., Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 843

18. Peter Burkholder, J., Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 844

¹⁶19. George Handel, *Saul: Act II, Scene 10*, (London, UK. 1738), scene 10

¹⁷20. George Handel, *Saul: Act II, Scene 10*, London, UK. 1738), Scene 10

¹⁸21. George Handel, *Giulio Cesare: Act II, Scene 1-2*, (London, UK. 1724), 1

audience resorted to catcalls as well as name-calling during a performance of Bononcini's. The operas were loved very much in London and helped him in increasing home and talent.

Handel decided to turn to Oratorios style, and it became his large-scale concert pieces. The audience was able to change immediately, and it proved to be the best style. The cost for production Oratorios was cheap compared to Operas because they did not require elaborates costumes as well as sets. He started by revising Italian operas so that they may fit in the new format. He translated them into English for London audience. Handel's Oratorios became the craze in London and were made the regular feature of the opera season. Handel produced about 14 concerts in 1735 during the Lent season. He was commissioned by Dublin's Lord Lieutenant to write new Oratorios that were to be based on the biblical libretto. Handel composed oratorio "Messiah" which became Handel's most famous. "Athaliah" was the first English Oratorio that Handel composed.¹⁹ He had laid a foundation of using choruses in his Oratorios, which he never used in operas. He was sure of his composition as well as the presentation of the oratorios. He was not taught on how to write choruses, and he struggled to replace Italians soloist with English. Handel created a tradition to govern the future for oratorios by ensuring that there were no costumes and the singers appeared only in their normal wear. This was a change in performances since earlier performers had to wear uniforms. In 1736, Handel released Alexander's Feast where John Beard joined him, and for the first time he became the permanent tenor soloist in Handel's music.²⁰ Alexander's feast was very successful that he encouraged Handel to make his transitions from Italian operas to English Choral works. His music in London was very effective due to the use of the three

¹⁹22. George Handel, *Giulio Cesare: Act II, Scene 1-2*, (London, UK. 1724), 2

²⁰23. Anthony Hicks, "Handel, George Frideric," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40060pg8>

trombones, a military kettledrum, and a carillon. Moreover, the three instruments made the most excessive noise. Another aspect that made Handel's music in London different from other places is the *Soul and Israel in Egypt* songs that were composed in 1739 because they had a list of great mature Oratorios whereby *da capo* aria did not become the rule but the exceptional.²¹ *Israel in Egypt* consisted of choruses, which had been borrowed from *Funeral Anthem for Queen Caroline*. Handel continued with work changing the course of the composition where he put more emphasis on the effects of orchestra and soloists; in this case, the choruses retired into the background. At the first performance of *Samson*, Handel's use of English soloists reached its peak, and the work became very theatrical. Handel's use of choruses in his oratorios was very important because all his supports admired it. Handel composed his last oratorio in 1752, which became the masterpiece of the rest.

Handel had a lot of stress in the course of his music career, and he had to endure many problems with his physical health since he suffered depression anxiety. Handel suffered the stroke in 1737, which impaired his right-hand movement. He was fully recovered after six weeks though his fans were worried. He went back to London where he both composed and made a comeback at playing the organ. Handel suffered a second springtime stroke after six years and like before, he recovered and composed the stream of ambitious oratorios, which he continued to produce. The first performance of *Messiah* took place in April 1750, and after that, it became the annual event. Handel continued with his composition of oratorios, such as *Jephtha*. When he was working on the final Act II chorus of "How dark, o Lord are thy decrees All hid from mortal Sight", his left eye failed him.²² His right eye also did not stay for

²¹16. Anthony Hicks, "Handel, George Frideric", 8

²²17. George Handel, *Ptolemy: Silent Worship*, (London, UK. 1728),1

long before it failed leaving Handel in total blindness. Although Handel became blind in 1752, he continued to perform organ concertos and volunteered between the part of his oratorios due to his memory and powers of improvisation. Handel remained involved in the arrangements for the performance of his work even though his health was not promising, and he stopped contributing when he died on April 14, 1759. After his death, Handel became a legend. He was then buried in Westminster Abby and his burial site was marked by a monument. A few years after his death, documents on his life began to flow. Series of three commemoration concerts was organized at Westminster Abby and in the Patheon on his 25th anniversary of his death in the year 1784. His work had a big impact to all his listeners and musicians and his hard work encouraged the fans never to give up. Even when he was sick, he did not fail to perform for his audience.

Sir Samuel Heller and Granville Sharp collected Handel's works, which they considered very important. These men are also described as the two men of the late 18th century, and the two left a solid evidence of the means by which they had indulged their enthusiasms. The Italian operas had fallen into obscurity immediately after the death of Handel except a few such as "Ombra Mai Fu". However, the oratorios continued to be performed, soon after the death of Handel, although the oratorios needed some modernization.²³ For that reason, Mozart orchestrated Handel's German version of Messiah, and they performed better than before. Handel's reputation rested on his English oratorios throughout the 19th century and in the half of the 20th century. Choruses of amateur singers performed the oratorios. Handel's death was celebrated in 1859 by a performance of Messiah in which about 2765 singers attended. Moreover, 460 instrumentalists were used to entertain about 10,000 people who had attended. Handel's secular oratorios and concert operas have

²³24. George Handel, *Giulio Cesare*, Act II, Scene 1-2. London, UK. 1724), 2

been revived in the recent decades.²⁴ Altogether, Handel's works have a very good close kinship with the sacred oratorios. In Germany, this great singer is known as Handel while in France he is "Haendel". His fellow composers had accorded him as a person with high esteem. They also said that Handel's understanding had effects to many of his fellow musicians. According to them, Handel was the greatest composer among the composers. People had learnt Handel's popular appeal of music, which he used to say, "go to him so that you may achieve the great effect. From 1831 to date, people have been borrowing Handel's style of composing the songs."²⁵

In conclusion, Handel had realized his talents in music at a very young age, but his father had objected the idea. Through the support of his mother, Handel managed to develop his talent because she was supportive. He started composing church cantatas at the age of only 17 years old. Though his father had asked him to study law, Handel was unable to handle both the law and the music and he opted to continue with his music career. Handel started composing operas in the Italian language when he visited Italy. Later he followed composing oratorios using choral style because it was appropriate to oratorios for it emphasized on communal and not individual expression. Handel was using choruses to stress the point in oratorios, but in operas, he used commentary on a situation. Handel has used the choral style in composing oratorios, which had effects in London for it emphasized on communal expression. In London Handel socialized with famous musicians and singers who helped greatly in inspiring him. Until his death, Handel has lived a king of oratorios and

²⁴25. Anthony Hicks, "Handel, George Frideric," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40060pg21>

operas. He died in 1758 after suffering from the stroke, which left him blind, and immediately after his death, he was made a legend. Compositions of Handel in London had great influence on the love for operas and oratorios since they were full of style and high quality, and his style is adored all over the world.

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