5 Handel's London – British musicians and London concert life

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When Handel arrived in London in the last weeks of 1710, Henry Purcell had been dead for just fifteen years. His younger brother Daniel, though still active as a professional organist, was no longer a productive composer, and much the same is true of the long-lived William Turner (1651–1740), who, with John Blow (d. 1708), had been the most distinguished of Purcell's colleagues and contemporaries in the Chapel Royal. Likewise John Eccles, the leading English theatrical composer at the turn of the century, and official court composer from 1700 until his death in 1735, had by this time retired from the hurly-burly of life in the city and gone to live in Hampton Wick where, according to Hawkins,[1] he spent most of his time fishing. As for Jeremiah Clarke, one of the more impressive creative talents of the next generation, he had, seemingly for love, put a pistol to his head in late November 1707. Of those native composers still left and active on the London musical scene, much the most gifted were John Weldon (1676–1736) and William Croft (1678–1727), both of whom Handel must surely have encountered quite early on in his first visit.

A former organist of New College, Oxford, Weldon moved in 1701 to London where, as a rank outsider, he immediately succeeded in winning first prize (over the heads of both Eccles and Daniel Purcell, who came second and third respectively) in a celebrated competition for a setting of Congreve's masque *The Judgment of Paris*.[2] In 1708 he succeeded Blow as one of the two organists of the Chapel Royal, and not long after he was also appointed second composer for the Chapel, at which point he seems more or less to have dried up. Though he published a number of attractive songs, his church music, most of which had been written by 1715, is disappointing. Croft is altogether more important. A former Chapel Royal chorister and protégé of Blow, he was by 1710 firmly ensconced not only as principal organist and composer but also as Master of the Children there, and organist of Westminster Abbey as well. As a young man, he contributed a certain amount of incidental music to the plays at the patent theatres; he also wrote a good deal of fine keyboard music,

many songs and some instrumental chamber music (mostly early), but it is for his church music that he is now chiefly remembered. His output was considerable and included four large-scale orchestrally accompanied anthems and a Te Deum. Handel would almost certainly have heard some of these pieces, and they may even have provided useful models for his own first efforts in this field. As regards the 'Utrecht' Te Deum and Jubilate, however, the more obvious exemplar was the famous Purcell setting of 1694. [3]

In the words of Thomas Tudway, another of Purcell's immediate contemporaries, but now organist of King's College, Cambridge, and Professor of Music in the University there, Purcell 'was confessedly the greatest Genius we ever had'.[4] In 1710, however, Handel's music was still unknown to the great majority of English music lovers, though some London theatre-goers at any rate would have encountered those extracts from *Rodrigo* which, earlier that same year, had been included in a revival of Ben Jonson's comedy, *The Alchemist*, as the work of an unspecified 'Italian Master'.[5] But Handel himself was by no means backward in coming forward. According to Mainwaring,[6] he 'was soon introduced at Court, and honoured with marks of the Queen's favour'. Indeed, it seems that, on 6 February 1711, less than three weeks before the triumphant premiere of *Rinaldo*, the birthday of Queen Anne was celebrated with[7]

> a fine Consort, being a Dialogue in *Italian*, in Her Majesty's Praise, set to excellent Musick by the famous Mr. *Hendel*, a Retainer to the Court of *Hanover*, in the Quality of Director of his Electoral Highness's Chapple, and sung by Signior *Cavalier Nicolini Grimaldi* and the other Celebrated Voices of the *Italian* Opera: With which Her Majesty was extreamly well pleas'd.

What the work was, however, we do not know. Handel's English Birthday Ode for the Queen, *Eternal source of light divine* (HWV 74), composed two years later, was probably never performed,[8] though it was clearly intended for court performance in the year of the 'Utrecht' peace celebrations.

Quite whom Handel met on that first visit to London we can only guess, but it must obviously have included John Jacob Heidegger (1666–1749), the Swiss impresario already intimately involved in the operatic life of the capital and with whom Handel's own career was, for so many years, to be so very closely connected. Another early professional associate must have been Aaron Hill, who produced the scenario for *Rinaldo* and was later, in 1732, to issue an impassioned appeal to Handel[9]

> 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 necessary.

