

[Charles Burney, *A General History of Music [...] Volume the Third*]

Indeed, musical criticism has been so little cultivated in our country, that its first elements are hardly known. In justice to the late Mr. Avison, it must be owned, that he was the first, and almost the only writer, who attempted it. But his judgment was warped by many prejudices. He exalted Rameau and Geminiani at the expence of Handel, and was a declared foe to modern German symphonies. [...] A critic should have none of the contractions and narrow partialities of such as can see but a small angle of the art; of whom there are some so bewildered in fugues and complicated contrivances that they can receive pleasure from nothing but canonical answers, imitations, inversions, and counter-subjects; while others are equally partial to light, simple, frivolous melody, regarding every species of artificial composition as mere pedantry and jargon. A chorus of Handel and a graceful opera song should not preclude each other: each has its peculiar merit; and no one musical production can comprise the beauties of every species of composition.

[...]

[vi]

[...] And the same melody which we sing to the 100th Psalm, is not only given to the 134th, in all the Lutheran Psalm-books, but by Goudimel and Claude Le Jeune, in those of the Calvinists; which [35] nearly amounts to a proof that this favourite melody was not produced in England. It is said to have been the opinion of Handel, that Luther himself was its author;¹ but of this I have been able to procure no authentic proof. [...]

[34-35]

(z) If ever any other compositions than those of Handel were to be performed in Westminster-Abbey, during the stupendous Annual Congress of Musicians, it seems as if this [i.e., Tallis's "SONG OF FORTY PARTS," with eight parts for each of five voices], and others of Tallis, Bird, Gibbons, and Purcel, should have the advantage of such a correct and numerous choral band.

[75 note]

[...] and it appears as if the attentive examination of good modern compositions, in score, would be of infinitely more service to a student, than the perusal of all the books on the subject of Music that were written during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Corelli, Handel, and Geminiani, for *Fugues*; [...] Pergolesi, Hasse, Jomelli, Galuppi, Piccini, Sacchini, Paesiello, and Sarti, for *vocal compositions*; and, above all, Handel for organ and choral Music: all easy to be found in our own country, and all models of perfection in correctness of composition, knowledge of instruments, rhythm, modulation, new effects, pathos, fire, invention, and grace.

[100, note (continues from previous page)]

The very terms of *Canon* and *Fugue* imply restraint and labour. Handel was perhaps the only great Fughist [*sic*], exempt from pedantry. He seldom treated barren or crude subjects; his themes being almost always natural and pleasing. Sebastian Bach, on the contrary, like Michael Angelo in painting, disdained facility so much, that his genius

¹ This information appears more than once in Hawkins's *History* (1776).

never stooped to the easy and graceful. I never have seen a fugue by this learned and powerful author upon a *motivo*, that is natural and *chantant*; or even an easy and obvious passage, that is not loaded with crude and difficult accompaniments.

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[...] we should suppose that the pieces of Bull were composed to be *tried*, not played; for private practice, not public use; as they surpass every idea of difficulty than can be formed from the lessons of Handel, Scarlatti, Sebastian Bach; or, in more modern times, Emanuel Bach, Mützel, and Clementi.

[112]

(*m*) [...] this admirable musician [i.e., Frescobaldi], whose fugues upon marked and pleasing subjects, were treated with such genius and learning, as have never been surpassed, unless by those of Sebastian Bach and Handel, which seem to include every perfection of which this ingenious and elaborate species of composition is capable.

[112 note]

[Mus. ex.: “Alman, by Robert Jhonson.”]

(a) A Point which continued in favour from the time of JUSQUIN to that of HANDEL, is here well adjusted to the Manual of Keyed-Instruments.

[118]

[on lack of originality in early English madrigalists]

[...] “If,” says a worthy Nobleman, and enthusiastic admirer of Handel, “some of that great master’s oratorio choruses were well performed, by voices *only*, in the manner of madrigals, how superior would their effect be to the productions of your Bennets, Kirbys, Weelkes’s, and Wilbye’s!” The idea was so just, that I wish to hear it put into execution: as there is doubtless more nerve, more science, and fire, in the worst of Handel’s choruses, than in the greatest efforts of these old madrigalists.

[131 note]

(*c*) We as frequently mistake concerning the past as the future, and judge, from what we hear, of all that *is* to be heard in Music. It has been generally imagined that there were no good fugues or choruses, particularly accompanied with instrumental parts, till Handel’s time; but Colonna, long before, had composed many in the same rich and bold style. [...]

[180 note]

Whoever is accustomed to the vocal fugues of Palestrina, Carissimi, or Handel, will be fastidious with respect to those of other composers of equal learning. [...] Fire, genius, and harmonical resources are discoverable in fugues, as well as in modern songs, solos, or concertos: a musical student, therefore, unacquainted with the laws of fugue, is advanced but a little way in composition; as the hearer who receives no pleasure from ingenious contrivance and complicated harmony, is but a superficial judge. [...]

