



George Frideric Handel: From Library to Stage

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Mabel Smith Douglass Room

Douglass Library

March 3–May 5, 2014

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Notes by Rebecca Cypess

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759) was among the most prolific and influential composers of the early eighteenth century. His training in Germany and Italy and his long career in the cosmopolitan center of London placed him in an ideal position to build upon musical styles from across Europe. His distinctive compositional approaches are manifested in work in every genre of the period, from dramatic operas and oratorios to austere anthems for performance in church, from concertos and sonatas to keyboard suites and arrangements.

The Rutgers Libraries are home to a remarkable array of Handel sources—manuscripts and printed editions—produced during the eighteenth century. Housed in Special Collections / University Archives, some of these materials are on display in the Mabel Smith Douglass Room in conjunction with a concert series of Handel’s works presented by the Department of Music at the Mason Gross School of the Arts. The exhibit has been significantly enhanced by materials owned by a local collector who shares the commitment to exploring the rich and fascinating world of Handel’s music.

The curators wish to thank Fernanda Perrone, Tim Corlis, and Kim Adams, without whom this exhibit would not have been possible. Thanks are due as well to George Stauffer, Dean of the Mason Gross School of the Arts, and to the many members of the faculty and students in the Department of Music and the Rutgers University Libraries who assisted with this project.



Case 1: Handel's Early Life and His Career in London

Handel's Early Life and Career. Documentation of the early life of George Frideric Handel is limited to the composer's own reminiscences, transmitted posthumously in John Mainwaring's *Memoirs of the Life of the Late George Frederic Handel*, a copy of which is on display here. Born in Halle, Germany, Handel claimed to have been discouraged from practicing music as a young man; his father, a surgeon-barber in the service of the Duke of Saxe-Weissenfels, wished instead to have him study law. But, as Mainwaring explains, Handel resisted his father's inclinations, which "did but augment his passion [for music]. He had found means to get a little clavichord privately convey'd to a room at the top of the house. To this room he constantly stole when the family was asleep."

Handel's father died in 1697, and after this he was able to devote himself more fully to the pursuit of music as a career. In 1703 he traveled to Hamburg, where Italian opera was highly fashionable; he started in the modest position of a second violinist in the independent opera house there. This sojourn in Hamburg provided Handel with training in the Italian operatic style that would later become central to his career.

By early 1707 Handel was in Rome, where he enjoyed contact with and patronage of members of the influential Colonna, Pamphili, and Ruspoli families. The most important works from Handel's Roman period include sacred oratorios and dramas, as well as numerous Italian cantatas. Among these was the pastoral cantata *Clori, Tirsi e Fileno*, parts of which he later adapted for use in his English pastoral masque *Acis and Galatea* (see the display of *Acis* sources in a separate case).

One of the most important hallmarks of Italian vocal music of the early eighteenth century was the "da capo aria," a song form that follows an "ABA" model. A long opening section (A) in one character is followed by a contrasting middle (B) section. The opening section is then repeated, usually with the singer introducing improvised

embellishments to the vocal line. Often virtuosic and florid, these embellishments served both to augment the emotional expression of the music and to display the agility of the singer. The *da capo* aria—a convention employed by virtually every Italian vocal composer of this period—became one of the primary staples of Handel’s compositional style.

Cannons, the Chapel Royal, and Handel in London. In 1710 Handel was appointed Kapellmeister (Chapel Master and head musician) to the Electoral court in Hanover. However, during his employment there he made numerous visits to London, which he would later make his permanent home. Although Italian opera had been imported to London a few years earlier, these early works had been adaptations of operas performed elsewhere. Handel was the first composer to write an Italian opera specifically for performance before an English audience.

During Handel’s visits to England between 1710 and 1713 he relied on private patronage and commercial enterprises. In 1713 he was granted a stipend from Queen Anne of England, following which he never returned to Hanover. When Anne died, the former Elector of Hanover and Handel’s former employer assumed the throne as King George I of England. Despite the fact that Handel had abandoned his post in Hanover, the king continued to pay the composer a stipend, and Handel wrote or adapted numerous works for performance at the royal court and the Chapel Royal.

