



Nova de Lisboa. Bridging archival research and performance practice, unafraid of creative experimentation and not easily mystified by theoretical fashions, the authors represented in this book demonstrate the dynamism of recent Portuguese musicology.

ROGÉRIO BUDASZ
<budasz@ucr.edu>



Eighteenth-Century Music © Cambridge University Press, 2017
doi:10.1017/S147857061600035X

DAVID HUNTER

THE LIVES OF GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

Woodbridge: Boydell, 2015

pp. xvii + 515, ISBN 978 1 78327 061 3

This substantial volume incorporates material from David Hunter's numerous published articles and scholarly papers produced over the last two decades. The result is a work of impressive bibliographical control, in which sensitive and sometimes controversial topics are probed in the quest to 'evaluate thoroughly the familiar, even over-familiar, story of Handel's life' (11). The author does more than merely scrutinize older biographies for accuracy and update them with fresh evidence and interpretations in order to construct a new 'life' of the composer, however. He also raises wider questions about the concept of biography itself, particularly how earlier 'lives' of Handel were constructed and disseminated, and how these historically contingent documents have fashioned our perceptions of him ever since. Like Ellen Harris's *George Frideric Handel: A Life with Friends* (New York: Norton, 2014), the book is structured around broad themes such as patronage, pensions, friendships and health. However, whereas Harris situates these topics within a chronological narrative, Hunter steers clear of an overall linear presentation of events. This approach has potential advantages: it enables similar topics and themes to be considered at different points in the narrative and from a variety of angles, thereby 'replicating, to some extent, the episodic nature of life' (8), and it avoids portraying Handel's biography as a tidy trajectory of his 'inexorable rise to greatness' (4), thus allowing a more nuanced picture of his personality to emerge. There are also some drawbacks, particularly the acknowledged difficulty of bringing together 'all those seemingly disparate parts into a cohesive whole' (5), and the inevitable duplication of some material. The volume comprises nine chapters, with titles such as 'The Audience: Partner and Problem' (chapter 2), 'Self and Health' (chapter 6) and 'Nations and Stories' (chapter 8). Each is broken down into between three and twelve sub-chapters varying between half a page and twenty pages in length, some of which contain four or five further subsections. These divisions facilitate navigation of the different topics, many of which are effective as stand-alone pieces, although for readers who elect to use the book in this way it would have been helpful to include all headed sections in the list of contents. When tackled as a whole, however, the diffuse nature of the narrative makes this book a challenging read.

The difficulties experienced by the author in marshalling such diverse material into an effective structure are not alleviated by his literary style, which is idiosyncratic and at times convoluted; I found myself having to reread certain passages two or three times before discerning even a vague idea of their meaning. Hunter's penchant for lengthy digression often results in the main argument being put on hold for several pages, and it is perhaps telling that he finds it necessary to end each chapter with a conclusion that attempts to pull together its various strands. Further disruption is created by the large number of footnotes (1,588 of them), which sometimes cover three quarters of a page. The bibliography, admitted to be 'overwhelming' (xv), includes over 160 articles and books on musical matters alone, some of them *recherché* in the extreme. Yet reference to the significant research of Handel scholars like Suzanne Aspden and Ilias Chrissochoidis, who have written extensively on topics covered in Hunter's book, is entirely absent. Another curious omission



from the bibliography is Christopher Hogwood's edited collection *Geminiani Studies* (Bologna: Ut Orpheus, 2013), which updates Enrico Careri's study of that composer's life and works (*Francesco Geminiani (1687–1762)* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993)).

Hunter takes a refreshing perspective on a number of issues, including the reasons for Handel's so-called 'oratorio turn', that is, his move away from Italian opera in the late 1730s. Dissenting from previous views, he attributes this change of tack to the composer's ill health at the time, an explanation I find quite convincing without wishing wholly to discount the influence of other factors. A particularly unsettling aspect of this book, though, is the ease with which its author slips from hypothesis to certitude. Thus the suggestion that Handel's blindness might have been a consequence of lead poisoning (302) becomes an unshakable statement of fact: 'These symptoms, and his blindness, were the consequences of lead poisoning' (305–306; my italics). Having appraised iconographic and written testimony to the composer's corpulence and gluttony, Hunter concludes that he suffered from bulimia, despite admitting that 'for a clinician, the stories are insufficient to assign a diagnosis of binge eating' (275). Entitling this section 'An Eating Disorder Diagnosis' (274) rather begs the question and lends his thesis greater credibility than the evidence can sustain. There is nothing to suggest that Handel felt compelled to overeat or had an excessive preoccupation with food and weight; perhaps, like Samuel Johnson, he was merely intemperate in his dietary habits. The author also takes to task certain 'myths' that have long since been laid to rest, such as the claim that Frederick, Prince of Wales was instrumental in setting up the Opera of the Nobility in order to oppose Handel. Hunter protests that this 'ought to have been examined and set aside as hyperbolic political propaganda long ago' (192). Well, it has: see Peggy Daub, 'Handel and Frederick', *The Musical Times* 122 (November 1981), 733; Carole Taylor, 'Handel and Frederick, Prince of Wales', *The Musical Times* 125 (February 1984), 89–92; and Christopher Hogwood, *Handel* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984), 121.