One English poet who knew how to do just that, and was indeed concerned to effect a rapprochement between English words and Italian-style music, was John Hughes (1677–1720), with whom, it is clear from a letter written by Handel at the end of July 1711, the composer was already acquainted.[10] Not long after this, and certainly before 1714, Hughes wrote the words for a cantata *Venus and Adonis,* which was doubtless one of the very first English texts set to music by Handel, while his contribution to Handel's first English dramatic masterpiece *Acis and Galatea,* would now appear to have been greater than hitherto supposed.[11]

When, in the late autumn of 1712, the composer returned to London determined this time to settle, he lived at first with a certain Mr Andrews at Barn-Elms, in an area where, some years later, Heidegger also lived in some style. Barn-Elms (Barnes) would then have been a rural retreat somewhat removed from the musical and artistic life of the metropolis. It was not long, however, before he was invited to take up residence at Burlington House, the palatial London home of Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington, and in 1717 he removed to Cannons, the no less imposing mansion of James Brydges, Earl of Carnarvon and soon to become first Duke of Chandos. During his time at Burlington House, if not before, Handel would have come into contact with a lively and interesting literary and intellectual circle which included Alexander Pope and his friend John Arbuthnot, John Gay and Burlington's architect, William Kent, an essentially anti-Establishment group, tainted with Jacobitism.[12]

It was evidently soon after his return to England in 1712 that Handel first made the acquaintance of the men of the St Paul's and Chapel Royal choirs. If we may believe Hawkins, the composer frequently attended evensong at the cathedral and then stayed on to play the organ (of which he was said to have been 'very fond'); after that, he often repaired with the gentlemen of the choir to the Queen's Arms tavern in St Paul's Churchyard where he enjoyed an evening of convivial conversation, and yet more music.[13] Burney, commenting on the St Paul's connection, tells an amusing tale of how Handel 'used frequently to get himself and young Greene [i.e. Maurice Greene, then assistant organist of the cathedral] locked up in the church, together' and, with Greene acting as bellows-blower, 'in summer, often stript into his shirt, and played till eight or nine o'clock at night'.[14] The particular attraction of the St Paul's organ is said to have been that it alone among the large English instruments of the period had pedals, but this was not in fact yet the case, though it may well be that a set of 'pull-down' pedals were among the 'Amendments and Alterations' made to it in 1720. Handel's prowess as an organist was well known, and on 24 August 1724 the two eldest of the Royal princesses,

Anne and Caroline, who had by then become his pupils, visited the cathedral to hear 'the famous Mr. Handel' play.[15]

By this time too, Maurice Greene (1696–1755) had succeeded his teacher, Richard Brind, as organist of St Paul's. Much the most talented English musician of his generation, Greene was clearly destined for higher things, and in August 1727 he stepped naturally into Croft's shoes as principal organist and composer of the Chapel Royal. On the death of Eccles in 1735, he became Master of the King's Musick also. In the meantime, he had taken a doctorate of music at Cambridge, and 'in compliment to his performance' had been made (honorary) Professor of Music in the University. According to Hawkins, Greene 'courted the friendship of Mr. Handel with a degree of assiduity, that, to say the truth, bordered upon servility; and in his visits to him at Burlington-house, and the duke of Chandois's, was rather more frequent than welcome'.[16] Later, however, they fell out, so violently in fact that Handel, in Burney's words, 'never spoke of him without some injurious epithet'.[17] Quite what the reason was remains a matter of conjecture; certainly Hawkins' explanation – that it was Handel's discovery that Greene 'was paying the same court to his rival, Bononcini, as to himself' – does not ring true.[18] The break came, it seems, somewhere round about 1727, and may well have had something to do with their relative standing as composers at court. Certainly, the following extract from a spirited polemic in defence of Handel, first published in 1734, would appear to suggest that there was an element of pique involved:[19]

> You must know then, Sir, [that] I [Handel] once went to the World in the Moon [i.e. England] . . . [where] I was immediately admitted into the good Graces of the Court, and principal Grandees; who were all ravished with the Novelty and Exquisiteness of my Compositions: In consequence of which I was declar'd principal Composer to their O[per]as; and *should have enjoy'd* the same Station in the Court Chapels and Publick Temples, only that Place could not be conferr'd upon a Foreigner: Yet upon all Solemn Occasions, they were obliged to have Recourse to me for their Religious Musick, tho' their ordinary Services were all compos'd and performed by Blockheads that were Natives; they claiming from several Laws a Right hereditary, to have the Places in their Temples supply'd with Fools of their own Country.

