

1. Introduction

1. 1.

HANDEL IN ITALY, HANDEL AND ITALY

The place of George Frideric Handel in music histories has not been questioned much since his musical “canonisation” in Britain and Germany in the 19th century. He is regarded not only as a “famous composer of Baroque music”, but also as one of “Western civilization’s greatest composers” (Buelow 2004, 476). Manfred Bukofzer’s *Music in the Baroque Era* sees a culmination of the tendencies of “late baroque” in the opus of Handel and J. S. Bach (Bukofzer 1948, 210–349). However relative the definition and periodisation of baroque music has come to be regarded lately (as outlined in detail in Leopold 1994), Handel, as shall be shown later on, is often singled out among the group of composers born in the last two decades of the 17th century for his conservative traits, i. e. his adherence to earlier musical traditions and his reluctance to wholeheartedly adopt some aspects of the emerging *style galant*. The question that this study will attempt to answer in its modest way (focusing on the highly particular form of the vocal duet) is which Italian composers from his immediate temporal (and to a certain extent, spatial) context would be the most suited for comparison with the master from Halle. In the period under examination in this study—from Handel’s stay in Italy to Giovanni Bononcini’s dismissal from the Royal Academy of Music (from roughly 1706 to 1724)¹—departures from a “baroque style” (if there is such a thing in the first place) are less or not at all pronounced in Handel’s works, which will facilitate a selection of Italian composers to compare him with.

Although, especially in earlier music histories, most of Handel’s and his Italian peers’ production falls under the periodisation of Palisca’s (1968, 6) category of “high baroque”, some of the older historiographic literature takes a different stand. In Hugo Riemann’s (1912) opinion, the period of 1710–1760 in Italy can also be considered as an era of aesthetic decadence. According to him, in this period Italian vocal music abounds in arias that are mere “sing-song of the *canzonetta* type”² (Riemann 1912, 412) with or without virtuosic finery with the least artful accompaniment imaginable, and states an array of composers (G. M. Orlandini, T. Albinoni, A. Lotti, A.

1 A more detailed explanation of the narrowing down of temporal focus will be given in the course of Chapters 1, but also 2 and 3.

2 Kanzonettenartige Singsang.

Vivaldi, G. Porta, F. Gasparini, C. F. Pollarolo, A. Pollarolo, L. A. Predieri, G. M. Buini, F. Chelleri) whose arias match the unflattering description. It comes as no surprise that in this catalogue of names we find as many as three composers to whose comparison with G. F. Handel this study is devoted. Even though he will later list some of them (G. Bononcini, A. M. Bononcini³, A. Ariosti, F. Gasparini, F. Mancini, A. Lotti, et al.) as representatives of the fully-fledged chamber cantata, Riemann still insists that their cantatas are not on a “significantly higher level”⁴ (413) than their stage works. The aesthetic underestimation of Italian composers not only of the *style galant*, but also of their precursors still within the frame of the old style in relation to their German peers like Handel and Bach is not characteristic only of Riemann and the generation of German musicologists around him but also of putting Handel’s output in Italian genres in the context of his Italian contemporaries in general. The following quote from a laborious landmark study of Handel’s borrowing practice by William Crotch confirms this:

Handel’s operas [...] contain fewer vulgar and boisterous melodies, and more that are in the true Italian style of the day. The same difference, however, existed between the German and Italian schools, as has been so remarkable ever since. The vocal melodies of Hasse, Porpora, Veracini, Pescetti, and Bononcini, were more light and beautiful; but for force, variety, design, invention, harmony, and instrumental effect, Handel was greatly superior to all his contemporaries. (Crotch 1986, 124)

This reception topos has continued to dominate research of Handel’s output in comparative terms, and the qualitative aspect of the comparison will always remain slightly awkward, for it inevitably brings the discussion to a halt by establishing Handel’s aesthetical superiority over his Italian peers. What remains to be a very difficult question is if and how these Italian predecessors and contemporaries were responsible in making Handel what he is. Although this study will not pretend to be able to provide answers by studying only a small and somewhat subsidiary element (the vocal duet), it is important to be aware of all the implications of the comparison. It is more than evident that Italy and its composers active in Handel’s lifetime have an important place in the stylistic positioning of the German composer’s opus. As a kind of “leading musical nation of Europe as a

3 Riemann wrongly lists the name as Marco Antonio, but the stated year of death confirms that he meant Antonio Maria.

4 Erheblich höheren Niveau.

whole”⁵ (Leopold 1994, 1247), the influence of Italy spread with its music and musicians all over Europe in the course of the 17th century, remaining “style-forming for the whole of Europe long into the 18th century” (ibid.), and Handel with his international career is a quintessential representative of such an Italian-dominated European musical culture. Irrespective of these broader concerns, an “Italian period” is standard in the periodisation of Handel’s output due to the biographic fact of his stay in Italy in the period between 1706 and 1710, and in spite of some criticism (e. g. Harris 1980a and Riepe 2013), it remains without a doubt that the exposure to various musical stimuli on the Apennine peninsula left a mark on not just Handel’s composition during this period but also continued to assert itself throughout most of his later career. According to Strohm (2008, 3), works of the so-called Italian period “bear the stamp of the mature Handel; and when the composer incorporated some of this youthful material into later works, the spirit of the Italian period remained fresh and unsullied”, forming “a level of Italo-German craftsmanship comparable only with that achieved by the young Mozart”.

Italian elements in Handel’s musical language are usually seen as a part of his stylistic eclecticism, or—put in more positive terms—his capacity to synthesise. As Silke Leopold (1994, 1249), among others, points out, a synthesis of Italian and French styles was a preoccupation of German music from the efforts of Georg Muffat up to J. S. Bach and beyond, but it acquires a specific guise in Handel’s case. George J. Buelow (2004, 476) expands this aspect with the heritage of Handel’s adopted homeland: “His genius was rooted in German, French, Italian, and English musical styles from the turn of the eighteenth century, but he was, especially in his later works, more and more attuned to synthesizing those various styles.” Leopold (1985, 89) is even more specific when she claims that Handel’s operas are one of a kind “in their amalgamation of Italian, French, English and German stylistic elements”⁶. His main initial points of reference in the construction of a kind of *goût réuni* or *vermischter Geschmack*⁷ must have been the music of Reinhard Keiser, who implemented a German, Italian and French synthesis in his substantial contribution to the repertoire of opera in Hamburg and, to a somewhat lesser extent, of Agostino Steffani, a composer active in Germany who integrated a lot of French stylistic traits into his cultivation of Italian genres. Juliane Riepe (2013, 268) adds Attilio Ariosti, Pietro Torri and even Johann Adolf Hasse to this group

5 Tonangebende Musiknation für ganz Europa.

6 In ihrer Verschmelzung italienischer, englischer, französischer und deutscher Stilelemente.

7 Coined by François Couperin and Johann Joachim Quantz, respectively.

of composers, and this makes it clear to which extent emigré composers prone to the reception of diverse stylistic (national or otherwise) influences are suited to a comparison with Handel. As Strohm (2008, 5) shows, many Italian composers “sought protection in foreign courts and embassies. Some created, while others maintained, contacts and commitments abroad. A large part of that splendid tradition of Italian opera outside Italy so characteristic of the eighteenth century owes its origins to the artistic diaspora which took place at this time.” It is therefore no coincidence that this study devotes itself to a comparison of exactly such composers (Steffani⁸, Bononcini⁹ and to a certain extent also Lotti) with Handel!

“Four years in Italy (1706–1710) converted Handel almost completely to the melodious Italian manner, although his predilection for counterpoint, choral writing, and elaborate instrumentation never left him.” (Palisca 1968, 237) In Italy and especially in London, Handel differentiated himself from other composers by the specifically German elements of his musical language, e. g. in his use of orchestral colour. An English influence manifests itself most clearly in the English-language genres. However, according to Hicks (2001) “The Handelian synthesis as a whole did not undergo radical transformations during the composer’s career, so that his earliest music superbly exemplifies the then current styles (particularly Italian), while by the 1750s it was increasingly heard as possessing the virtues of an earlier age.”

1. 1. 1.

Contact with Italy: Biographic Aspects

From the generation of Heinrich Schütz to that of Johann Christian Bach, a journey to Italy has often been a very important part of the formative process of German composers, and most aspects of the motivation for this educational trip are combined in Handel’s case: “the cultural background in central northern Germany, the quest for learning, the aspiration to a career, the dependence on patronage, the spirit of adventure. [...] He arrived in Italy richly endowed with extensive experience of the German tradition at its most profound; he left as an ‘international’ artist. The most significant aspect of Handel’s character during his Italian period is his marked capacity to adapt himself to the whole body of circumstance and influence which surrounded him.” (Strohm 2008, 2)

8 As a composer given detailed analytical attention in this study, Agostino Steffani will only be referred to by his surname from here on.

9 As a composer given detailed analytical attention in this study, Giovanni Bononcini will only be referred to by his surname from here on.

Nevertheless, Handel's exposure to and confrontation with Italian music must have occurred as a series of often heterogeneous events. First contacts might have occurred during his early studies with Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow, who owned an extensive collection of Italian music and instructed Handel to copy and imitate some of these distinguished predecessors. Handel may have also had access to German anthologies of music elsewhere e. g. in Berlin (Strohm 1993, 10), possibly during a visit to the Prussian court, the date of which remains to be established.

