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Cantatas for Alto and Continuo: 16 Alto Cantatas from the  
Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (review)

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Music and Letters, Volume 85, Number 3, August 2004, pp. 505-508 (Review)

Published by Oxford University Press



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## Ex. 4

1. D'un em-pia bel-tà Che fè Che  
D'u-n'em-pia bel-tà che fè che

2. Un bel crin d'or Che le ga il cor Che  
Un bel crin d'or che le ga il cor

3. Il cor nel sen Con ri o Con  
Il cor nel sen con ri o con

fè non ha empia bel-tà Che fè  
fè non ha n'em-pia bel-tà che fè  
le-ga il cor bel crin d'or Che le  
cor bel crin d'or che le  
ri-o ve-len cor nel sen Con ri  
rio ve - len cor nel sen con ri

che fè non ha  
che fè non ha  
ga che le ga il  
ga che le ga il cor  
o con ri o ve-len  
o con rio ve - len

A few examples may suffice: Prologo, bar 1, '*Io che de l'o-ce-an*' (strong beats are italicized) needs to be corrected to '*I-o che del o-cean*'; bar 63, '*da un ci-clo-po uc-ci-so*' to '*da un ci-clo-po uc-ci-so*'; Act I Sc. iv, bar 101, '*mie-i sì du-ri af-fan-ni*' to '*mie-i sì du-ri af-fan-ni*' (to allow the dissonance to fall on '*duri*', hard, not on '*si*'); bar 194, '*in-cen-si e vo-ti*' to '*in-cen-si e vo-ti*'; bar 273, '*con-ti-nu-o il duo-lo*' to '*con-ti-nu-o il duo-lo*'; bar 484, '*so-no e (= melisma)*' to '*so-no e*'; Act II Sc. i, bar 120, '*l'a-ri-a e di-stil-la di piog-gie*' to '*l'a-ri-a e di-stil-la di piog-gie*'; bar 241, '*pre-sti ad*' to '*pre-sti ad*'; bar 249, '*d'ir-ti o fa-re trat-to ar-cie-ro*' to '*d'ir-ti o fa-re trat-to ar-cie-ro*'. I could go on correcting such errors, but I stop here.

Fortunately, the Italian is modernized—but only in part. Dunn leaves, for example, the capital at the beginning of a line and does not correct the endings *-cie* and *-gie* into the more up-to-date *-ce* and *-ge*, nor does his punctuation assist comprehension. Errors are introduced: *Pluton* for *Pluto* (I. ii, b. 71), *poiché* [for] in place of *poi che* [after] (b. 77); *da* [from] for *dà* [he gives] (I. iv, b. 201); *fè* for *fé* (II. i, b. 180). The senseless correction of '*puol*' to '*può*' (p. 99) is annoying, because '*si puol*' is a shortened form of *si puollo*, or *lo si può* [it can be] and did not need changing. Above all, an egregious misunderstanding of a pair of words compromises the translation itself. '*Pafò*' (Paphos, Venus) is read as '*paso*' (I. iv, b. 26) and the line '*or non potiam di Pafò in su l'altare*' [now we cannot on Paphos' altar] becomes '*or non potiam di paso in su l'altare*', translated as '*we*

cannot now go up to the altar' (p. xxii), where '*di paso*' was perhaps understood as '*di passo*', quickly. Similarly, the word '*fole*' (I. iv, b. 577), a contraction of *favole* [tales, trifles], becomes '*sole*' [sun], for which '*ci vuol senno e non son fole*' [you need prudence, it's not a trifle] is translated '*you need prudence, not just sunshine*' (p. xxvi), which smacks more of Edward Lear than Loreto Vittori.

I end with a general observation. A–R Editions, with no fewer than seven ongoing series of critical musical editions, is conspicuous for the courage with which it faces the disarray of modern publishing, in which music, expensive and unprofitable, is now rarely undertaken. Nevertheless, I do not believe that editions prepared in haste can check the haemorrhage of purchasers. The failure, for example, to beam the notes by syllable, in addition to encouraging a fixed and rigid performance by the singer, is particularly inappropriate to this music, and has led to an unnecessarily widely spaced layout of music and text. The music sprawls over the page, the eye gets lost and no longer knows where to look. A publisher ought to know that the golden rule of impagination responds more to physiological than aesthetic needs; to contradict four centuries of musical typography means to fail of one's purpose. And why stretch out the bars? To increase the number of pages and justify the high cover price? In the end it costs less to obtain printouts from a microfilm of the original edition (postage included). The original printed version is certainly more elegant, and sometimes even more legible, and it surely presents fewer errors.