Whenever the interests of the Royal Family themselves were directly involved, as for example at the Coronation of George II in 1727 and the wedding of Princess Anne seven years later, it was Handel, not Greene, who was called upon to hymn the event; in the latter case the two were openly in contention, because an anthem specially composed by Greene for the occasion was displaced by Handel's *This is the day which the Lord has made* (HWV 262).

Though Italian opera, all-sung, had been but lately (and somewhat precariously) established on the London stage at the time of Handel's arrival, the city enjoyed a teemingly active concert life. Thanks to the pioneering efforts of John Banister in the 1670s, London had become in fact the first city in Europe in which musical performances were commercialised, and auditors actually paid to listen. Among the venues in which concerts regularly took place was York Buildings in Villiers Street, then owned by Sir Richard Steele, the editor of *The Spectator*, and the first room in London specifically designed for the purpose. Located just off the Strand on a site now occupied by Charing Cross Station, it functioned from about 1680 until 1732 when, after a performance of Handel's *Esther* given there on 20 July of that year, it was apparently closed. Even more important throughout the whole of the eighteenth century was 'Mr. Hickford's Great Room', originally situated in James Street, quite close to the opera house in the Haymarket, and later (from 1739) in Brewer Street, in a rather newer and more fashionable part of town. The scene of the young Mozart's English debut in 1765, it survived until 1934 when the building was demolished to make way for the Regent Palace Hotel annexe.[20]

Virtually every reputable artist of the day played in one or the other, if not both, of these concert venues – but not, curiously enough, so far as is known, Handel. Though London audiences were obviously struck by the prodigious dexterity shown in the harpsichord solo passages incorporated in Armida's aria 'Vo' far guerra' in *Rinaldo*, it was not until he started to include organ concertos between the acts of his oratorio performances in the mid-1730s that Handel regularly appeared in public as a solo keyboard player. A newspaper advertisement for a performance of *Teseo* given on 11 May 1713 specifically mentions the addition of 'an Entertainment for the Harpsichord, Composed by Mr. Hendel on purpose for that Day' (which was a benefit for Handel himself),[21] but otherwise all we have are a few fleeting references to such occasional private musical entertainments as that hosted (and charmingly described) by Mrs Pendarves (later Mrs Delany) in April 1734, when Handel evidently 'played lessons and accompanied Strada and all the ladies that sang from seven o' the clock till eleven'.[22] Similar private performances were organised by various musically inclined members of the upper classes, most notably perhaps Viscount Perceval, first Earl of Egmont, but Handel is not known to have been involved, though he probably performed to private gatherings whilst living at Burlington House, and at Cannons.

In an entirely different category were the celebrated concerts promoted by Thomas Britton, the so-called 'musical small-coal man' who, from 1678 until his death in 1714, presided over a series described by

Hawkins as 'the weekly resort of the old, the young, the gay and the fair of all ranks, including the highest order of nobility'.[23] These took place in a long narrow room directly over his shop in Clerkenwell, with Handel, it is said, a frequent performer on the harpsichord. Among the other participants were John Hughes (who was also an accomplished violinist) and Johann Christoph Pepusch (1667–1752), a fellow German expatriate who, at the time of Handel's arrival, was probably the single most active figure on the London musical scene. Also prominent in London's concert life, though not so far as we know in the Britton series, were the German oboist and composer Johann Ernst Galliard, the French-born violinist and harpsichordist Charles Dieupart, the Italian soprano Francesca Margherita de L'Epine (whom Pepusch later married), the leader of the opera house orchestra William Corbett, and John Loeillet, its principal oboist and flautist (i.e. recorder player), the English harpsichordist (and violinist) William Babell, and Nicola Haym, an Italian 'cellist and composer who was soon to become closely associated with Handel, together with a host of lesser artists such as Thomas Clayton who had earlier (in 1705) been responsible for the first English opera 'after the Italian manner'. Other distinguished foreign performers such as Veracini and Geminiani followed shortly – both arrived in 1714 – and the first appearance of the latter at court is said to have been accompanied, at Geminiani's insistence, by Handel himself.[24] Later still, in 1729, the great Italian oboist and composer Giuseppe Sammartini also arrived.