A taste for opera may first have been stimulated on a visit to Berlin; opera there "was in a flourishing condition" and Handel is said to have met both Giovanni Bononcini and Attilio Ariosti. Such a visit is assigned by Mainwaring to 1698, but probably belongs to 1702, when both Italian composers were producing operas for the Prussian court. The fact that one of Handel's earliest musical works (the trio sonata op.2 no.2) appears to contain borrowings from Bononcini's operas of this period (*Cefalo* and *Polifemo*) suggests that the visit did indeed take place and was an important stimulant to the young composer. (Hicks 2001)

Other, more recent literature on the matter (Burrows et al. 2013, 16–17 and Riepe 2013, 157–160) shares this opinion. Backed by John Roberts's study of Handel's borrowings from Bononcini (Roberts 2010), Riepe decided that Handel might have studied the aforementioned scores by Bononcini as well as Attilio Ariosti's opera *La fede ne' tradimenti*, likewise written for a performance at the court of Sophie Charlotte. Mainwaring's (quoted in Burrows et al. 2013, 16–17) account of Bononcini giving Handel a particularly demanding chromatic cantata to play only to be embarrassed by the young man's musical prowess as well as Ariosti's more kind and fatherly disposition to him remains anecdotal in that it is impossible to confirm, and its value for the assessment of Handel's musical development cannot be judged.

A full outline of the facts on Handel's stay in Italy is impossible in spite of extensive study in the previous decade. We do not even have a precise time frame, and the exact dates of the departure from and return to Germany will remain unknown unless archival research unravels some unexpected sources. The data known of the principal stations of the composer's stay (Rome, Venice, Florence, Naples) does not build up to a continuous narrative. Even the exact reason for Handel's departure, whether it was Ferdinando de Medici's or his younger brother Gian Gastone de Medici's invitation¹⁰, is to a certain extent speculation. The chronology of

10 Strohm 2008, 11 and some other sources seem to imply that it was Ferdinando himself, a "fanatical opera lover", who invited Handel to Italy. Riepe (2013, 372–373) thinks that G. G. de Medici may have met Handel already in Berlin.

Handel's stay in Italy is much more complete in the *Handel Documents* by D. Burrows (Burrows et al. 2013) than it was sixty years ago in this publication's predecessor, O. E. Deutsch's *Handel. A Documentary Biography* (Deutsch 1955). However, as in the example of a possible meeting between Handel, Bononcini and Ariosti, biographical research still heavily draws on Mainwaring's (1760) biography of the composer, proving or—which is more common—speculating about its claims. There are lots of holes in the chronology, the biggest one probably from August 1708 (Handel's presence in Rome) to December 1709 (presence in Venice), and only the stay in Rome is more or less well documented, which makes room for a lot of speculation.

Naturally, music scholars have been curious about whom (or more precisely: which Italian musicians) Handel might have met during his stay. Mainwaring brings forth the following hypothesis: "When he came first into Italy, the masters in greatest esteem were Alessandro Scarlatti, Gasparini, and Lotti. The first of these he became acquainted with at Cardinal Ottoboni's. Here also he became known to Domenico Scarlatti." (Burrows et al. 2013, 70) Dean (1985, 2) likewise finds it highly probable that Handel met A. Scarlatti (he makes no mention of Domenico), whereas Burrows et al. (2013, 33) add the aforementioned Francesco Gasparini and Antonio Lotti to the list. As one of the most sceptical opinions on Handel's unprovable Italian contacts, Riepe (2013, 21) finds Handel's visit to Venice and the acquaintance with the operas of these colleagues of his plausible, but not that he necessarily met them personally. Dean (1985, 1) also extends the array of composers whose works Handel might have heard: "He must have encountered the operas of Pollarolo, Gasparini¹¹, Lotti¹², Caldara and Albinoni in Venice, Perti and Orlandini in Florence, Mancini in Naples, and many others. The Bononcini brothers were in Vienna, but Giovanni's *Il trionfo di Camilla* was still being played all over Italy. None of these composers however left an identifiable mark on Handel's style. I believe that with Alessandro Scarlatti the case is different." Handel unquestionably heard at least some of Scarlatti's oratorios performed in Rome in 1707 or 1708, and Dean speculates if he might have been able to hear his opera *Il gran Tamerlano*¹³ when he came to Florence in 1707. The two composers even "shared the same patron (Cardinal Vincenzo Grimani), who commissioned dramatic works from both for Naples and Venice" (Dean 1985, 3).

11 As a composer given detailed analytical attention in this study, Francesco Gasparini will only be referred to by his surname from here on.

12 As a composer given detailed analytical attention in this study, Antonio Lotti will only be referred to by his surname from here on.

13 No musical sources for this opera survive.

The question of Scarlatti's possible musical influence on Handel, as one of the most discussed questions in the research of Handel's musical *italianità*, merits a separate subchapter (1.1.4). I shall for now concentrate on the topical importance of Rome, Florence and Venice for Handel. Although half of the time spent in Italy was sojourned in Rome, where opera was banned, this does not mean that Handel missed acquainting himself with opera, one of the main musical interests throughout most of his career. According to Strohm (2008, 11), he spent his autumns and winters in important operatic centres. At Pratolino, the residence of Ferdinando Medici near Florence, operas by A. Scarlatti and G. A. Perti were performed around that time. Their music is lost, but "each of Salvi's libretti from the years 1707–1710 was set to music by Handel in London some years later: they were *Sosarme*, *Berenice*, *Ariodante*, and *Rodelinda*."¹⁴ (Strohm 2008, 11) Sabine Ehrmann-Herfort (2009, 37) is sceptical about the prospects of such an extensive Florentine stay, stressing that both Handel's stay as well as the idea that *Rodrigo* was a commission by Ferdinando Medici are mere hypotheses that cannot be proven.

The wealth of public opera production in Venice could have offered even more musical stimuli to Handel. And although a Venetian stay for the premiere of *Agrippina* is unquestionable, according to some, its representativeness of a Venetian operatic school as well as the formidable success Handel had scored with it (resulting in the famous acclamations to "il caro Sassone") are less self-evident. Since it is effectively a pasticcio made up of the most popular arias he had written during his time in Italy, one is tempted to consider it as an aesthetic summation of what Handel had learnt in Italy and its implementation in the genre that was to mark his subsequent career. This opera is far less representative of librettistic traditions that were *en vogue* in Venice at the time compared to the "proper" opera seria such as Handel's Florentine *Rodrigo*, but we are unable to make a comparison in musical terms since musical sources for most Venetian operas from 1700–1710 are lost. Obviously, Handel must have understood Venetian opera well for he scored a success, although Riepe (2013, 340) shows, drawing on other literature, that this success might have not been so unusual or exceptional. Still, Strohm (2008, 13) points out that in Venice Handel "encountered most of the original texts of the operas that he was later to set in London."

It is precisely the comparison of the composers outlined above with Handel that this study devotes itself to. One finds Handel's later career continually intertwined with these same composers, whether as a context in which he created his output in the genre of the chamber duet (Steffani,

14 Unfortunately, the music of the original Florentine operas has been lost.

Bononcini, to a certain extent also Gasparini and Lotti), or as competitors in the cultivation of Italian opera in London (Bononcini, Ariosti, Gasparini). One could also add Francesco Mancini to the latter group, who conducted Handel’s *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo* at the first performance in Naples in 1708 since Handel had to go back to Rome (cf. Marx 2002, 518). The fact that his opera *Gl’amanti generosi* served as the basis for *Idaspe fedele* (1710), one of the first Italian operas performed in London in the original language, although a coincidence, could indicate some kind of proximity, albeit indirect. One should also mention Giovanni Porta, the only Italian composer whose operas were performed in London who, along with Bononcini and Ariosti, actually travelled to the British capital. “Porta, whom Handel may have met in Rome [they were active in similar circles around the same time, A/N], was already in London under the patronage of the Duke of Wharton” (Burrows et al. 2013, 135) in 1720, when *Numitore* was commissioned to open the first season of the Royal Academy of Music. Handel confirmed the connection by borrowing from the opera in his English oratorios, including numerous borrowings from the duet that opens it.

Following Strohm’s thoughts on the matter, I can conclude that the time in Italy “left behind it a set of profoundly memorable experiences and a personal awareness of European culture, which were to be drawn on often in the future, with all the pride of the emigré” (Strohm 2008, 14). For the composer, the experiences on the Apennine Peninsula had the character of a “great intellectual adventure” (ibid., 10). Nevertheless, it remains hard to pin down the concrete musical ways this manifested itself in Handel’s works.

1. 1. 2.

Italian Influence or “What Did Handel Learn in Italy?”