DAVIDE DAOLMI

(Translated by Bonnie J. Blackburn)

George Frideric Handel, *Cantatas for Alto and Continuo: 16 Alto Cantatas from the Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Oxford*, ed. Ellen T. Harris. (Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 2002, £30. ISBN 0-19-345413-0.)

Handel wrote some hundred cantatas in a fairly short period of his life that roughly corresponds to the years in which he enjoyed the protection of generous aristocrats, first Italian—when he was in his early twenties (1706–10)—and then English (1712–23). Before he reached the age of 40 Handel had, after a decade in London, become economically independent; as a composer of the Chapel Royal, he decided not to depend any longer on the hospitality of patron friends and, having moved to Brook Street, gave up composing cantatas.

The conjunction in his life between patrons and cantatas is not fortuitous: the genre is linked to aristocratic taste through cultivated private entertainments. It is above all the cantatas for solo voice with simple continuo accompaniment (there are some sixty in the Handel catalogue) that betray this select destination, uninterested in exhibition. Characterized by delicate shades, an often sophisticated use of harmony, alert to the delineation of the most intimate meanings of the text, Handel's cantatas cry out for subtle interpreters and a public prepared to show itself at its best. An extraordinary cantata such as *Lungi n'andò Fileno*, in which a lover laments the departure of the beloved, not only offers harmonic audacities capable of reflecting the inconsolable sorrow of his loss, but distinguishes the first aria from the second by contrasting two similar rhythmic schemes. Both derive from the funereal dactylic metre (— — —), which, in the second aria, that in which he awaits death alone, is transmitted in a regular



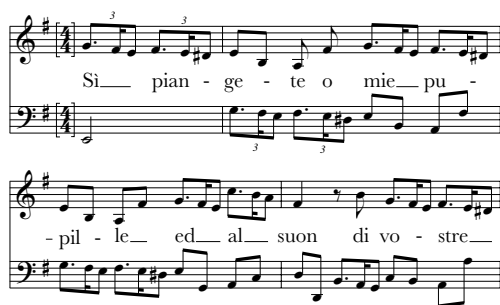
In the first aria, however—where tears are still being shed by the beloved—all of a sudden, by reducing the first of the two short beats, Handel transforms the rather martial dactylic pattern into the imitation of plaintive sobbing:



It is not, as might appear, the rhythm of a siciliana, for the systematic use of three against two displaces the accent to the semiquaver of the triplet, suggesting the jerky movement of one who is prey to tears, as shown in Ex. 1 (*Lungi n'andò Fileno*, first aria: 'Si piangete o mie pupille', bb. 4–7). Instances of such artifice, in which Handel indulges only in chamber music forms, demand an attention that a public accustomed to the pyrotechnics of opera is often not disposed to concede, and perhaps because of this the cantata repertory continues to be performed comparatively rarely and often badly.

For years Ellen T. Harris has been engaged in countering this indifference and, after an analytical book on Handel's cantatas (*Handel as Orpheus: Voice and Desire in the Chamber Cantatas* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), reviewed in *Music & Letters*, 85 (2004), 62–82, esp. 72–82), has now published a critical edition of sixteen cantatas for alto and continuo. Now that the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe is nearing completion, Harris's volume might appear superfluous. In fact, the HHA has not yet published the first two

Ex. 1



volumes in its fifth series, which will contain the cantatas with basso continuo; moreover, Harris does not provide a critical edition *tout court* but has chosen to publish some cantatas from one of the most important Handel sources, the Legh Collection.

This latter—together with the more famous one copied for Cardinal Ruspoli and today preserved at in the Santini collection at Münster—is one of two non-autograph collections of cantatas made during Handel's lifetime. It was put together by Elizabeth Legh (1695–1734), a keyboard player of some accomplishment and an enthusiast for Handel's music. Her brother Charles, a friend of the composer, may have had occasion to put Handel up at his residence, Adlington Hall, in Cheshire, when the composer was on his way to Dublin in 1741. Here, among other things, is still preserved a precious organ of 1670 signed by Bernard ('Father') Smith (Schmidt). Among the little information we have about Elizabeth Legh is the anecdote of the pigeon recounted in the introduction to the libretto of John Christopher Smith's opera *Rosalinda* (1740); it seems that the bird flew from the dovecote to listen every time that she played a particular aria by Handel on the keyboard. Elizabeth died at the age of 39, twenty-five years before her favourite composer, leaving the world some forty volumes of Handel's music, mostly now in the Earl of Malmesbury's collection housed at the Hampshire County Record Office, Winchester. Two volumes of cantatas fared differently and turned up in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, where they carry the shelfmark Mus.d.61–62.