In 1717 Handel joined the musical establishment of the Earl of Carnarvon, who later became the Duke of Chandos, at Cannons, his new palace just north of London. Handel was at Cannons only briefly, but it was during this period that he composed the first version of his masque *Acis and Galatea*, as well as the English sacred oratorio *Esther*. In addition, at Cannons Handel composed numerous anthems—choral works on sacred themes set to English or Latin texts—tailored to the substantial musical establishment employed there.

The Rutgers collection includes nine volumes of anthems in manuscript (that is, they were written out by hand rather than produced by a printing press), copied during the second half of the eighteenth century by a copyist from the circle of Handel's principal amanuensis, John Christopher Smith the Elder. Among this collection are two versions of the same anthem, the "Te Deum Laudamus"—one version produced for performance at Cannons, and the other "transposed and altered for the King's Chappel."

Borrowing. The practice of adapting previously composed works for performance under new circumstances was one that Handel used frequently throughout his career, to greater and lesser extents. In some cases, as in the "Te Deum Laudamus," he reworked an entire piece for performance in two distinct settings. In other cases, he "borrowed" melodies or movements, setting them in an entirely new context.

One example of this latter type of borrowing appears in the "Foundling Hospital Anthem," which the copyist of the Rutgers manuscript describes as "in part Composed, and part Compiled by Mr. Handel; for the Foundling Hospital." Handel became involved in the cause of this orphanage—the Hospital for the Maintenance and Education of Exposed and Deserted Young Children—in 1749, a decade after its founding. On May 27th of that year, he gave a benefit concert in the chapel at the orphanage that featured this anthem, "Blessed are they that considereth the Poor and the Needy." Some passages of this anthem are adapted from other such choral works. For the final movement, Handel borrowed the so-called "Hallelujah Chorus" from his oratorio *Messiah*—arguably his most famous work today. The final page of the Rutgers manuscript instructs the reader, "End with the last Chorus at the second part of *Messiah* Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, &c."

As Donald Burrows has pointed out, it is unlikely that the "Hallelujah" chorus from *Messiah* would have been widely known at the time of the premiere of the "Foundling Hospital Anthem," since the oratorio had only been performed a few times. However, Burrows posits that the

premiere of the anthem might have been the first occasion when the audience, which included members of the royal family, stood for the “Hallelujah” chorus—a practice that has remained in use to the present day.

The practice of borrowing was widespread in the eighteenth century; composers including Handel frequently went so far as to “borrow” material by other composers, incorporating it into their own music, often without attribution. Although some critics of the eighteenth century criticized this practice as theft, it was extremely common. Some composers quoted, borrowed, or copied from their peers in order to pay homage to them, and to show their own place in a long and venerable tradition of music-making.



Cases 1–2: The Handel Centenary and the Rutgers Handel Collection

Charles Burney and the Beginnings of Music History. Until the mid-eighteenth century, European audiences were largely unconcerned with the music of the past. They wanted to hear concerts with the newest, most fashionable music; tradition and the authority of ancient composers were, for the most part, a topic of interest only to a select group of connoisseurs.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, however, this approach began to change. England in particular saw a rising interest in music of the past, and organizations like the “Concert of Ancient Music” were established to preserve the country’s musical heritage. This historical consciousness spread quickly throughout Europe.

One of Europe’s leading historians was the Englishman Charles Burney (1726–1814), an amateur musician. Burney pursued his interests in the

development of music by traveling the continent, interviewing living musicians, attending concerts, and searching through archives for historical information. He kept copious journals on the “Present State of Music” in a variety of countries, which he published. His *magnum opus*, however, was his four-volume *General History of Music*, published between 1776 and 1789, in which he attempted to treat the development of music from antiquity to his own time.

The Handel Centenary. It is noteworthy that the final volume of Burney’s *General History* concludes with passages about the Concert of Ancient Music and about the centenary commemoration of Handel’s birth. Handel was one of the few composers whose music never fell out of style, even decades after his death. (*Acis and Galatea* and *Messiah* are among the works with a nearly continuous performance history from the time of their first composition.) For men like Burney, Handel represented the pinnacle of England’s contributions to music history. The passage on the centenary in Burney’s *General History* indicates that he wished to see similar events organized for other composers, as a means of enshrining them in the pantheon of music.