It is notoriously difficult to prove direct influence in a period when composers used a common language and were not concerned to strike an original or intensely personal note, especially as key works may have been lost. Such influence has nothing to do with Handel’s borrowings, which are more tangible—and more conscious—but in this connection less significant. (Dean 1985, 3)

Although this quote stems from an article that claims a strong influence of A. Scarlatti on Handel (which has been subject to criticism since), it is strikingly lucid in its circumvention of a too broad a use of the term “influence”. Leopold (1997, 390) agrees with Dean that concrete influences have been impossible to prove, but expresses hope that research should focus on details and nuances of Handel’s compositional language which

he “demonstrably used already in Hamburg, tested further in Italy and finally applied them in England as a kind of a code for a particular affect”¹⁵. Riepe (2013) is the most outspoken in her critique of generalisation on the Italian influence on Handel. Her main argument is that our knowledge of the repertory of Italian vocal music at the beginning of the 18th century is too limited for an objective overview of repertory and styles that a comprehensive comparison would require.

The other extreme in this often too heated debate would be a negation of the (relevance) of Italian influence on Handel and the (over)stressing of the importance of his German musical background. Indeed, there is a body of literature (in certain aspects also Harris 1980; Taruskin 2010, 311; Riepe 2013) that claims Handel stayed true to himself more than he was influenced by Italian composers, meaning by “himself” mostly his (protestant) German musical heritage. While insisting that Handel’s German heritage was of “paramount importance”, Ellen T. Harris (1980b, 493) still admits that it should not be overemphasised like the Italian influence:

If the Italian influence is not as strong as previously thought, this does not mean that it had no effect at all. Handel adapted his style to the Italian model, [...] but these adaptations were mostly extraneous to his fundamental style, which includes his use of harmony, meter, counterpoint, or melodic sequence. (ibid.)

Harris maintains that the Italian influence on Handel was mostly of formal nature (e. g. the relationship between the ritornello and the vocal melody as well as the adoption of the *da capo* form) or appears in relation to the importance of the Italian language (the stay in Italy did transform Handel’s composition of recitative, henceforth showing much more idiomatic facility). According to her, whatever other Italian influence on Handel there might have been, it most likely came via his German models Keiser and Mattheson. In his *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*, Johann Mattheson stressed the positive impact of Handel’s exposure to the Hamburg (operatic) school, and—if he is to be trusted—also of his own personal influence as a composer in the softening of Handel’s “stiff” German traits with Italian mellifluousness. Whether the stay in Italy enhanced this process or it happened comparatively independently of it cannot be subject to causal attestation. Another aspect that contributes to the ambivalence of the question of Italian influence concerns the difficulties of dating as well as the inaccessibility of sources. Strohm (1993) claims that Handel might have composed

15 Nachweislich schon in Hamburg verwendete, in Italien dann weitererprobte und schließlich in England als signifikante Affekt-Chiffren einsetzte.

more chamber duets during his time in Italy or perhaps even earlier, in Hamburg, than it was thought before (when a lot of them were assigned to Hanover), revising them subsequently for new performances.

Although he was a prolific representative of specifically Italian musical genres such as the cantata, chamber duet and opera, Handel did not seem to be interested in making a conscious contribution to these genres in general on a level that Italian composers might, but in using "progress made there to characterise his own output as a composer" (Strohm 2008, 8). "In London he was also continuing the tradition of Italian opera in Germany, a subsidiary tradition now twice removed from its source and in any case conservative" (Strohm 2008, 103) and was therefore in a different position to his London operatic rivals of Italian nationality. As Lindgren (1975), and even more decisively McGeary (2013) have shown, even though Bononcini was probably not a Jacobite, as a partisan representative of Italian culture, he could, unlike Handel, easily be entangled into aesthetical and political polemics. While Bononcini, the librettist Paolo Antonio Rolli and the like were members of an Italian cultural colony existent in lots of European cities, Handel was a representative of a "secondary practice of European adoption of Italian art, literature and music as humanist or 'classical' cultural goods"¹⁶ (Strohm 1993, 30). In other words, had Handel really wanted to become an Italian, he could have become one, even in the sense of how Johann Christian Bach did, converting to Roman Catholicism for the sake of the advancement of his career in Milan. Indeed, Handel never did this, the same way that in spite of his naturalisation (as a British citizen) he never officially became a member of the Church of England. To continue along the lines of a religious metaphor, he did not have to convert to become a more fervent papist than the Pope himself:

To stay in Rome and conform—he did not want this, but he did want to head to the North as a prophet of the South... A kind of a cultural unselfishness that made him appear a better representative of Italian music than a Bononcini or a Porpora to some of his contemporaries, but firstly to posterity. It was not him who was converted, but his music: his music has some traits of a foreign language mastered in the manner of a virtuoso."¹⁷ (Strohm 1993, 36)

16 Sekundären Praxis der europäischen Aneignung italienischer Kunst, Literatur und Musik als eher humanistischer oder ‚klassischer‘ Kulturgüter.

17 In Rom bleiben und sich anpassen – das wollte er nicht, aber nach dem Norden gehen als Prophet des Südens, das wollte er... Eine Art kultureller Uneigennützigkeit, die ihn einigen Zeitgenossen – und erst recht der Nachwelt – als besseren Vertreter italienischer Musik erschiene ließ als einen Bononcini oder Porpora. Nicht er war konvertiert, aber seine Musik: seine Kunst hat manche Züge einer virtuos erlernten Fremdsprache.

Let us now turn again to the question "What did Handel learn in Italy?", asked by Leopold (1997, 387–396), who tries to expand the perspective from compositional technique to broader cultural aspects. The differences in the German and Italian approach to musical rhetoric, theory of the affects and theory of musical figures translate to the musical level in a comparison of the use of ostinato and sequential motifs in Handel's Hamburg opera *Almira* on the one hand and works that were written after his stay Italy on the other. These techniques depict pain and suffering, but in markedly different ways. Leopold's hypothesis is that before the exposure to Italy, Handel used musical figures in a strict, literal way, whereas afterwards he showed more flexibility, for example in the treatment of ostinato rhythms. In the portrayal of affects, the individual and not the typified emotion is in the centre; rather than interpreting the text (the specifically German term *Textausdeutung*), the composer is interested in the expression of drama. To illustrate this, Leopold draws the duet for Jesus and Maria, "Soll mein Kind, mein Leben sterben" from the *Der für die Sünde der Welt gemarterte und sterbende Jesus* (better known as the *Brockes Passion*, HWV 48) as an example, which unlike other German composers who set it, Handel turned it into a dramatic scene, a tragic duet of unity between mother and son.

It was this idea, to bring human beings and not the text or a regular texture into the focus that Handel brought with himself from Italy and turned into a governing principle for all his later works. [...] Writing Italian music meant replacing the pulpit with the stage, placing images before one's mental eye instead of following a text. [...] That unmistakable handwriting that distinguished Handel from his contemporaries of the same provenance came about only from the entirely individual synthesis of the German tradition of the cantor and Italian expressive art.¹⁸ (Leopold 1997, 396)

In spite of this, Leopold is of the opinion that Handel's formation in terms of compositional technique might have already been completed in

18 Es war diese Idee, den Menschen und nicht den Text oder den regelhaften Satz ins Zentrum zu stellen, die Händel aus Italien mitbrachte und für alle seine späteren Werke zur Leitidee machte. [...] Italienische Musik zu schreiben bedeutete [...] die Kanzel mit der Bühne zu vertauschen, Bilder vor das geistige Auge zu stellen statt Texten zu folgen... Vielleicht erkannte er hier zum ersten Mal, daß auch der bewußte Verzicht auf das Handwerk ein starkes Ausdrucksmittel sein konnte, daß die musikalische Setzkunst nicht der Endzweck des Komponierens, sondern Mittel zum Zweck eines anderen Vorhabens war – dem der Menschendarstellung... Erst aus der gänzlich individuellen Synthese von deutscher Kantorentradition und italienischer Ausdruckskunst entstand jene unverwechselbare Handschrift, die Händel von seinen Zeitgenossen gleicher Herkunft unterschied.

Germany. His contrapuntal skills were formed in Halle, and as already remarked upon, Mattheson (and indirectly, Keiser) influenced him in terms of a more Italianate melodic idiom in Hamburg before his departure to Italy. So a qualitative development of the kind described above might have, indeed, occurred during his stay in Italy in a comparatively independent way, somewhat irrespectively of any concrete Italian influences (cf. Leopold 1997, 392). Riepe (2013, 150–151) agrees with the possibility that a qualitative development might have been part of the process of Handel’s personal aesthetic maturation, and concludes once again that it is impossible to prove a causal relationship between Handel’s experiences in Italy and what he might have learnt there. Given the extreme difficulty (verging in some cases on impossibility) of establishing causal links in (music) history, this study will have no pretence of establishing clear causal links between the vocal duets of Handel and his Italian contemporaries either.

1. 1. 3. Questions of Parody

Whereas it is unquestionable that Handel “seems to have been the champion of all parodists, adapting both his own works and those of other composers in unprecedented numbers and with unprecedented exactness” (Taruskin 2010, 327), this question has been prone to exaggeration and misinterpretation. In an era of the “above-individual character of the baroque work of art”¹⁹ (Strohm 1993, 41) the practice of parody was not considered irreconcilable with but an integral part of artistic creativity. Other composers as well, including J. S. Bach, borrowed extensively and Handel was not unique. He was, however, highly specific in the sheer abundance and variety of ways he devised to work with a pre-existing musical model, taken either from compositions of his own or from music by his occasionally stylistically very different contemporaries and precursors. The term “parody”, used uniformly in German-language literature (cf. Marx 2002) seems more appropriate with its broad, historical connotations²⁰ than “borrowing” since it seems to imply the appropriation of something that is not one’s own.