To judge from the preface, the interest in this collection of fifty-five cantatas—for some of which it is the only witness (at least in their disposition) and for others, in the absence of an autograph, one of the most trustworthy sources—is linked to the presence of ornamentation ('more than [in] any other Handel cantata collection', p. iv) and to the predilection for the

contralto range, to which the sixteen cantatas published by Harris are devoted.

In reality the cantatas for continuo that Handel wrote for contralto can be counted on the fingers of one hand; all the others are transposed versions made for Elizabeth Legh (it is not surprising, therefore, that they appear only in this source or derive from it); among the cantatas published here, ornamentation is found only in *Dolc'è pur d'amor l'affanno* and is not conspicuous for its originality. In both categories of cantata we have information on the ways in which a dilettante used Handel's cantatas, not on the cantatas themselves. If the aim, therefore, is to offer a repertory for contralto (or mezzosoprano), reference to the Legh collection is of course a good criterion; nevertheless, all Handel's cantatas, following contemporary practice, can potentially be transposed and adapted to a different register, and to single out the repertory chosen by Miss Legh may be reductive.

However, the editorial principle of transcribing the copy text (the Oxford MSS) and comparing it with some of the most important sources (beginning with the surviving autographs) is carried out well, though I am not in a position to evaluate the editor's preference for some witnesses over others: we still lack a well-constructed stemma of Handel sources. If anything—but this is an observation that applies to all critical editions of music—the apparatus is still insufficiently reader-friendly and could have distinguished between patent errors (which might have been corrected silently), insignificant variants (which could have been relegated to notes), and significant variants, that is to say, those that offer suggestions for performance and the understanding of a piece and its history. It would have been opportune to discuss these last at greater length (e.g., again in *Lungi n'andò Fileno*, the discarded autograph reading in bars 13–14 of the first recitative might suggest a faster performance that would accord well with the words: 'volare vorrei d'appresso' (I would fly close)).

The decision to realize the continuo—in conjunction with some welcome observations on performance practice (pp. ix–x)—can be appreciated in an edition such as this, intended also for non-professionals, and on the whole the sobriety with which it has been carried out may be a good visual aid for the professional who wishes to undertake a more original realization. At most it would not have been a bad idea to reduce the size of the second stave to prevent the less alert reader of this repertory from thinking that it derives from Handel.

The regretful note, as usual, is on restoration

of the Italian text. Harris, though not setting out the criteria for the edition of the text, gives evidence of knowing the language well, offering a transcription that is substantially correct (I note a *sé* without accent in *Qualor crudele*, and an 'ed ostro' to be corrected to *e d'ostro* in *Nel dolce tempo*), and above all a translation that adheres to the meaning of the texts; but she errs conspicuously in the division of the lines of the recitatives. Seventeenth-century Italian recitative, as is well known, rarely uses more than two metres, the *settenario* and the *endecasillabo*; why therefore publish, for example, the opening lines of *Qualor crudele* in this barbarous manner (p. 177)?

Qualor crudele, sì, ma vaga Dori,  
A tue rare bellezze fisso le luci  
E ai tuoi ridenti lumi,  
Veggio ed ammiro  
Quanto san far per nostra meraviglia  
I Numi.

This is in fact three *endecasillabi* interspersed with two *settenari* (which could have been transcribed avoiding the useless initial capitals and improving the punctuation):

Qualor crudele, sì ma vaga, Dori,  
a tue rare bellezze  
fisso le luci e ai tuoi ridenti lumi  
veggio ed ammiro quanto  
san far per nostra meraviglia i numi.

And similarly the four lines of the first recitative of *Irene idolo mio* (p. 172):

Io peno,  
E pur non hai pietà  
De' miei sospir,  
Delle mie pene,

are really only two (*settenario* plus *endecasillabo*):

Io peno e pur non hai  
pietà de' miei sospir, delle mie pene,

Unfortunately, the misunderstanding of the division of the lines is to be found throughout: every cantata has some kind of error (most frequently the division of the *endecasillabo* into two lines in an improbable metre), and the second recitative in *Nel dolce tempo* is set out in twenty-five lines when there are in fact only fourteen! Then it is necessary to correct 'Lungi, lungi n'andò Fileno' (p. 175), where the repetition of 'lungi' is only musical and the line an ordinary *settenario*, while in 'Clori degli occhi miei, Clori del cuore' the repetition is not Handel's but belongs to the poetic text (the line is an *endecasillabo*) and cannot be omitted, thus misrepresenting the line as 'Clori degli occhi miei, del cuore' (p. 169).