In addition to the concert rooms, music was also regularly to be heard in the theatres, not only as 'First and Second Musick' performed before the play itself began, but also between the acts. Later in the century, mini-operas in English like Boyce's *The Chaplet* (1749) and Arne's *Thomas and Sally* (1760) were often tacked on to the end of the evening's theatrical entertainment, as 'afterpieces'. But the theatres themselves – Drury Lane, Lincoln's Inn Fields, the new Covent Garden Theatre from 1732, and the Queen's (later King's) Theatre in the Haymarket – were often used for concerts as well, chiefly it seems benefit concerts to which various members of the profession would contribute their services in support of a (sometimes necessitous) colleague. Necessitous colleagues were also looked after by annual concerts given in aid of the 'Fund for the Support of Decayed Musicians and their Families' (now the Royal Society of Musicians) founded in 1738, and generously supported by Handel, who was a founder member.[25]

For many eighteenth-century Englishmen, the charitable use of music was a happy way of salving their corporate social conscience, and from the 1740s onwards the various London charities (most notably, in a Handelian context, the Foundling Hospital, as also Mercers' Hospital in

Dublin) were assiduous in summoning music – generally either *Messiah* or the Handel Coronation Anthems – to their aid. Even earlier in the field were the Sons of the Clergy, whose annual festival service held in St Paul's Cathedral was presided over by Greene, and normally involved an orchestrally accompanied setting of the Te Deum together with a specially composed anthem performed by the combined choirs of St Paul's, Westminster Abbey and the Chapel Royal, accompanied by the largest band of instrumentalists to be heard on any suchlike occasion anywhere in the country. During the earlier part of the century, the Te Deum used was usually Purcell's 1694 setting, but the notion that this was replaced by Handel's 'Utrecht' setting in 1713 and that the two were thereafter alternately performed until 1743, when Handel's new 'Dettingen' Te Deum supplanted both, is no more than a myth which originated with Burney.[26] Indeed, there is no evidence of any music by Handel being performed at any Sons of the Clergy Festival prior to 1731.

By a curious coincidence, it seems that it was also in January 1731 that a work of Handel's (the 'Utrecht' Te Deum and Jubilate) was for the first time included in any of the programmes of the Academy of Vocal (subsequently Ancient) Music.[27] This was a prestigious semi-private concert-giving society which, like many other similar groups that sprang up in the period shortly after Britton's death, met regularly in one of the many London taverns with large rooms suitable for music: in this case, the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand. Founded by Pepusch, Galliard, Croft and Greene together with a number of other (mainly Chapel Royal) musicians, the membership grew from a nucleus of thirteen (plus the choristers of St Paul's Cathedral) at their inaugural meeting on 7 January 1726 to as many as eighty-two by the 8th Subscription of 9 April 1730.[28] Included in that number were Bononcini, Senesino, Haym and Geminiani – but not Handel – Pier Francesco Tosi (the famous castrato, now in his seventies), Giuseppe Riva the Modenese ambassador in London, William Hogarth the painter, and the Lords Perceval, Paisley and Plymouth. Concerts were given fortnightly during the season from late autumn to spring and, while the Academy was evidently by no means averse to performing contemporary music (the works of its own composer members in particular), its primary concern, as is implied by the name it was shortly to acquire, was with music of the past. (In a memorandum dated 26 May 1731, the 'ancients' were defined as 'such as lived before the end of the Sixteenth Century'.)[29] A wordbook of 'such Pieces as are most usually performed by the Academy of Ancient Music' published thirty years later is an astonishing document which shows just how extensive was the range of early music in their repertoire; it also reveals the considerable number of Handel's works they had performed.