This study will not dig too deep into the sheer magnitude of scholarly literature written on the subject for several reasons. Firstly, I am not interested in exactly what Handel borrowed from his Italian peers or vice versa and how this “influenced” either of them. Strohm (1993) had already made this point when he asked the question if “borrowings” and “influences” were causally connected at all, as well as if besides compositional

19 Über individueller Charakter des barocken Kunstwerks.

20 The so-called parody mass of the Renaissance, among others.

and ethical, borrowing had a musical-aesthetical relevance at all. Harris (1990, 305), as well, is more interested in the (aesthetic) intent and purpose behind Handel's parody techniques than their cause: "Handel borrowed frequently from himself and others as an integral part of the composition process. The question this raises is: so what?"

Secondly, Handel's parody techniques have had a somewhat problematic history of reception and evaluation. Early on in his historical survey of writings on the matter, Buelow (1987, 63) makes the point that, contrary to popular beliefs and anxieties about Handel's "moral integrity", he did not try to hide his borrowings, since even his contemporaries wrote extensively on the subject, acknowledging the special frequency of parody in Handel's opus but often not deeming it at all problematical. Attitudes began to change in the 19th century, especially in Britain, when charges of plagiarism were voiced with increasing frequency. As a result, two "camps" formed around the debate, one accusing and the other defending Handel, both equally unaware that he operated under entirely different ideas about artistic originality. In his *The Indebtedness of Handel to Works by Other Composers*, the only hitherto published monograph on Handel's parody practices, Sedley E. Taylor (1906) wanted to avoid the extremes that dominated the discourse on borrowings by acknowledging their existence and scope and admitting that although there are many cases when Handel surpasses what he takes from other composers, cases of routine, almost technical appropriation abound as well. He could still not distance himself entirely from the moralising stance that was typical, as Marx (2002) had observed, of 19th-century English-language literature on the matter. Thus, Handel's borrowing was not necessarily morally acceptable if it paid back what had been borrowed with "interest". Buelow (1987, 77) lists the research of authors as diverse as Winton Dean, Walter Siegmund-Schulze, Bernd Baselt and John Roberts as a sign that the tide was turning in the direction of a less value-laden and more level-headed examination of parody in Handel's opus, showing that these practices contributed to what Handel is mainly appreciated for.

As both Marx (2002, 581–584) and Buelow (1987, 68–72) have shown, in early modern aesthetics imitation was still a legitimate part of the *ars inventiois*, and the more artful the imitation, the closer it came to *imitatio perfecta*. Working without models was therefore thought to be almost impossible, although the Enlightenment spirit already questioned this in Handel's lifetime, as witnessed in the writings of his contemporaries Mattheson, Scheibe and Marpurg. The change of attitude towards parody in Handel's oeuvre was thus, a symptom of the changing notions of artistic originality after his death. Buelow (1987, 79), drawing on Baselt, distinguished three types of parody: the use of an entire movement (with a new text or not), the transformative use of a movement that produces,

by the techniques of “insertions, extensions and detailed modifications” a “quasi new piece”, and the “use of individual themes, accompaniment figures or other characteristic short melodic motifs, to build a fully new movement”. Marx (583–584) describes how due to deadlines and other temporal pressures, recourse was made to material that the public had not been acquainted with, which could thus remained unrecognised.

Many authors, ranging from Mattheson to John Roberts (1987), are of the opinion that Handel resorted to parody because his melodic invention was somewhat limited, although this does not necessarily diminish his aesthetical merits.²¹ When it is thought that the borrowing had been identified in the form of a musical source Handel might have easily had access to, it is often in no way clearer how his musical memory worked. For instance, how can we explain his parodying of R. Keiser and Bononcini’s Berlin works at the time of his stay in Italy? Riepe (2013, 192) asks a question that Roberts (2010) had disregarded, namely if Handel could have carried scores by the above mentioned composers around Italy with himself, had a sketchbook with quotes, or if he had maybe quoted from memory.

The share of Italian composers and compositions among the objects of Handel’s parody processes has been a question of some debate as well. Whereas most authors, some of them mentioned in the preceding subchapters, consider that the significant part played by Italian composers in Handel’s parody practices is connected to the question of a strong Italian influence on him, Harris (1980b, 497–498) finds that not only are there more borrowings from German composers than Italian ones in Handel’s output but that these German parodies are more significant for the composer’s creative process. Many have attempted to devise some kind of a periodisation or at least a diachronic account of parody processes in the course of Handel’s career. Roberts (1987, 89; 2012, 184) shows that, after the initial phase of absorbing both German and Italian models as part of a formative period, Handel borrowed less in the 1720s when the bulk of his activity consisted of composing operas for the Royal Academy of Music, returning to a more intensive application of parody in the 1730s and 1740s. The stroke he had in 1737 may have left an impact on his creative abilities, but this has been strongly refuted by many authors (cf. Buelow 1987, 77; Roberts 1987, 87). Roberts (*ibid.*) in particular is adamant that the explanations of Handel’s parody practices offered in the past are unsatisfactory

21 Although firm in his view that Handel “had a basic lack of facility in inventing original ideas”, Roberts (1987, 88, 91) is convinced that the composer should be judged “not by his methods, still less by his motives in employing them, but solely by the effects he achieves. [...] No matter how many more borrowings are discovered, they will not detract from Handel’s greatness but only help us to understand it more fully.”

because “several of these theories could account only for certain kinds of borrowings, not for the phenomenon as a whole.”

One aspect of borrowing holds pride of place in this study. Already Taylor (1906, 37) had noticed that when Handel parodies either other composers’ or his own duets, he often resorts to a manipulation or an elaboration of the contrapuntal texture. When he reached for his own chamber duets *No, di voi non vuò fidarmi* (HWV 189, to be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.3) and *Quel fior che all’alba ride* (HWV 192) while composing his most famous oratorio, *Messiah*, he expanded the two-, or three-voiced contrapuntal texture into a large-scale choral one. While discussing Handel’s borrowings from Lotti’s collection of chamber duets and his Dresden operas into his anthems, operas and oratorios, Roberts (cf. 2012, 170–174; 2014, 281–299) also notices that the parody is often transformative in contrapuntal terms. On the other hand, as he describes the relationships of rivalry in the Royal Academy of Music, Strohm (1993, 34–35) gives the example of Handel’s “allusion”²² to the melody of Fronima’s aria “Già preparai gl’inganni” from Bononcini’s *Etearco* (1711) in the second aria of his own opera *Radamisto*, Tigrane’s “Deh! Fuggi un traditore”. Strohm finds that Handel may have wanted to remind London audiences of music they had heard nine years before in the context of the rumours of Bononcini’s arrival to London as his rival, of a composer whose music they had cherished since 1706. “Allusion” is a much better term than “parody” or “borrowing” for it implies a conscious manipulation of listeners’ expectations. However, convincing claims like these are hard to make in numerous other intertextual situations occurring between scores by Handel and his Italian contemporaries, which is why I will have to shy away from being so bold in the revelation of intent as Harris and Strohm are.

1. 1. 4.

The Case of Alessandro Scarlatti

The absence of this influential Italian composer from the ranks of the ones singled out for comparative purposes certainly needs justification, since we are dealing with the composer who is considered to have left a decisive imprint on Handel’s opus ever since Edward Dent established this in his pioneering study of A. Scarlatti (cf. Dent 1960). For although Scarlatti’s status as the founder of a Neapolitan school of composers and of opera seria as a genre had been somewhat contested²³, he still remains an important figure

²² Anspielung.

²³ Cf. “Scarlatti used to be given credit for it [the use of horns or trumpets as supporting members of opera orchestras, A/N] along with so much else to which he is no longer thought entitled, not only because the work of his older contemporaries was even less well known today than his but also because innovations, historians tended to feel, had to have protagonists.” (Taruskin 2010, 186)

in the development of (Italian) music in the 18th century. Ellen T. Harris (1980b) was the first one to oppose the often repeated claim that Scarlatti had a great influence on Handel, insisting that not only Scarlatti's but the idea of a strong Italian influence in general is problematic. Dean (1985) criticised her, claiming that at least an aria type in *Mitridate Eupatore* did influence Handel, and the influence has been regarded as even more wide-ranging by Wolff (1975b, 59), whereas Strohm (1993) and Leopold (1997) stressed the lack of objective evidence for establishing an influence. We shall now elaborate on the points made by some of the parties in the polemic.