Burney was one of the primary organizers of the Handel centenary, which took place at Westminster Abbey in late May and early June, 1784. In the following year he published *An account of the musical performances in Westminster-Abbey...in commemoration of Handel*, which contained a complete narrative of the organization of the events, as well as a dedication to King George III, a biography of Handel, lists of Handel’s compositions, pictures of the layout of the orchestra and singers for each concert, a financial accounting of the centenary, and various images of the composer and entrance tickets to the events. The tickets themselves are extremely rare, but one of the original tickets is on display in this exhibit.

The idea of preserving the music of the past did not necessarily mean an “authentic” reproduction of the performances that Handel himself would have heard. As shown in the engraved image entitled “View of

the orchestra and performers in Westminster Abbey, during the Commemoration of Handel,” the orchestra and chorus were enormous—far, far larger than any group Handel is likely to have used himself. The purpose of these increased forces seems to have been the glorification of the music—and the composer.

Westminster Abbey was an ideal place for this commemoration. The two-volume history of the Abbey included in this exhibit entitled *Westmonasterium. Or the history and antiquities of the abbey church of St. Peters Westminster*, which saw numerous printings during the eighteenth century, recognized the Abbey as a place for the preservation of memory. The author, John Dart, preceded his work with a long poem on this subject; the poem concludes by contrasting the eternity of the dead enshrined in the Abbey with the ephemeral nature of music:

Poets themselves like common Mortals die
Such are the Laws of hard Necessity
Not the sweet Musick of the pleasing Tongue,
The heav'nly Numbers, nor harmonious Song,
Can plead Suspension to the fleeting Breath,
Or charm th'inexorable Ears of Death,
Who interrupts him even while he sings,
And with rude Fingers breaks the sounding Strings. (xlii)

Sir Watkin Williams Wynn and the Rutgers Handel Collection. Burney's *Account of the musical performances in Westminster-Abbey...in commemoration of Handel* indicates that he was one of the principal organizers of the centenary events; but he was not alone. One of the co-directors of the commemoration of 1784 was Sir Watkin Williams Wynn (1749–89), member of a family of Welsh landowners. Burney's *Account* includes lists of collections of Handel materials held by various aficionados, and his list of manuscript sources held by Wynn is virtually identical to the collection of sources now in the Rutgers Libraries Special Collections / University Archives.

It was on this basis that Handel scholar Graydon Beeks, in consultation with former Rutgers professor Martin Picker, identified the Rutgers collection as the very same collection once owned by Wynn. This body of materials thus stands as an important witness to Handel reception in the second half of the eighteenth century. It seems remarkable that the majority of the Rutgers sources might have been intact as a collection since the late eighteenth century.

Handel Reception beyond the Centenary. A number of artifacts on display here attest to the continuing interest in—and glorification of—Handel in the years following the first centenary celebration. Events celebrating and commemorating Handel’s contributions to music were held at Westminster Abbey, the Crystal Palace, and other important sites in London throughout the nineteenth century. As at the commemoration of 1784, medals were struck for many of these occasions and presented to the performers; one on display here dates from 1859, the centenary of the composer’s death. Other portraits, miniatures, and busts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries served as souvenirs of London’s musical culture.



Case 3: Instrumental Music

The practice of borrowing was not limited to vocal music. Handel frequently transferred material from his choral compositions to those for instruments without voices. Indeed, in some cases it seems that the printer did Handel the favor of assembling preexistent music into new instrumental works, even without the composer’s knowledge or permission. Such seems to be the case with the concertos, op. 3, which the printer, John Walsh, apparently had assembled on his own,

without the composer's involvement. On display here is the Chandos anthem "My song shall be always," which served as the source material for the opening two movements of the concerto op. 3 no. 3, also on display here.

The *concerti grossi* op. 3 represents one type of concerto in use in the early eighteenth century; the *concerto grosso* might feature a small group of soloists against the backdrop of the full orchestra, or it might put the spotlight on various sections of the orchestra at different moments within the composition. The concerto op. 3 no. 3 calls for a solo flute or oboe and a solo violinist, playing together with a full string orchestra. The other volume of concertos on display, the *Six concertos for the harpsichord or organ*, typifies the solo concerto, which places a single soloist in contrast with the full orchestra.