The Crown and Anchor Tavern, later a favourite haunt of Dr Johnson's (though he himself was notoriously unmusical), was a popular venue for concerts, and it was there, on 23 February 1732, Handel's forty-seventh birthday, that *Esther* was revived under the aegis of Bernard Gates, Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal, with repeat performances on 1 and 3 March, the latter for the Academy of Ancient Music, with which Gates was then also connected. The first two of these performances were, it appears, promoted by members of the Philharmonic Society (also known as the Society of Gentlemen Performers of Musick) which likewise met there, and which, as the 'Philarmonica Club', had earlier subscribed to the publication of *Rodelinda*, *Scipione*, *Alessandro* and *Admeto*. The Duke of Chandos is said to have been a member, and its orchestra was led by Michael Christian Festing, the leading English violinist of the period. Other flourishing London music clubs include the Castle Society which met initially in the house of John Young, the musical instrument maker and publisher in St Paul's Churchyard. Quickly outgrowing its accommodation there, it transferred to the Queen's Head Tavern in Paternoster Row and then, in 1724, moved just round the corner to the Castle Tavern from whence it took its name.[30] Also important as a venue for concerts were the Swan Tavern in Exchange Alley, Cornhill, the Globe Tavern in Fleet Street, and the Devil Tavern, Temple Bar, which, from 1731, housed the meetings of Greene's Apollo Society, a splinter group whose organisers had originally belonged to the Academy of Ancient Music.

Such tavern-based musical societies were by no means confined to the metropolis, and contemporary subscription lists show numerous similar groups operating in the provinces. Some, like the Musical Society at Oxford, subscribed to all of Handel's later publications, from *Atalanta* in 1736 to the *Grand Concertos* Op. 6 issued in April 1740; the latter was taken not only by several of the London clubs already mentioned, but also by music societies in Dublin, Canterbury, Salisbury and the 'Ladies Concert in Lincoln'.[31] In almost every case, one assumes, the name of Handel loomed large on the musical agenda, and especially so at the annual performances of the Three Choirs' Festival (founded *c.* 1715). Although it has been said that the first recorded performance of Handel's music outside London took place at Bristol in November 1727,[32] a tantalising reference to 'Hendel's Oritorio [sic], & some of his Anthems' by Claver Morris, a Wells-based west-country physician and keen amateur musician, in a diary entry for 1 May 1724 shows that this cannot be so.[33] Much the most important of all the provincial performances, however, and the only ones in which Handel himself was involved, were those which took place during his celebrated visit to Oxford in July 1733, when

Athalia had its first performance in the Sheldonian Theatre.[34] Four months prior to this, *Applebee's Original Weekly-Journal* of 7 April had informed its readers of the university's intention of presenting 'the celebrated Mr. Handel with the Degree of Doctor of Musick, at the Publick Act to be held there this Summer' and also that 'Signor Senesino is expected to be present on that Occasion'. In the event, however, neither happened, for not only had Handel in the meantime fallen out with Senesino, but he evidently also declined the offer of an honorary degree – on the grounds (so it was said) that his erstwhile friend Maurice Greene had, three years earlier, taken a doctorate in music at Cambridge. How ironic then that one of Greene's orchestral anthems, *O praise the Lord, ye angels of his*, should later find its way into Chrysander's monumental collected edition as the work of Handel himself.[35]

More or less coincident with all of this concert activity was the development of music at the various London Pleasure Gardens from the late 1730s onwards, and here too a great deal of Handel's music was performed. First to open its doors, in June 1732, was Vauxhall Gardens owned by Jonathan Tyers who, five years later, commissioned the well-known Roubiliac statue of Handel which is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum (but was then, in April 1738, sited just to the west of the orchestral bandstand in the Gardens). Here nightly concerts were given throughout the summer months, subject of course to the vagaries of the English climate, but Handel himself was never personally active there, save in 1749 when the Fireworks Music was publicly rehearsed at Vauxhall, an event which caused an enormous traffic jam on London Bridge. Just across the river to the north lay Ranelagh Gardens (opened 1742), whose vast circular Rotunda was impervious to the weather and attracted a rather more fashionable clientele, with musical performances featured not only in the evenings but sometimes in the morning as well. Also important, though rather less so from the purely Handelian point of view, were Marylebone Gardens, just to the east of Marylebone High Street and not far from the present Royal Academy of Music, Cuper's Gardens on the south side of the Thames opposite Somerset House, and, though some distance out of town, Ruckholt House near Low Layton in Essex.[36]