According to Dean (1985, 4), it is Scarlatti's operatic opus from the period of 1694–1707 and not his late masterworks that are relevant for Handel. He finds that the "Handelian" *Mitridate Eupatore* (1707) has a spaciousness and a depth of characterisation beyond that of Scarlatti's earlier operas or his later works, for *Mitridate* was a failure and he never repeated the experiment. Nevertheless, he finds the opera "prophetic of Handel's London style" (Dean 1985, 4) in its use of a slow siciliana type of aria in 12/8 metre²⁴ and its harmonic language abundant in chromaticism and the Neapolitan chord. Dean admits that Scarlatti is not the only Italian composer whose works these elements appear in around this time, and speculates that "it was probably from him that other Italian composers adopted it, for example Giovanni Bononcini in *Polifemo* (1702) and Mancini in *Gl'amanti generosi* (1705)²⁵. It begins to appear in Scarlatti's operas in the 1690s. There are examples in *Pirro e Demetrio* (1694)" (Dean 1985, 6). The siciliana paired up with a contrapuntal string texture, and a heavy emotional charge is indeed frequent in Handel's London operas, especially during the Royal Academy of Music period. Leopold (2009, 78) admits that Handel could have adopted the siciliana from Scarlatti, but shows in a comparative analysis of the use of punctuated rhythmic figures in the bass to express pain and anguish in works by different composers (1997) that it is impossible to speak of direct contact in positivist terms.

Another often repeated example of Scarlatti's influence on Handel would be the latter composers' oratorio *La resurrezione* (1708), created in the context of Scarlatti's prolific activity as an oratorio composer in Rome, some of his oratorios being performed in close proximity to Handel's.

- 24 Similarly, Westrup (1968, 139) claims that the ritornello preceding Laodice's lament in Act IV of *Mitridate Eupatore* anticipates the seamless integration of the voice into a dense, contrapuntal string texture in the aria *Cara sposa* of Handel's *Rinaldo*. Wolff (1975b, 59) agreeing with Westrup, adds that beside this type of aria, Handel was in a way emulating Scarlatti's "broad melodic curves".
- 25 These are both operas Handel was to a certain extent familiar with, so one might rightly ask the question whether Handel could have been influenced by them instead of Scarlatti.

However, in spite of an evident relationship between the two composers placed in a position to write for the same audience, there are some evident differences in their approach as well. “It seems clear that in this oratorio Handel was attempting to outdo Scarlatti, one of the best-known specialists in the genre” by including some dance tunes and even popular songs (such as “Ho un non sò che nel cor”) in his setting of *La resurrezione*, thereby emulating Bononcini and Caldara rather more than Scarlatti.” (Strohm 2008, 10). Riepe (2013, 156) also convincingly shows that between *La resurrezione* and Scarlatti’s *Il giardino di rose*, whose performance in 1707 Handel attended and might have even assisted to, “the differences [...] seem greater than the similarities in details”.²⁶ However, as Dean (1985, 4) had established in the case of Harris’s (1980b) comparison of settings of the same cantata texts by the two composers (finding very little in common) the fact that Scarlatti, as well as Steffani, are a generation older than Handel, indeed puts them in the position of illustrious predecessors rather than composers who exerted a contemporary, topical influence.

As already pointed out, the idea to compare, side by side, some compositions by Handel’s contemporaries with certain aspects of the Halle master’s output, is at this stage hardly imaginable as a comprehensive survey with definitive, causally verifiable results. This would be even more difficult to carry out in the case of A. Scarlatti, who over the decades significantly transformed his style into a vast, dynamic opus still comparatively inaccessible in philological terms²⁷. It makes more sense to examine Italian composers of a smaller stature in music history, but who were nevertheless in more direct contact with Handel.

1. 1. 5.

Selection of Italian Composers for Comparison

Less has been written on the influence of other Italian composers on Handel. One who is certainly not a lesser peer is Agostino Steffani, but his marked influence is more often recognised in the domain of the genre of the chamber duet, and this will be discussed in depth in Chapter 2. However, Steffani’s operas were also widely known in Germany, and it is primarily through their influence on Reinhard Keiser that they may have left a

²⁶ Scheinen die Unterschiede [...] größer als die Gemeinsamkeiten in Details.

²⁷ The works of Alessandro Scarlatti are still mainly available in manuscripts, with comparatively few printed editions. Unlike the works of the composers in this study, conserved mostly in London, Scarlatti’s are also scattered in various Italian libraries and abroad.

mark on Handel's output.²⁸ Wolff (1975b, 52), claims that "Handel modelled his operas on" Steffani's, as a result of his study in Hanover of the elder composer's "effective combination of vocally rewarding melodies with a contrapuntal bass". Not only Handel but also his Italian contemporaries (in particular Bononcini and Ariosti, who came in touch with Steffani's legacy in Germany) could have learnt the use of contrapuntal techniques in secular vocal music from their older Italian predecessor. Perhaps even the manner in which "Steffani brought vocal and instrumental styles into a much closer relationship" or treated accompanying or *concertante* instruments "as second voice parts" left an indirect mark on Handel's likewise contrapuntal operatic idiom? This opinion is shared by Colin Timms (2002, 67). "As Mattheson observed, the number of duets in Steffani's Hanover operas and his reveling in vocal counterpoint were quite exceptional. Steffani also made greater use, often with dramatic purpose, of the *aria in duetto*²⁹ in which successive strophes are sung by different characters." It must be added that the *aria in duetto* type of duet common in Steffani's operas was going out of fashion by the time Handel had reached maturity. This is only one aspect in which the argument from the comparison with A. Scarlatti is evident, that the two composers namely belong to different generations. Handel's and Steffani's operas are too different on many levels to enable the kind of closer comparative look that I will be aiming for, so this study will refrain from a comparison between the two even though establishing connections is of great historical significance.

Our guide in the outlining of influences by Italian contemporaries on Handel as possible candidates for the subject matter of this study will be Riepe (2013, 159–162), who offers an overview of the literature on the matter. There are names that only get a brief mention, such as Benedetto Marcello and Francesco Mancini. Alongside her above mentioned comparison of settings of the same cantata texts by Handel and Scarlatti, Harris (1980b) adds another two points of reference, concluding that Handel exceeds Mancini in expressiveness in his approach to a text that they both made use of in their cantatas, whereas Marcello's and Handel's settings of the same cantata verses have virtually nothing in common. This seems to support the criteria of selection at the core of this study: for however coincidentally and indirectly, Mancini's path is known to have crossed Handel's, whereas there is nothing to suggest that Marcello, although

28 Interestingly enough, the staging of Steffani's opera *Tassilone* was foreseen for the first season of the Royal Academy of Music in 1720/1721, with Bononcini at the helm, but it did not take place in the end.

29 For an attempt at a terminological distinction between the term *duetto*, *aria in duetto* and *aria a due*, see Chapter 3.1.

active in Venice at the time of Handel's possible visit, had any contact with Handel whatsoever.

As opposed to Marcello's works, Handel had probably heard and seen performances of Antonio Lotti's works during his stay in Dresden, which explains why he chose some of the same libretti for his own operas in London, and possibly also some of his borrowings from him (cf. Byram-Wigfield 2012, Roberts 2012, Roberts 2014). The ever sceptical Riepe (2013, 160–161) criticises the idea of similar fugue themes as proof of a link between the two composers' settings of *Dixit Dominus* because of the typical character of the theme, rendering it almost a topos of early 18th-century music. Besides, it is not even certain that Lotti's setting precedes Handel's chronologically and, in her opinion, Handel outdoes Lotti aesthetically. Regardless of all this, a comparison with some aspects of Lotti's opus will be included in this study, but it will be not at the centre of it. On the other hand, the performance of music by Francesco Gasparini in London and a stronger stylistic proximity with Handel will render comparisons more fruitful. According to Roberts's (2003, 285) study of Handel's borrowings from Gasparini, "there can be little doubt that Gasparini was one of Handel's models in developing his Italian style", although Riepe (2013, 160) warns that the borrowings and the other links that Roberts discusses date from 1719 onwards, long after Handel's Italian stay.

For Roberts (2010), it is of little relevance if and under which circumstances Handel met Giovanni Bononcini in Berlin or later in Rome. He establishes that Handel had borrowed from the composer 15 years his senior, often developing the material in question in a highly innovative way (which, as we have already seen, is characteristic of many of Handel's borrowings). He speculates, though, as to whether Handel had brought Bononcini's music with him to Italy from Germany or if the borrowing had arisen from hearing some of his operas in Venice. Referencing Roberts's article, Riepe (2013, 159) stresses once again that Handel borrowed mostly from those works of Bononcini's that he got to know while still in Germany and highlights that even Roberts does not see Bononcini exerting an influence on Handel. "One sees already in Handel's first Roman works a range and power of expression that goes beyond Bononcini's rather narrow limits. He might at times emulate the sweetness of the Italian's melody, but he had other strengths and much further to go." (Roberts 2010, 208) As we shall see in both Chapter 2 and 3, although their careers unfolded in parallel in the field of opera (also to a certain extent in the chamber duet), Bononcini and Handel are more often in a relationship of contrast than a conscious, causal adoption of each other's traits. For Riepe (2013, 160), the case with Attilio Ariosti is somewhat different due to the recourse to a "mixed taste" that they both share. However, Ariosti—whose

opus is on a much smaller scale—and his duets will not be included in the comparison. The reasons for this are manifold. Firstly, Ariosti did not compose chamber duets so it is not possible to examine this duality of genres in his opus. Secondly, his duets are less numerous than Handel's, Bononcini's and Gasparini's so they would better serve a monographic study of smaller proportions. Thirdly, due to the wide comparative approach taken in this study, the inclusion of Ariosti's duets might overload it in quantitative terms. Finally, I am more interested in contrast and overt difference, categories much more suited to a comparison of Handel and Bononcini than Handel and Ariosti.