[196]

(u) [...] In a collection of his [i.e., Marenzio's] madrigals for six voices, published at Antwerp, 1594, some of the movements are gay and spirited, and contain passages that continued in fashion more than a hundred years after publication, as appears by the use that Purcell and Handel have made of them; [...]

[203 note]

(h) The frequent use of the sharp third and minor sixth, if it be reckoned among his harmonies, does little honour to the delicacy of his ear; for even Purcell and Handel, with all their own weight, and the due reverence of the public for their superior genius and abilitie[s], were not imitated in the use of this combination. It is, indeed, admitted by Handel in his Organ Fugues, more through necessity than choice, in order to bring in an answer, or make one subject serve as an accompaniment to another; but it has always the effect of a wrong note in the performance. [...]

[221 note]

(p) [...] the late excellent organist's collection of Music, Mr. Jos. Kelway, master to her majesty, to whose professional merit, with which alone I was acquainted, it seems but justice to take this early opportunity of bearing testimony. During many years of his life his manner of playing the organ, at St. Martin's in the Fields, was so masterly and original, that it was the fashion for the first musicians in London to frequent that Church, in order to hear him; and, among the rest, I have often seen Mr. Handel there. Mr. Kelway was an enthusiast who had nothing symmetric or studied in his voluntaries, which, if they resembled any written Music, were more in the wild and desultory style of Geminiani, his master, than any other. He composed too little to write with facility; and, by despising every thing that was common, and a determination to be new and masterly, he seems, in the few works which he published, to want grace, melody, and experience. His extempore flights, however, on the organ, and his manner of executing the Lessons of Scarlatti, on the harpsichord, will long be regretted by those who had the pleasure of hearing him; for till a new style of Music and execution on keyed-instruments was introduced here, by the use of *piano fortes*, the fire and precision of his performance were such as few of the greatest professors of any country ever attained.

[262 note]

Salinas is said to have been an admirable performer on the organ; an instrument which seems peculiarly happy in its construction for the display of great musical talents, after the privation of sight: for not only Salinas, but Francesco Cieco, the first great organist upon record; Pothoff, the late excellent organist at Amsterdam; and our own Stanley who delighted the lovers of that instrument more than fifty years, seem, with respect to their performance, rather to have gained than lost by this calamity. Milton, we are told, could amuse *himself*, and Handel, we know, had the power of delighting *others* upon this instrument, after total blindness, though it came on late in life.

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(g) The words are likewise often inaccurately accented: he [i.e., Thomas Tudway] throws the accent of the word *triumph* [in his anthem] upon the second syllable, like Handel; which, though but slight, is, indeed, the only resemblance between them.

[458 note]

It is sometimes fortunate for hyperbolic panegyrists of the Music of ancient times, when the particular pieces they celebrate cannot be found. If the productions and performance of Orpheus, Linus, Amphion, Terpander, or Timotheus, could now be realized and compared with those of Handel, Corelli, Leo, Pergolesi, or of many other musicians now living, would they be able to keep their ground, and fulfil our ideas of their excellence, founded on poetical exaggeration? [...]

[477 {1}; NB: duplicate pagination]

The fine arts depend so much on the protection and encouragement of the great, that they have never flourished in any country where its most illustrious inhabitants were indifferent to their charms. And the periods of our own history, in which Music has been the most favoured by royalty, are those alone that entitle us to any kind of share in the honour of its cultivation. [...] happy for the art, when a sovereign's favour is founded on so firm a basis as the works of Handel! Indeed, our [484] country would certainly now be less sensible of their worth, were it not for the royal countenance and patronage with which they have been long and steadily honoured.

[483-84 {1}; NB: duplicate pagination]

[...] His [i.e. Purcell's] songs seem to contain whatever the ear could then wish, or heart could feel. My father, who was nineteen years of age when Purcell died, remembered his person very well, and the effect his anthems had on himself and the public at the time that many of them were first heard; and used to say, that "no other vocal Music was listened to with pleasure, for near thirty years after Purcell's death; when they gave way only to the favourite opera songs of Handel."

[479 {2}; NB: duplicate pagination]

The custom, since the death of Purcell, of opening this magnificent hymn [i.e., *Te Deum* and *Jubilate*] with an overture or symphony, which Handel and Graun have done so powerfully, renders the beginning of our countryman's composition somewhat abrupt, meagre, and inferior in dignity to the subject; [...]