It was in the early 1730s too, and not long after his appointment as Musical Instrument Maker in Ordinary to the King, that the younger John Walsh (1709–66) became Handel's regular publisher. Although Walsh's father (who had founded the firm in 1695) had been responsible for the first edition of the songs in *Rinaldo*, another publisher, John Cluer in Cheapside, printed most of Handel's early operas and also the 1720 set of *Suites de Pieces pour le Clavecin* (HWV 426–33). Nevertheless, it was

the Walshes who, from their premises in Catherine Street, just off the Strand, soon came to dominate the market and, by vigorous newspaper advertising, not to mention the innovative use of pewter plates and metal punches (as opposed to expensive copper plates and hand engraving), triumphed over almost all their early eighteenth-century rivals. The combined Walsh catalogue is enormous, and, excluding Handel, runs to well over 2,000 items by almost every major English and foreign composer of the period.[37] The Walshes both showed real entrepreneurial flair, and the son indeed is said to have died worth £40,000, some at least of which he owed to the genius of the man whose music it was now his business to promote.

As far as Handel's relations with his own English contemporaries are concerned, we are faced with a mass of floating tradition, the exact details of which are difficult to ascertain and impossible to verify. From various references in Burney, Hawkins and other subsidiary sources, however, one gains the impression that these relations were by no means entirely cordial. Indeed, if Burney is to be believed, Handel 'had a thorough contempt for all our composers at this time . . . and performers on the organ too'.[38] Those who were wise were obviously at some pains not to challenge the great man on his own ground. And with some reason too, for when Greene, inspired perhaps by the success of *Esther* some six months earlier, first tried his hand at oratorio (*The Song of Deborah and Barak*) in the autumn of 1732, Handel promptly retaliated with a setting of the same biblical tale (HWV 51). According to Hawkins, Pepusch immediately 'acquiesced in the opinion of his [Handel's] superior merit, and chose a track for himself in which he was sure to meet with no obstruction, and in which none could disturb him without going out of their way to do it'.[39] Boyce was evidently of the same opinion, his characteristically generous nature being nicely illustrated by his reported attitude to Handel's own borrowings: 'He takes other men's pebbles and converts them into diamonds.'[40] Arne, on the other hand, is said to have been 'aspiring, and always regarded Handel as a tyrant and usurper, against whom he frequently rebelled, but with as little effect as Marsyas against Apollo'.[41]

Though Handel himself is described by Burney as 'impetuous, rough and peremptory in his manners and conversation, but totally devoid of ill-nature or malevolence',[42] it can hardly have been coincidence that the immensely successful first performance of *Alexander's Feast* at Covent Garden on 19 February 1736 was timed to take place on the evening of the same day as the Sons of the Clergy Festival that year, the one and only time that Greene (alone among contemporary musicians) was honoured with a Stewardship and thus made partially responsible for the administration of the charity; it was also the only time between 1731 and 1755 that a

Handel setting of the Te Deum was supplanted by one of Greene's. According to contemporary newspapers, the takings that year were about £200 down on what they had been the year before. It is all the more surprising therefore to find Greene listed among the subscribers to *Alexander's Feast* when, two years later, it first appeared in print. Needless to say, Handel did not reciprocate when, in 1743, Greene's own magnum opus, *Forty Select Anthems*, was also published by subscription.