A few words should be said about Italian composers who are not considered for a comparison with Handel within the framework of this study. A prolific composer of opera who nevertheless left his mark on European music primarily through his innovation in instrumental music, Antonio Vivaldi will stay outside my focus. However, a certain amount has been written on the possible influence of Vivaldi's ritornello form on Handel's instrumental works, to be more specific his *Sonata in B-flat major* (HWV 288), which could be the earliest sign of this kind of Vivaldi reception outside Venice. Riepe (2013, 161–162) summarizes the literature on the matter and agrees that this could be the only “proven” example of an Italian influence on Handel, but she cannot help finding it ironic that Handel never again chose to implement this influence during his Italian stay. The lack of other direct contact with Handel certainly seems to make a comparison with Vivaldi less fruitful than with the above mentioned composers.

In line with her insistence on the fact that we cannot know whose music Handel actually heard in Italy, Riepe (2013, 162–164) goes on to enumerate other composers who were prominent in the city's musical life, but hitherto unconsidered as exerting an influence on Handel. Insisting that the status of A. Scarlatti as the most important composer of the day might be a misperception, she singles out the composers who held the most prominent position in Roman churches, since sacred music was the most important segment of music-making in the capital. She stresses the importance of exploring the influence of the following composers whom Handel might have made an introduction to as the leading composers of Rome: C. Cesarini, P. Lorenzani, B. Gaffi, G. Amadori, G. O. Pittoni, P. P. Bencini and F. Amadei. Research into these composers is still in its early days and marred by the inaccessibility of sources, but Riepe singles out G. O. Pittoni³⁰, P.P. Bencini and C. Cesarini³¹ as the most important in the

30 Handel was Pittoni's neighbour and they might have made music together.

31 Unexpectedly, according to Burrows et al. 2013, the pasticcio *Love's Triumph* (1708) might have contained numbers by “Caesarini”.

group, concluding that it is unlikely Handel had not come across them in Rome and that “as long as we do not know the work of these composers better, it remains open what significance they had for Handel’s development in Italy as a composer.”³² (ibid., 164)

Finally, the reasons for leaving some distinguished Italian composers of a younger generation out of the comparison should be explained. It is not difficult to notice that the Italian composers I have considered and selected so far range from A. Steffani (1654), a whole generation older than G. F. Handel, via F. Gasparini (1661), A. Ariosti (1666), A. Lotti (1667), G. Bononcini (1670), who are between fifteen and twenty-four years older, up to F. Durante (1684), a composer who will feature in the chapter on chamber duets, and who was only one year older than Handel. The generation of composers beginning with Nicola Porpora (1686), Leonardo Vinci (1690), Francesco Feo (1691), Leonardo Leo (1694) and Johann Adolf Hasse (1699), up to fifteen years younger, are, on the other hand, absent from the comparison. Although Handel’s and J. S. Bach’s year of birth is surely just a coincidence and not a historical turning point, it is unquestionable that there is a stylistic divide between these two groups of Italian composers. What could be at stake here is the aforementioned relationship with the nascent (Neapolitan) *style galant*.

It is beyond doubt that although somewhat isolated from Italian operatic goings-on in the British capital, Handel was up-to-date with musical developments on the Appenine Peninsula even after his last journey to Italy in 1729. This can be observed in the pasticcio operas from arias by Italian composers, in whose productions he was involved as a compiler of the music, leader of the company or both. Starting with *Elpidia* in 1725, the process intensified in the 1730s when Handel was dealing with the competition of Porpora and the *Opera of the Nobility* by offering his audience music along similar stylistic lines. However, perhaps in line with the comparatively lower number of duets in the operas of these composers (conditioned at least to a certain extent by Zeno’s and Metastasio’s Aristotelean precepts of verisimilitude), Handel resorted more often to borrowing duets from other operas when he was compiling *pasticcios* out of his own works, whereas according to the Händel-Handbuch (Baselt, Flesch, and Eisen 1978) he only did it twice in the *pasticcios* from works by Italian composers, in *Elpidia* (1725) and *Arbace* (1734). The composers whose arias Handel included are mostly the aforementioned Porpora, Vinci, Leo and Hasse, as well as G. Giacomelli (1692) and G. F. Orlandini (1676). Although nine years older than Handel, Orlandini was in some aspects more adventurous in the adoption of

32 Solange wir das Werk dieser Komponisten nicht besser kennen, bleibt offen, welche Bedeutung sie für Händels kompositorische Entwicklung in Italien hatten.

a “fashionable and forward-looking operatic style [...] as early as *Antigona* (1718), in which one finds light accompaniments, often with drum basses, simple, slow-moving harmony, frequent use of regular phrasing in two-bar units and reverse-dotted rhythm.” (Hill and Giuntini 2001)

The idea of Handel’s conscious and decisive resistance to these new trends, although frequently encountered in literature in the past (cf. also Grout and Weigel Williams 2003, 184), has been replaced by a more differentiated view. Most contemporary authors (e. g. Palisca 1968, 258; Hicks 2001) are united in a need to reconcile the view that Handel’s personal style had been formed early on in his career and resisted change on the one hand, but that it was also susceptible to more modern currents later on in his life. One can only speculate what motivated Handel in this slight stylistic rapprochement. Palisca (1968, 258) is of the opinion that his “seeming capitulation to the new fashion was partly stimulated by competition from younger composers, but there were other [business, A/N] circumstances”. This does not necessarily exclude genuine interest or a more intrinsic motivation either. However, even while admitting to some form of influence, it is often important to stress Handel’s compositional (and aesthetic) idiosyncrasies. As Calella (2009, 351) puts it, Handel had a limited interest in the “new style of vocal music that was more homogenous, but harmonically and contrapuntally less varied than his ‘mixed’ way of composing”³³.

The stylistic and aesthetic appraisal of Handel’s younger Italian contemporaries was a matter of some controversy even in his own time, as can be shown in the opposing judgements of the music of Leonardo Vinci coming from musical authorities of the age such as Charles Burney, who praised the refinement of the melody by the vocal line’s clear morphological-syntactical structuring under an ornamental, virtuosic façade, whereas Pier Francesco Tosi criticised the “banishment” of counterpoint (cf. Taruskin 2010, 165). Leopold (1985, 94) expresses herself in similar terms on *galant* musical tendencies in London from the 1730s onwards, juxtaposing them with Handel’s musical strong points, “the novel style imported from Italy took away the basses’ independence, led the violins in unison or in octaves with the voice, degraded the wind instruments to a coloristic supplement and the strings to accompanying instruments. [...] What Handel won from this conservative stance was a musico-dramatic art that did not have to draw

33 Neuem Stil der Vokalmusik, der zwar homogener, jedoch harmonisch und kontrapunktisch weniger vielfältig als seine ‚gemischte‘ Schreibweise war.

solely upon vocal expression, but also lived from the tension between the voice and the instruments.”³⁴

Therefore, one can safely conclude that regardless of whether we choose to view the contrast between Handel and his somewhat younger Italian contemporaries in terms of stylistic periods and currents or within a context of a great diversity of musical phenomena in the period 1720–1750, the stylistic divide would not facilitate a rounded comparison of Handel and the musical output of Porpora, Vinci, Hasse and the like. It is much more purposeful to compare Handel with the Italian composers with whom he has more in common in stylistic terms, and these are exactly the names that I have been outlining in the course of this subchapter. The fact that they are mostly composers of up to 25 years his senior is symptomatic of the stylistic positioning of the master from Halle. On the other hand, one should not underestimate Handel’s willingness (and ability) to renew his consistently personal and individual musical idiom with fresh breezes from the south, but it is beyond doubt that this happened mostly later on in his career. Given the fact that this study aims for a comparison of only a limited aspect of the composer’s production and that the activity of Handel’s somewhat older Italian contemporaries is more important for the early and middle stages of his career, I shall limit the comparison to a time frame, 1706–1724.

The reasons for electing 1706 as the starting point of this comparative research needs little further justification. For however important Handel’s German musical upbringing in Halle and Hamburg may be, it is beyond doubt that he must have received decisive impulses in the country of origin of musical *italianità*. 1724 as the year of Bononcini’s departure from the Royal Academy of Music provides the other end of the time frame under inspection. This study follows the evolution of the performance of Italian opera in London from 1706 and Handel’s debut with *Rinaldo* in 1711 and onwards. It is only in 1720 that a continuous production of *drammi per musica* took on. Bononcini as the most important Italian composer that Handel’s works were pitted against at the time will have pride of place in the comparison. The dissolution of the Royal Academy of Music in 1729 almost ended Bononcini’s musical career in Britain, and certainly did so in the realm of opera. In his subsequent operatic undertakings Handel had more independence, and so

34 Aus Italien importierter neuartiger Satz, der den Bässen jede Eigenständigkeit nahm, die Violinen unisono oder in Oktaven zur Singstimme führte, die Blasinstrumente zu einem koloristischen Zusatz degradierte und die Streicher zu Begleitinstrumenten. [...] Was Händel jedoch aus dieser konservativen Haltung gewann, war eine musikalische Dramatik, die sich nicht allein auf den Ausdruck der Singstimme stützen mußte, sondern auch aus der Spannung zwischen Gesang und Instrumentalsatz lebte.

did his competition (the *Opera of the Nobility*, for instance), which might explain the more distinct stylistic positioning of both sides. In Italy, his brief time in Hanover and in London up to the thirties Handel was incessantly compared to his coeval or slightly older Italian contemporaries, and his style owes something to this dialectic. The purpose of this study is to find out more about this process in the realm of the vocal duet.