[...] it seems to me as if *all* the composers of this hymn had mistaken the cry of *joy* for that of *sorrow*, in setting *To thee all angels cry aloud*. Here Purcell, as well as Handel, has changed his key from major to minor, and in admirable modulation in itself, has given the movement a pathetic expression, which in reading and considering the idea of that eternal laud and praise which the hierarchies and heavenly hosts offer up to the throne of God, it seems not to require.

[484 {2}; NB: duplicate pagination]

This admirable composition [i.e., Purcell's *Te Deum* and *Jubilate*] was constantly performed at St. Paul's Church on the feast of the sons of the clergy, from the decease of the author, 1695, till the year 1713, when Handel's *Te Deum* for the peace of Utrecht, was produced by order of Queen Anne. From this period till 1743, when his second *Te Deum*, for the battle of Dettingen, was composed, they seem to have been alternately performed. But since that time, Purcell's composition has been but seldom executed,

even at the triennial meetings of the three choirs of Hereford, Worcester, and Gloucester. Handel's superior knowledge and use of instruments, and more polished [487] melody, and, indeed, the novelty of his productions, which, *caeteris paribus*, will always turn the public scale, took such full possession of the nation's favour, that Purcell's *Te Deum* is only now performed occasionally, as an antique curiosity, even in the country.
[486-87]

(m) The review of this work [i.e., Purcell's *Te Deum* and *Jubilate*] has not been undertaken with the least spirit of comparison, in order to exalt our great countryman at the expence of our great foreigner [i.e., Handel]. Some years have passed since these remarks were made, and I purposely avoided looking critically at Handel's *Te Deum*, till the time came, not only for a careful and candid examination of that production, but of such of the other works of that truly great musician, as were performed at his *Commemoration*, in 1784.
[486 {2}; NB: multiple pagination]

(n) These airs [i.e., "A Collection of Ayres composed for the Theatre and on other Occasions, by the late Mr. Henry Purcell" (1697)] are in four parts, for two violins, tenor, and base, and were played as overtures and act-tunes in my own memory, till they were superceded by Handel's hautbois concertos, and those, by his overtures, while Boyce's sonatas, and Arne's compositions, served as act-tunes. [...]
[487 note]

Indian Queen. The first movement of this overture is equal to any of Handel's.
[...]

Dioclesian, or the Prophetess, 1690. The instrumental Music of this English opera given here, consists of an overture of two movements, the first excellent in the style of Lulli, and afterwards of Handel with better fugues; [...]
[488]

[...] [Purcell's song] "I'll sail upon the dog-star," has all the fire of Handel's prime.
[493]

The song on St. Cecilia's day, 1692, has several passages of which Handel frequently made use, many years after, in his *Allegro* and *Penseroso*, and elsewhere.
[499]

[...] that admirable performer the late Mr. Valentine Snow, whose exquisite tone and fine shake must be still remembered by many persons living, who have heard him at Vauxhall, and in Mr. Handel's oratorios.
[499 note]

[...] indeed, since his time nothing can secure success to an English composer, but dexterity at imitation. Handel, Geminiani, and the Italians in general, were long imitated; nor, of late years, would the strains of our countrymen have been borne, much less listened to with pleasure, but for the Italian taste and tincture in their composition. [...]

[502 note (continues from previous page)]

[...] Instrumental Music, therefore, has never gained much by our own abilities; for though some natives of England have had hands sufficient to execute the productions of the greatest masters on the continent, they have produced but little of their own that has been much esteemed. Handel's compositions for the organ and harpsichord, with those of Scarlatti and Alberti, were our chief practice and delight, for more than fifty years; [...] [510]

Handel, who flourished in a less barbarous age for his art, has been acknowledged his [i.e., Purcell's] superior in many particulars (*c*); but in none more than the art and grandeur of his choruses, the harmony and texture of his organ fugues, as well as his great style of playing that instrument; the majesty of his hautbois and grand concertos, the ingenuity of the accompaniments to his songs and choruses, and even in the general melody of the airs themselves; yet in the accent, passion, and expression of *English words*, the vocal Music of Purcell is, sometimes to my feelings, as superior to Handel's as an original poem to a translation.

[511]

In this work [i.e., Francesco Turini's mass for four voices (1643)] there is a canon, upon the subject of which Handel has composed one of his finest instrumental fugues; but, according to his usual practice, whenever he adopted another's thought, he has enlivened and embellished this theme, like a man of true genius, with a counter subject, and shewn that he saw farther into its latent fertility than the original inventor (*n*).

[521]

Near the latter end of the last century a species of learned and elaborate *Chamber Duets* for voices began to be in favour. The first that I have found, of this kind, were composed by JOHN BONONCINI, and published at Bologna in 1691. Soon after, those of the admirable ABATE STEFFANI were dispersed in manuscript throughout Europe. These were followed by the duets of CLARI, HANDEL, MARCELLO, GASPARINI, LOTTI, HASSE, and DURANTE.