He did, however, subscribe to a fair number of works by various other English contemporaries. Among them are Boyce's *Solomon* (1743) and *Twelve Sonatas* for two violins and continuo (1747), Chilcot's *Six Suites of Lessons for the Harpsicord or Spinet* (1734) and *Twelve English Songs* (1744), *Six Setts of Lessons for Harpsichord or Organ* [1743] by John Christian Mantel,[43] Nares's *Eight Setts of Lessons For the Harpsichord* (1747), Barnabas Gunn's *Two Cantata's and Six Songs* (1736), the first set of William Felton's *Six Concerto's for the Organ or Harpsichord* (1744), John Bennett's *Ten Voluntaries for the Organ or Harpsichord* [1757] and the first two books of John Christopher Smith's *Suites de Pièces pour le Clavecin* (1732 and 1737). Literary publications to which he subscribed (in addition to the works of Aaron Hill already mentioned) include the collections (all entitled *Poems on Several Occasions*) by John Gay (1720), Henry Carey (3rd edition, enlarged, of 1729), and Joseph Mitchell (1729 also), the last two of which contain eulogistic references to Handel himself.

Among the few English players whom Handel is said to have admired was the blind organist John Stanley (1712–86) who, together with John Christopher Smith, continued the annual Lenten oratorio seasons at Covent Garden (and later Drury Lane) for some years after the composer's death. And though he was not himself, it seems, one of the judges at the election of Thomas Roseingrave (1688–1766) as organist of his own local parish church (St George's, Hanover Square) in 1725, it may well be that Handel provided a subject for the candidates to extemporise upon, as he was also invited to do at the election of Roseingrave's successor in 1744.[44] It does, however, look as if he was called in to give his opinion of the new organ by Gerard Smith, just as, five years later, he was also to do with the rebuilt Schrider instrument at Westminster Abbey; though he had evidently been asked to comment on an almost identical Renatus Harris organ for St Dionis Backchurch in December 1722, it seems that, when it came to the actual trial (in June 1724), he was unable (or unwilling) to appear.[45] Another with whom he must from time to time have been closely associated was Greene's friend the violinist (and composer) Michael Christian Festing (d. 1752), who from 1737 led the opera orchestra, the band at Ranelagh and several of the City musical

societies, and was, it seems, the moving spirit behind the establishment of the 'Fund for the Support of Decayed Musicians and their Families'. Abraham Brown, his successor as director of music at Ranelagh, ought also perhaps to be mentioned as having led the orchestra for the Foundling Hospital performances of *Messiah* in 1754 and 1758. Likewise Matthew Dubourg (1703–67), who succeeded Festing as leader of the King's Musicians in 1752: ten years earlier, when he was Master and Composer of State Music in Ireland, he had led the band during Handel's visit to Dublin.

English singers with whom Handel worked include several well-known names, most notably the tenor John Beard (*c.* 1717–91), for whom he wrote the title roles in *Samson* (1743), *Belshazzar* (1745), *Judas Maccabaeus* (1746) and *Jephtha* (1752); as a boy chorister of the Chapel Royal Beard also sang in the first London performances of *Esther* in 1732. Nor were his activities confined to the world of oratorio (or to the music of Handel either, for that matter). A former pupil of Bernard Gates at the Chapel Royal, he made his operatic debut as Silvio in the 1734 Covent Garden revival of Handel's *Il Pastor Fido*, and during the following years, he appeared in no fewer than ten Handel operas, creating roles in *Ariodante*, *Alcina*, *Atalanta*, *Arminio*, *Giustino* and *Berenice* (1735–7); he also took part in numerous ballad operas, pantomimes and other more serious pieces by Arne, Boyce, Lampe, De Fesch, J. C. Smith and others. Less distinguished, but similarly active in both opera and oratorio, was William Savage (1720–89), who first sang as a treble in *Alcina*, and then for two or three years as an alto before his voice finally settled as a bass; a competent organist (and composer too), he subsequently became Master of the Choristers of St Paul's, and on Handel's death in 1759 he was given the composer's ring by his executors.[46] The tenor Thomas Lowe, on the other hand, was best known as a popular theatre and pleasure gardens singer; nevertheless, he too was closely associated with Handelian oratorio from 1743 onwards and, though nothing like so versatile, it seems, as Beard, had no fewer than half a dozen roles (including the title role in *Joshua* and the part of Septimius in *Theodora*) specially written for him.