Despite its obvious limitations, this edition is valuable for the diffusion of a neglected repertory (Centaur has recently recorded eight of these cantatas; the performances do not inspire much enthusiasm, and the choice has not fallen on the best pieces, but it is a good sign that a new edition should have been followed immediately by a CD) and above all—this is its true value—it restores the pleasure of a domestic Handel, to be sung and played among friends, not necessarily virtuosos but simply lovers of good music. It resolves, in sum, to put forward anew a model of private performance that—rare in these days of too many media—is not far removed from the purposes for which this music was composed three centuries ago (aristocrats aside).

DAVIDE DAOLMI

(Translated by Bonnie J. Blackburn)

Charles-Marie Widor, *Symphonie pour orgue et orchestre, op. 42 [bis]*, ed. John R. Near. Recent Researches in the Music of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, 33. (A-R Editions, Middleton, Wis., 2002, \$106. ISBN 0-89579-515-9.)

Claude Debussy, *Fuge über ein Thema von Jules Massenet für Orgel*, ed. Otto Biba. Diletto musicale: Doblingers Reihe alter Musik. (Doblinger, Vienna and Munich, 2001, €9.95. ISMN M-012-18722-6.)

‘Legendary’ is one way in which John R. Near describes Charles-Marie Widor’s Symphony for organ and orchestra, Op. 42[bis]. However imprecise and overworked that word may be, there is an extraordinary story to tell about this work. It was conceived at the behest of the future King Edward VII for a charity performance at the Royal Albert Hall, London in 1882. Widor fashioned it from three of his movements for organ solo already published in his organ symphonies: the first and last components of the Sixth Symphony, Op. 42, which remain the outer movements, and the Andante of the Second, Op. 13. (The organ and orchestra symphony was given the same opus number as no. 6, which already embraced no. 5 and would eventually take in nos. 7 and 8; ‘bis’ is Near’s useful clarification.) The work was given its premiere on the Cavallé-Coll organ of the Trocadéro shortly before the London performance; Widor was the soloist on both occasions.

In 1904 a young Belgian organist, Charles-Marie Courboin, performed the symphony at Antwerp, and when shortly afterwards he emigrated to the United States, he took his score with him. He became widely recognized as an

organ virtuoso (even as the ‘Rachmaninov of the organ’) and participated in the 1919 dedication concert of the rebuilt organ of the Wanamaker department store in Philadelphia with the Philadelphia Orchestra under the baton of Leopold Stokowski. Then as now one of the largest and most idiosyncratic organs in the world, its combination with the celebrated Philadelphia Orchestra in Widor’s symphony reportedly stole the show. Estimates of the size of the audience vary: 10,000, 12,000, perhaps even 15,000 (Near suggests at least 12,000; in any event, at 18,144, the organ still had more pipes than the audience had members). These numbers dazzled organists of the day, and continue to do so even now.

Never published, the symphony languished, and interest in it did not reawaken until near the end of the century. Linda R. Tyler has called attention to the 1919 concert as a ‘pinnacle of musical extravagance’ (‘“Commerce and Poetry Hand in Hand”: Music in American Department Stores, 1880–1930’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 45 (1992), 87). Craig R. Whitney has also drawn attention to it: ‘Courboin and Stokowski brought electricity to the Wanamaker’s event’ (*All the Stops: The Glorious Pipe Organ and its American Masters* (New York, 2003), 42). Courboin’s copy made possible a performance in 2000 on the enormous Spreckels outdoor organ in San Diego, and in 2002 the symphony as edited by Near was featured at the national convention of the American Guild of Organists in Philadelphia with James David Christie at the organ. Thanks to Near and his splendid edition, Widor’s symphony finally has the chance to become a living legend.

As in Near’s landmark edition of Widor’s ten organ symphonies in as many volumes (*Charles-Marie Widor: The Symphonies for Organ* (Madison, Wis., 1991–7)), he here provides an impressively documented introductory essay (as well as fascinating plates and an exhaustively detailed critical report). The discussion of the 1919 concert is particularly rich in contemporary reports. For example, the Wanamaker concert director, Alexander Russell, thought the symphony created ‘a perfect Niagara of sound’; however, the reviewer for *Musical America*, H. T. Craven, found in the work ‘a degree of majesty and tremendous eloquence that is a little short of overwhelming’ and had trouble determining if the work was a concerto or a symphony. Near is quick to acknowledge that the symphony resists assignment to such genres. Yet, as Craven suggested, the problem is not entirely a formal one; the tone of the symphony also raises questions.