[534]

[...] Though Walther and most of the Germans, who wish to rank him [i.e., Steffani] among their countrymen, say that Lepsing was the place of his birth, yet Handel and the Italians make him a native of Castello Franco, in the Venetian state. [...]

[534]

(*c*) See account of his Commemoration, p. 39.

(*n*) The tenor leads off the subject, and is answered at the second bar by the soprano in the octave; at the third bar the base begins a fifth below the tenor, and is answered at the fourth bar by the countertenor an octave above the base.

[...] About the year 1724, after he [i.e., Steffani] had quitted the court of Hanover, where he is said to have resigned his office as maestro di capella, in favour of Handel, he was elected president of the Academy of Ancient Music in London. [...]

[535]

[...] Handel is supposed to have availed himself of [Carlo Maria] Clari's subjects, and sometimes more, in the choruses of Theodora.

[536]

[...] It has been said (*t*), without authority, that Corelli went to Paris in the year 1672, but was soon driven thence by the jealousy and violence [551] of Lulli.

[550-51]

[...] I well remember my pleasure and astonishment in hearing Giardini, in a solo that [559] he performed at the oratorio, 1769, play an air at the end of it with variations, in which, by repeating each strain with different bowing, without changing a single note in the melody, he gave it all the effect and novelty of a new variation of the passages.

[558-59]

The thanksgiving anthem: "Rejoice in the Lord," page 33, page 143 [in Crofts's *Musica Sacra* (1724)], is a very elaborate composition, accompanied with instruments; and if it be remembered, that it was produced about the middle of Queen Anne's reign, before the arrival of Handel, our great model for Music richly accompanied, the symphony or introduction, with a solo part for the hautbois, and two violins, tenor, and base, must shew Crofts in the light of a man of genius, [...]

[609]

The productions of Weldon appear flimsy after those of Crofts; and Dr. Green's after Handel's; yet Green compared with Weldon is a giant: that is, a Handel.

[613]

[...] [Maurice] Greene was an [615] intelligent man, a constant attendant at the opera, and an acute observer of the improvements in composition and performance, which Handel, and the Italian singers employed in his dramas, had introduced into this country. His melody is therefore more elegant, and harmony more pure, than those of his predecessors, though less nervous and original. Greene had the misfortune to live in the age and neighbourhood of a musical giant, with whom he was utterly unable to contend, but by cabal and alliance with his enemies. Handel was but too prone to treat inferior artists with contempt; what provocation he had received from Greene, after their first acquaintance, when our countryman had a due sense of his great powers, I know not; but for many years of his life, he never spoke of him without some injurious epithet. Greene's figure was below the common size, and he had the misfortune to be very much deformed; yet his address and exterior manners were those of a man of the world, mild, attentive, and well-bred. History has little to do with the infirmities of artists; who being

(*t*) Life of Handel, 1760, p. 46.

men, in spite of uncommon gifts and inspirations, are subject to human frailties, which enthusiasm, praise, and the love of fame, more frequently augment than diminish.

[614-15]

The two-part anthem [by Greene]: “Thou, O God, art praised,” has repeatedly a passage on the word *praised*, which has to my ear the disagreeable effect of two fifths; and there is a point at “unto thee shall my vow be performed,” for which he was manifestly obliged to the second movement of Handel’s fourth organ concerto. [...]

[616]

[...] The solo anthem [by Greene]: “Hear, O Lord,” for a base voice, is grave and pathetic, on the model of Handel’s best oratorio songs. The same may be said of the next, for two voices: “I will seek unto God.” [...] “O give thanks,” is wholly built with Corelli’s and Handel’s materials, though somewhat differently disposed; [...]

[617]

[...] The collection of harpsichord lessons, which he [i.e., Greene] published late in his life, though they discovered no great powers of invention, or hand, had its day of favour, as a boarding-school book; for being neither so elaborate as those of Handel, nor difficult as Scarlatti or Alberti’s, they gave but little trouble either to the master or scholar. Indeed, as all the passages are so familiar and temporary, they seem to have been occasionally produced for idle pupils at different times, with whom facility was the first recommendation.

[618]

Dr. Boyce, with all due reverence for the abilities of Handel, was one of the few of our church composers who neither pillaged nor servilely imitated him. [...]

[620]

[...] Upon the death of Handel he [i.e., Stanley] and Mr. Smith undertook to superintend the performance of oratorios, during Lent; and after Mr. Smith retired, he carried them on, in conjunction with Mr. Linley, till within two years of his death, in 1786. [...]

[621]²

² Charles Burney, *A General History of Music, from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period ... Volume the Third* (London: the author, 1789).