On top of what connects them to Handel, there are subtle historical traces of links between these Italian composers themselves. In his influential treatise on the theory and practice of *basso continuo*, Gasparini praised Bononcini's cantatas for their exploration of the aesthetic realm of the "appealing ('vaguezza', 'armonia'), but also of the exclusively knowledgeable ('bizzaria', 'studio artificioso', 'capricciosa invenzione'"³⁵ (Riepe 2013, 183, quoted from *L'armonico pratico al cimbalo*, Bologna 1722, p. 79). The Spanish music theorist Antonio Eximeno (1729–1808) had a very high opinion of the older generation of Italian composers because of the unity they accomplished between expression and the art of counterpoint (Rodríguez Suso 2001). He added an extra layer of arguments in favour of a comparison with Handel's music: "In the compositions of Gasparini, Bononcini, Marcello and Clari the true purpose of music with the difficult harmony between expression and counterpoint came to light" (Garda, Jona, and Titli 1989, 384). This quote is definitely at odds with the one by Riemann at the outset of this chapter, finding nothing but sheer decadence in Italian dramatic vocal music between 1710 and 1760. Theorists such as Riccati (cf. Timms 2003 and De Piero 2012, to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2) and Eximeno were obviously capable of recognising inherent qualities that escaped the likes of Riemann and Schmitz.

Finally, I should mention the author who advocated the need for what became the main topic of this dissertation. In two articles, Michele Calella (2000; 2009) examined the idea that Handel is distinguished from his Italian contemporaries in a more interesting and diverse (whether novel, or more traditional) treatment of vocal ensembles. His claims receive a more detailed account in Chapters 2.1 and 3. In the conclusion of the first article, Calella (2000, 143) states the following, "Only through a better knowledge of operatic ensembles of Handel's contemporaries (Orlandini, Bononcini, Gasparini, Vinci i. a.) will it be possible to assess if the fragmentary remarks in this paper depict the rule or the exception in operatic history of the early 18th century."³⁶ But even if this study succeeds to a

35 Gefälligen (,vaguezza', ,armonia') auch solche des Kennerhaft-Exklusiven (,bizzaria', ,studio artificioso', ,capricciosa invenzione').

36 Erst durch eine bessere Kenntnis der Opernensembles von Händels Zeitgenossen (Orlandini, Bononcini, Gasparini, Vinci u.a.) wird man beurteilen können, ob die fragmentarischen Bemerkungen dieses Beitrages einen Normal- oder einen Sonderfall in der Operngeschichte des frühen Settecento geschildert haben.

certain extent in this assessment, one must bear in mind, as Strohm (1993, 23) warns us, that “the time for conclusions has not come yet, and direct comparisons between Handel and individual Italian composers must not be extended to general verdicts nor to a German-Italian national dichotomy.”³⁷

As pointed out by Taruskin, (2010, 311) “it is Handel who, for many modern historians and the small modern audience that still relished revivals of opera seria, displays the genre at its best, owing to the balancing and tangling of musical and dramatic values”. What fascinates in this quote is the realisation that Handel has become the landmark for not only an entire generation (or generations) of composers, but also the whole genre of opera seria, even though—paradoxically—he was not its native representative. If we bear this in mind, the pejorative stance taken by the older generation of German scholars such as Riemann and Schmitz makes more sense. The reasons have been explained by H. C. Wolff, as early as 1975:

Italian opera of the first half of the eighteenth century has had to endure the harsh judgements of later generations who branched out in new directions and chose to regard older operas as either imperfect precursors or degenerate latecomers. Most of these verdicts have proved quite unreliable, since they were based on far too superficial a knowledge of the operas themselves. (Wolff 1975a, 73)

Wolff’s remark on the lack of knowledge of the Italian composers whose duets are going to be studied in this chapter has not been entirely overcome since: their works are still rarely available in critical editions and less frequently performed, but we are in a much better position to judge them than a few decades ago. I will, however, not avoid Handel as a reference point since the aim of this research is not to study (and if need be, evaluate) these composers on their own merit but in relation to G. F. Handel. After all, a professional relationship with him was an important aspect of the musical activity of many of them, and we owe the renewed scholarly interest in their works to the great master from Halle, too. Finding middle ground between the derogatory tone of Riemann and the like and a need to elevate these “lesser” composers onto the higher ranks of music history will definitely remain a challenge.

37 Die Zeit für Schlußfolgerungen noch nicht gekommen ist. [...] Insbesondere direkte Vergleiche zwischen Händel und einzelnen italienischen Komponisten nicht zu Gesamturteilen, etwa gar über einen deutsch-italienischen Nationalgegensatz, ausgeweitet werden dürfen.

1. 2.

THE VOCAL DUET

Before one tries to define and classify the vocal duet, it is important to note that even though the distinction between the duet as a vocal and the duo as an instrumental genre stems from some of the 18th-century authors to be quoted in the course of this chapter, “that usage is by no means universal except in present-day Germany” (Tilmouth 2001) and in English-language literature one often finds the term “instrumental duet”. Therefore, the term “vocal duet” is adopted in this study, but the specifying adjective will often be dropped when it is clear from the context that we are by no means dealing with an instrumental genre. A closer terminological distinction of the terms “duet” and “ensemble” is required, as well, since they are often used interchangeably in dramatic genres. Most of the consulted reference sources (McClymonds, Cook, and Budden 1992; Liebscher 1996, Rienäcker 1997, Cook 2001, Ruf 2001, Tilmouth 2001) agree that the duet is a subcategory of the broader term of the ensemble. “In modern operatic terminology, ‘ensemble’ denotes a musical number involving anything from two singers to the whole cast.” (Cook 2001) Some other authors (e. g. Dent 1910a, Dent 1910b, Robinson 1972) use the term “ensemble” predominantly for numbers written for more than two voices. Given the diversity of not only the performing forces involved (ranging from the sparse texture of two voices and *basso continuo* to as many as seven or eight soloists plus orchestra) but also of the stylistic changes the ensemble, it is not a simple task to attempt a definition of the ensemble in structural terms. Out of the above mentioned reference sources, Gerd Rienäcker’s article in *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Rienäcker 1997, 100) comes closest to a generalised (albeit rather intricate) outline of structural procedures common to the ensemble in general. As a model, it allows the omission of some of the numerous elements it lists, and is therefore surprisingly suited to the definition of the duet as well. Rienäcker stresses structural diversity and the vast number of combinations in the treatment of the horizontal and vertical plane, the distinction and contrasting of the vocal parts and their coordination, as well as the use of vocal and instrumental idioms:

The duets give word to the individual, so that they can build togetherness from it in oscillation between connecting and separating. They let the voices enter logically, after each other, after which the sequences of the voices are shortened and their entries dovetailed. They finally flow into a homophonic note-against-note texture, but

eventually dissolve it, as the voices rub against each other in chains of dissonances or *contrapunctus ligatus*³⁸ (Rienäcker 1997, 104).

The “connecting” and the “separating” of the voices obviously refers to their simultaneous and successive treatment. The tendency to move from lengthier entries of the individual voices to shorter ones and, consequently, a parallel cadence very often preceded by some sort of sequential counterpoint (e. g. suspensions that make out *contrapunctus ligatus*) is generally characteristic of the relationship between two voices in a duet texture, whatever the respective proportions of these three structural procedures (alternation, counterpoint, parallelism) are. At one point, Rienäcker (1997, 104) even speaks of “a pendulum swing between imitative polyphony, *contrapunctus ligatus* and note-against-note texture in thirds and sixths”³⁹. In the course of this study, as we examine a wide range of types of duets, the structural pendulum will swing in increasingly different ways.