The op. 3 concertos were assembled and published by Walsh in 1734; his intention to market this publication to a variety of potential purchasers is attested by the flexible instrumentation—"ad arbitrio" (arbitrarily)—called for on the title page. Given that Handel apparently had no involvement with this publication, it seems significant that his volume of concertos for orchestra and keyboard (harpsichord or organ), published around 1750, includes on its title page the claim that "These Six Concertos were Publish'd by Mr. Walsh from my own Copy Corrected by my Self, and to Him only I have given my Right therein. George Frideric Handel." This note betrays the anxiety that composers and potential purchasers of their printed music felt that the publications provide an authentic picture of the composer's intentions; nevertheless, the actual level of involvement that Handel had with the production of this publication is unclear.

Most of Handel's instrumental music was published in part-book format: one volume for first violins, a second for second violins, another for violas, and so on. This format enables the players to read their parts alone, avoiding cumbersome page-turns in the middle of a performance. The pages of the part-books of op. 3, as shown here, are

sewn together loosely; these might have been left as they were, or they could be brought to a binder to form a more sturdy binding.

Although Handel's instrumental music shows his facility with numerous instruments, he was most famous during his lifetime as a virtuoso organist and harpsichordist, and he was known for his ability to improvise easily on those instruments. His harpsichord suites (commonly known as the "Eight Great Suites"), published in 1720, are among his most famous keyboard works and are among the few instrumental works whose publication Handel is known to have supervised. Their French title (*Suites de pièces pour le clavecin*) and their inclusion of French dance forms attest to the widespread use of the French style in solo keyboard playing, even as Italianate and Germanic traditions of chamber music became increasingly widespread.

The popularity of Italian- and German-style chamber music is attested by the compilation entitled *Six solos for a German flute*, which places works by Handel alongside pieces by three Italian composers. Handel's famous sonatas, op. 5, include both Italianate movements with headings like "Allegro" and French dance forms such as the *musette* and *gavotte*.



Cases 4–5: *Acis and Galatea*

The Story of *Acis and Galatea*. The myth derives from Greek mythology; the primary source is Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which had been translated by John Dryden and published in 1717 (see the facsimile on display). In the myth, the shepherd Acis and Galatea, a nereid (water-nymph), are happily in love; however, the cyclops Polyphemus, himself in love with Galatea, kills Acis with a boulder. The requisite metamorphosis in Ovid's telling occurs when Galatea turns

the blood of Acis into the river flowing through Sicily that bears his name.

Handel's Settings of the Story. Handel's *Acis and Galatea* went through numerous versions during his lifetime. He first set this story early in his career, during his years in Italy, as a cantata entitled *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo*. During his period at Cannons, under the patronage of the Earl of Carnarvon, Handel set an English-language libretto by John Gay as a one-act masque; it was premiered in the summer of 1718, and apparently performed outdoors at Cannons. This early version included no music from the cantata *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo*, but it did incorporate an aria from a different cantata, *Tirsi, Clori e Fileno*; the new version is the famous aria "As when the dove," sung by Galatea.

Although *Acis and Galatea* was published in 1722, perhaps indicating a degree of popularity among the nobility, collectors, and amateur singers, it did not receive a public performance until 1732. In that year, the composer and impresario Thomas Arne, with his associate Thomas Frederick Lampe, performed *Acis and Galatea* at the Little Theatre at Haymarket without Handel's involvement, advertising it as staged "with all the Grand Chorus's, Scenes, Machines, and other Decorations; being the first Time it ever was performed in a Theatrical Way." (This claim suggests that earlier performances, including the one at Chandos, had been unstaged or only partially staged, and with minimal scenery and machinery.) The singer who portrayed Galatea in this unauthorized production was Arne's sister, Susanna Maria Cibber; in the following year she would sing the role of Jael in Handel's oratorio *Deborah* (see the edition on display in this case).

His subsequent working relationship and friendship with Cibber notwithstanding, Handel was apparently displeased at having his music pirated by Arne's group. In the following year Handel used the King's Theatre, the rival opera house directly across from Arne's where Handel regularly staged Italian operas, to produce an expanded version of *Acis and Galatea*. This new three-act version incorporated a large

amount of music from the early cantata *Acis, Galatea e Polifemo*, and was performed, remarkably, part in Italian and part in English. For this version, Handel underscored his intention that the work be semi-staged, by contrast with Arne's production: Handel advertised that "There will be no Action on the Stage, but the Scene will represent, in a Picturesque Manner, a rural Prospect, with Rocks, Groves, Fountains and Grotto's; amongst which will be disposed a Chorus of Nymphs and Shepherds, Habits, and every other Decoration suited to the Subject."