Also very much in the public eye during this period was the soprano Cecilia Young, who sang in the premieres of *Ariodante* and *Alcina* (1735) and married Arne two years later. Likewise Susanna Maria Cibber (Arne's sister) was not only a good mezzo-soprano, but was soon to become the finest tragic actress of her generation; the centre of a messily public marital dispute in 1738, she then left the stage, only to reappear in Dublin where she sang for Handel in 1741–2 and again later in London. (It was incidentally of her singing of 'He was despised' in the first performance of *Messiah* that Patrick Delany, husband of Handel's long-standing friend

and admirer, is reported as saying: 'Woman, for this all thy sins be forgiven thee!')[47] Nor must we forget the celebrated Anglo-Irish actress and soprano Kitty Clive, who made her reputation as Polly in *The Beggar's Opera*, and for whom Handel not only wrote the part of Dalila in *Samson*, but also a couple of little-known but nonetheless delightful English theatre songs.[48] Her protégée and pupil Miss Edwards was another soprano who sang regularly for Handel in the 1740s and also took part in plays as well. Among the later English male soloists were two basses: Robert Wass, who was the first Zebul in *Jephtha* (1752), and Samuel Champness, who sang Time in the 1757 premiere of *The Triumph of Time and Truth*.

Handel's chorus singers in his oratorios included performers drawn from the ranks of the Chapel Royal, Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral choirs (see Chapter 18), and it was entirely fitting that all three should be involved when, at his own request, the composer was finally laid to rest in the Abbey itself.[49] The treble line for the oratorio choruses, it appears, was usually provided by the boys of the Chapel Royal under the direction of Bernard Gates (1686–1773), who, as a bass singer himself, had been closely associated with the composer from his earliest days in London and, more or less inadvertently in 1732, presided over the birth of Handelian theatre oratorio in London. Among Gates's Chapel Royal colleagues who also sang for Handel during the first ten years or so after his arrival was the great English countertenor Richard Elford (d. 1714), for whom Handel wrote the alto solo in the first version of the anthem *As pants the Hart* (HWV 251a), Francis Hughes (also an alto), and Samuel Weely (bass). On the secular front, he was associated, though only very briefly, with the long-lived English bass singer and composer Richard Leveridge (1670–1758), the contralto Jane Barbier, Mrs Ann Turner Robinson (soprano), and the Scottish tenor Alexander Gordon, who trained in Italy and returned to London in 1719 where he sang in the spring 1720 and 1723 seasons of the Royal Academy before abandoning his operatic career to become a scholar, author and antiquary.[50] But far more important than any of these was Anastasia Robinson (*c.* 1692–1755), who made her debut as a soprano in 1714 and later that same year sang Almirena in a revival of *Rinaldo*. In May 1715 she created the role of Oriana in *Amadigi*, but by the end of the decade her voice had dropped to contralto. As a member of the Royal Academy, she sang in all the operas between spring 1721 and summer 1724 when, two years after her secret marriage to the elderly Duke of Peterborough, she retired from the stage.

That Handel totally dominated the English musical scene during the period from 1710 to 1759 (and indeed for many years after his death) is

undeniable, but that he somehow cowed his English musical compatriots into submission and stylistic servitude, as has so often been suggested in the past, is a nonsense which I have laboured elsewhere to expose.[51] They all spoke the common musical *lingua franca* of the era, a language ultimately rooted in Italy and perfected for general European usage by Corelli in the closing years of the seventeenth century, but one which, for all its confident self-assurance, did not totally inhibit the development of certain regional accents. Though the essential Englishness of the music of Handel's English contemporaries is undoubtedly easier to recognise than it is to define, he himself was by no means impervious to its charms, as is evident enough in some of the later works, *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* in particular.[52] Even *Deborah*, the first of his oratorios to be written for the London theatre, shows strikingly English features in the (non-da capo) air 'How lovely is the blooming fair' and especially in the duet 'Smiling freedom, lovely guest'. Likewise the strophic setting of 'Ask if yon damask rose' and 'Ye verdant hills' in *Susanna*, while 'Queen of summer, queen of love', the opening chorus in Act 2 of *Theodora*, might almost have been written by Purcell himself.[53] Clearly the question of stylistic influence and cultural interaction is by no means as entirely one-sided as has generally been supposed.