Hunter is least secure when discussing technical matters. Thus in chapter 5, 'Musical Genres and Compositional Practices', he writes: 'When Handel wished to deploy trumpets or horns he had to do so in D, though crooks could be used to lengthen the tubing, thereby lowering the instrument's pitch and allowing it to play in C, for example' (209). It is difficult to know what to make of this. If he is implying that the composer restricted himself to a horn pitched in D, and that crooks were inserted to lower its fundamental as required, then he is mistaken; how, one might ask, would Handel's horn player have coped with the obbligato parts in 'Va tacito e nascosto' (*Giulio Cesare in Egitto*) and 'Mirth, admit me of thy crew!' (*L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*), which are in F and E flat respectively? I suspect what Hunter is trying to say is that when Handel used horns in conjunction with trumpets he did so in D. Just as clumsy is the following gloss to his definition of a sequence: 'This can happen over the same harmony or, with greater difficulty, over a new key' (225). The general level of debate here makes one wonder about his intended readership. What is to be gained from describing the elements of baroque compositional technique and pointing out, for instance, that in 'And he shall purify' (*Messiah*) 'Handel adds imitation'? Comments such as 'Handel had to work with a relatively restricted palette. We can only imagine what he might have done with saxophones, tubas or electric guitars' (208) and 'He had no ambition to prefigure the *gesamtkunstwerk* [*sic*] of Richard Wagner' (243) contribute little to our understanding of the composer and his music.

Almost inevitably, some small errors have crept into the multitude of facts and figures that the author juggles. To cite just a few: 'Geminiani's opera [*L'incostanza delusa*] was performed at the King's Theatre, Haymarket, on nine consecutive Saturday evenings . . . A typical opera season would have also had performances on Wednesday evenings' (37); in fact, that production was mounted at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, and opera nights at the time were normally Saturdays and Tuesdays. 'Handel deployed three trombones in *Saul* . . . making it unique among his works' (212); actually, three trombones are also used in *Israel in Egypt*. 'Walsh was "confined" to Marshalsea Prison in 1726 for non-payment of stamp duty' (128); had Walsh been incarcerated, he would have been sent to the Marshalsea of the King's Bench, a neighbouring but quite separate institution. There are also a number of confusing or misguided statements. For instance, the erroneous claim that Handel's oratorios were performed in 'sacred spaces' (236) is retracted on the following page. Furthermore, the assertion that the performers for these English-language works were 'native singers'



is a misleading oversimplification; Handel also employed many continental singers for his oratorios – Giulia Frasi, Elisabeth Duparc, Caterina Galli, Thomas Reinhold, Gaetano Guadagni, Elisabetta Gambarini (to name but a few) – and in some instances created roles specially for them.

As a work of scholarship, this book will be most valuable for readers who are already familiar with Handel biography and know that the arguments rehearsed therein represent the sometimes contentious views of its author. Since there is little by way of musical analysis, the text may be useful to a wider readership as a reference book, particularly for discussions of the social-historical environment in which Handel lived and worked. It represents good value at £30 for a hardback edition, though the quality of some of its illustrations (all of which are in black and white) could be improved. In writing this book the author has set himself a laudable but difficult task: 'to distinguish fact from fiction' (1) and expose the myths surrounding Handel's life for what they are. Unfortunately, so much speculation and suspect reasoning is applied in the process that he is in danger of replacing the old myths with new ones of his own.

CHERYLL DUNCAN

<cheryll.duncan@rncm.ac.uk>



Eighteenth-Century Music © Cambridge University Press, 2017
doi:10.1017/S1478570616000361

ELISABETH LE GUIN

THE TONADILLA IN PERFORMANCE: LYRIC COMEDY IN ENLIGHTENMENT SPAIN

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014

pp. xxi + 383, ISBN 978 0 520 27630 7

Musicologists, particularly scholars of Iberian music, will already be familiar with Elisabeth Le Guin and her work on late eighteenth-century music through her previous book *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Her most recent work, *The Tonadilla in Performance: Lyric Comedy in Enlightenment Spain*, continues within this period but shifts focus to dramatic music. Her book is valuable not only for its relatively unfamiliar content, which makes it an indispensable volume for scholars of both Spanish music and drama in general, but also for Le Guin's approach to her subject, examining and drawing conclusions from correspondence, censor reviews, contemporaneous newspaper articles, various types of libretto and the extant music.

The book is divided into an introduction and seven sections (five chapters and two shorter sections), followed by 133 pages of examples, endnotes, bibliography and index. The inclusion of both examples within the main text and longer scores in the Appendix is a significant benefit. These samples both help to prove her important points and give a taste of the richness and variety of the *tonadilla* genre. In a book about a better-known genre, such extensive examples might be considered excessive; however, this genre is so poorly known to today's audiences that the inclusion of numerous and lengthy examples can be justified.

Le Guin begins the book by introducing the *tonadilla*, a short, comic dramatic piece meant to be inserted into longer works and serving a similar purpose as the Italian intermezzo. The *tonadilla* was well known to audiences in the second half of the eighteenth century, but owing to a variety of circumstances discussed by Le Guin, the genre fell out of favour, and it is almost unknown today. Le Guin notes that many writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries found the *tonadilla* to be too influenced by Italianate styles to be part of the nationalist musical identity they were constructing. Other writers, conversely, thought the *tonadilla* embodied the unique folk flavour of Spanish comedy, but dismissed the genre because it was not weighty enough to be taken seriously. In both cases, the *tonadilla* was excluded from monographs and other studies on Spain's musical heritage.