Handel produced yet another version in 1739; this time the piece was reduced from three acts to two and performed all in English. This version has remained most popular since Handel's lifetime; by contrast, his other sung dramas fell largely out of use from the late-eighteenth to the twentieth centuries.

Full Scores of *Acis and Galatea* on display. The two printings of *Acis and Galatea* on display here are both variants of this two-act version: one is an edition of c. 1743 by John Walsh, the principal publisher of Handel's music during his lifetime; the other was published around 1768 by William Randall, heir to Walsh's firm. There are very few differences between the two versions. Both deviate from earlier versions in designating the aria "Consider, fond shepherd," for a character named "Clori," rather than Acis's friend Damon. It is unclear whether this change was intentional or the result of an error, but the fact that it was not altered for the later version indicates that it may have been intentional. Use of the name Clori recalls Handel's incorporation of material from *Tirsi, Clori e Fileno*, thus attesting to the complicated performance history of this work. (In a nod to this feature of the score in the Rutgers collection, the Opera Workshop's spring production of *Acis and Galatea* will have this aria sung by a character, Clori, who will be cast as a companion to the shepherd Damon.)

Editions for Amateurs. Early editions of Handel's Italian operas were produced by the publisher John Cluer; these generally include only the *da capo* arias, identifying them with the famous singers who

sang at their premieres. (See, for example, the edition of the opera *Rodelinda* on display here, open to the aria “Dove sei amato bene? Vieni l’alma a consolar,” which was “sung by Sgr. Senesino,” the famous Italian castrato.) The two later editions of *Acis and Galatea* on display here, by contrast, include the recitative passages that connect the various arias, thus enabling purchasers of the volume to reproduce as much of the music as they wished. The absence of recitative passages and the inclusion of the names of famous singers in the Cluer editions might indicate that these early scores were collected by musical amateurs who wished to see, or even to reproduce in their own homes, the music of Handel that became so popular during his lifetime.

Other editions likely produced for amateur use include anthologies of songs from a variety of Handel’s operas. Its title notwithstanding, the volume of *Handel’s songs selected from his oratorios* on display contains music from both oratorios and operas, including the famous song “As when the dove laments her love,” from *Acis and Galatea*. In addition, the volume of *XXIV overtures fitted to the harpsichord or spinnet*, which contains keyboard arrangements of the opera overtures, was likely also produced to enable amateur musicians to reproduce the music they heard in the theater in their own homes. The title page itself attests to amateur and instructional usage in its claim that the overture arrangements are “proper pieces for the improvement of the hand on the harpsichord or spinnet.”

Esther: A Companion to Acis and Galatea. The Rutgers copy of the oratorio *Esther* is included here because it was both composed in the same year as *Acis and Galatea* at Cannons and also revived in 1732 as a companion piece to the expanded version of *Acis and Galatea*. This score, too, was produced after the composer’s death, in 1783. It is open to the list of subscribers—contributors who paid in advance to underwrite the costs of publication—which includes the king and queen. Also on the subscription list are “The Directors of the Concert of Ancient Music,” and Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, who, as already noted, once owned the collection now housed at Rutgers.



Join us for other events in the series **George Frideric Handel: From Library to Stage:**

March 25, 2014, 4:30 p.m. Join us in the Mabel Smith Douglass Room for a concert of instrumental music by the Rutgers Baroque Players, featuring music in the Handel exhibit.

April 27, 2014, 2:00 p.m and **April 29, 2014, 7:30 p.m.** Fully staged productions by the Opera Workshop at Mason Gross and the Rutgers Baroque Players. Pamela Gilmore, producer; David Ronis, stage director; Rebecca Cypess, music director. Schare Recital Hall, Marryott Music Building, 81 George Street, New Brunswick.

April 27, 2014 at 12:45 p.m. Pre-performance discussion. Learn about the performance and publication history of Handel's *Acis and Galatea* and the curious history of the Handel collection held by Special Collections/University Archives. Rebecca Cypess and Pamela Gilmore will be joined by Jonathan Saucedo, Performing Arts Librarian. Shindell Choral Hall, Robert E. Mortensen Hall, 85 George Street, New Brunswick.

These concerts are sponsored in part by a grant from Early Music America.