But this as well as other definitions of the duet are not ahistorical. Only after around 1680 did it become customary that “each character should sing first a short solo (often to the same music but with different words); imitative dialogue then quickly led into duet textures” (McClymonds, Cook, and Budden 1992). After the turn of the century, structural procedures in opera and other dramatic vocal genres became more entrenched and standardised in general and consequently in the duet as well. “After 1700, duets tended to begin with a long solo for each participant, usually singing a different strophe of poetry but set to the same music, a 4th or 5th apart in pitch; this is followed by a transitional section in which the voices have alternating short phrases and overlapping of parts or a section *a due* to lead to simultaneous cadences.” (McClymonds, Cook, and Budden 1992) For reasons already outlined and to be elaborated on in the course of these introductory chapters, this study will also concentrate on duets written in the period from the end of the 17th century to the fourth decade of the 18th century, so we shall leave aside further considerations on how this structural plan developed up to then. It is nevertheless important to point out how music theorists of the 17th and

- 38 Die Zwiegesänge [...] geben einzelnen das Wort, um daraus Zweisamkeit zu entwickeln im Pendel zwischen Verbindung und Abstoßung, lassen folgerichtig die Stimmen nacheinander einsetzen, verkürzen, hernach deren Abfolge, verzahnen die Einsätze, gehen schließlich über in homophone Note-gegen-Note-Sätze, lösen diese wieder auf, lassen die Stimmen in Dissonanz-Konsonanzketten des *contrapunctus ligatus* sich reiben.
- 39 Der Pendelschlag zwischen imitatorischer Polyphonie, *contrapunctus ligatus* und Note-gegen-Note-Satz in Terzen und Sexten.

the first half of the 18th century often acknowledged the importance of the duet, stressing that composing for two voices and at least a third, bass part required particular mastery and was difficult to excel in. Drawing on previous authors such as Giovanni Maria Bononcini (1969, 109–111) in his *Musico pratico* of 1673, Mattheson claimed that “a true trio is thus the greatest masterpiece of harmony, and if one can deal purely, singably and harmoniously with three voices then one will do well even with 24” (Mattheson 1981, 657). Besides being an important aspect of the teaching of the art (or craft) of musical composition, the chamber duet was also an integral part of vocal pedagogy, as the musical equality of the soloists put not only their melodic and rhythmic interpretive precision but also their coordination to the test. This was obviously much needed in a period of music history that favoured soloist self-display in vocal genres as diverse as opera, oratorio, church music and even cantata, but it also has a very long tradition, for example in the *bicinium*, an imitative two-part instrumental or vocal piece of the 16th and early 17th centuries.

What needs to be tackled more than historical developmental theories is the distinction between the so-called “dramatic duet” and the “chamber duet”. The dramatic duet features in dramatic vocal genres such as opera, oratorio, cantata and serenata as one of the many vocal numbers that such a work consists of and as such assigns the vocal parts to characters that interact in a dramatic situation at a certain point in the overall dramaturgy of the work, whether it was on a larger scale as in opera or oratorio or on a much smaller one as in a *cantata a due*.⁴⁰ In contrast, the chamber duet would appear “undramatic” since its voices do not assume dramatic roles, although this assumption will meet with a lot of criticism, especially in the course of Chapter 2. Calella (2000, 125) rightly points out that the distinction between these two types of duet can be “fluid”⁴¹ and that the influence of the chamber on the dramatic duet should be explored, which is something that this study will attempt in its own modest way. The distinction “dramatic”/“undramatic” stems from the text rather than the way it is set: in this sense a chamber duet is a setting of a lyric (or less commonly, epic) text, and the dramatic duet a setting of a dramatic text. However, as we shall see in Chapter 3 in particular, dramatic musical genres often assign verses that entirely lack dimensions of dialogue to the *dramatis personae* singing a duet, but even so these duets have been conceived as parts of an overall drama.

40 I am deliberately avoiding the formulation “if the text of the two vocal parts could function in a verbal drama”. Dramatic vocal genres allow for dramatic situations that would be either impossible or incomprehensible in spoken theatre.

41 Fließend.

The difficulty to differentiate in these terms is particularly felt when classifications concentrate on the degree of difference in the text that the voices in a duet sing. For instance, in a different use of the term “dramatic” than is the case in this study, Tilmouth (2001) distinguishes between duets whose vocal parts sing identical lyrics and those “dramatic” ones that individualise the voices with different texts. One should, however, be very careful in making a causal link between the particularity of the texts that the two vocal parts sing and the degree of “drama” in a duet, since a duet can be “dramatic” even when the voices utter exactly identical texts. Duet texts in dramatic genres were conceived by librettists according to the same poetic criteria as arias, meaning that they had to be distinguished from their recitative surrounding by a regular poetic metre, and the imposition of the same metre on lines assigned to characters in a play who are reacting to the same dramatic situation will impose a certain metrical and stylistic stamp on them even if they are fully different. This is why I made only partial use of my earlier (Ćurković 2009) classification into “monotextual” (duets in which both voices sing the same text), “polytextual” (duets in which the voices sing different texts) and so-called “partially polytextual” duets. In the latter cases, “when the lyrics of the parts differ merely in certain details, such as personal pronouns (and are therefore also syntactically unified)” (Ćurković 2009, 40), the treatment of the voices is often very similar to the one in fully polytextual duets, whose vocal parts are nonetheless metrically and syntactically unified, not to mention how difficult it can sometimes be to draw a line between “partial” and “full” polytextuality.

However, the opposition between monotextuality and polytextuality should not be abandoned entirely, since most chamber duets are “monotextual”. As we shall see in Chapters 2 and 3, in dramatic duets the scale of concordance and difference between the texts sung by the voices can vary greatly, whereas in the chamber duets textual variance is a matter of exception or a special device. Therefore, even though it might seem to undermine it, this study is not able to dispense with the binary opposition of the chamber and the dramatic duet since the way duet texts in the period under study were set was firmly rooted in genre and performance conventions. Any kind of lyric poem could be set as a chamber duet, whereas there is no dramatic duet without a text clearly assigned to *dramatis personae*. It is, however, a difficult task to investigate the correspondence between the dramatic or undramatic character of a duet and the structural procedures outlined above since most duets combine all of them in different ratios.

It is interesting to consider a classification of an entirely different nature by Hugo Riemann (1921, 167–222) in his *Handbuch der Gesangskomposition*. Riemann’s aim is to teach how to compose a vocal

duet and not to investigate its historical development, which is why he elaborates his categories of the lyric, imitative and dialogic dramatic duet on an almost eclectic array of examples of 18th- and 19th-century music. His classification also shows signs of the utmost flexibility, which will prove instructive for the way this study should treat the numerous categories and typologies it resorts to. Since the consequent implementation of the technique most characteristic of the “lyric duet” (i. e. the continual leading of the voices in parallel thirds and sixths) leads to monotony, according to Riemann it is possible (perhaps even advisable) to introduce alternating appearances of the individual voices, especially at the beginning, or add pedal notes, even imitation to the outlining of a melodic idea in one of the voices. In other words, a lyric duet is better if it is infused with techniques characteristic of the other two types. The imitative duet, naturally, excels in the implementation of contrapuntal techniques, but Riemann (1921, 185) warns early on that “free imitation, i. e. the approximate adherence to the melodic lines suffices perfectly for the fulfilment of the implied aesthetic claims... Strict canon is a mere triumph of compositional technique, achieved mostly at the expense of the freedom of imagination.”⁴² He continues with further examples of the combining of strict, canonic imitation with free counterpoint in examples by F. Durante, G. B. Martini, G. B. Pergolesi, E. d’Astorga and Handel himself. We shall see that this flexibility in the application of contrapuntal techniques will feature not only in the less learned domain of the dramatic duet but also in the innately contrapuntal chamber duets examined in this study. The dominant theory of fugal instrumental counterpoint of the 18th century (as outlined by Mann 1987 as one among many authors) cannot, therefore, be fully appropriated to the study of the vocal duet.⁴³ Finally, Riemann also examines the category of the dialogic dramatic duet, a category that we shall return to later, in Chapter 3.1.

Let us finish the examination of what was written on the definition and classification of the vocal duet with an attempt to get closer to what the composers at the centre of this study and their contemporaries thought of the duet, its role and importance. For this, we can turn only to theoretical sources stemming from their time, for the composers themselves left few written traces of their ideas. This does not come as a

42 Die freie Imitation, d. h. die ungefähre Wahrung der Melodielinien genügt vollkommen, um die angedeutete ästhetische Forderung zu erfüllen... Der strenge Kanon ist nur ein Triumph der kontrapunktischen Technik, der meist auf Kosten der Freiheit der Phantasie errungen wird.

43 It is not a matter of Handel and his Italian contemporaries being less contrapuntally consistent than, say, Bach in his instrumental and sacred music but being active in a genre with entirely different structural and technical requirements.

surprise because the establishment of aesthetics as an independent discipline had not been fully attained in the first quarter of the 18th century, but also because the duet did not occupy a central enough place to deserve a lot of analytical attention.

Theoretical sources of the 17th and 18th centuries abound with definitions of the duet. As Julia Liebscher (1987, 15–19) rightly observed, before the 1720s they were distinguished by a strong need to stress continuity with older theoretical traditions through the use of terms such as *bicinium* and *tricinium*. It took some time for the examination of the duet to be emancipated from the context of the development of the sacred concerto and the application of *concertante* techniques to a wide range of vocal and instrumental genres. The distinction between the instrumental duo and the vocal duet and their respective number of parts (the main question being if the *basso continuo* is counted in) was crystallised in the writings of Johann Mattheson. The most important to our understanding of the duet are the periodical *Critica musica* (1722–1725) and his most influential treatise, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*. It is there that Mattheson defined the duet as an “aria for two voices” (1981, 438), confirming the prevalence of structural and formal principles of the aria in vocal music of the time. He was also one of the first to standardise the precise distinction between the vocal duet (for two voices and accompaniment, therefore most commonly in three parts) and the instrumental duo (for two instruments).

Mattheson carries out a classification of the vocal duet in the chapter “On the Categories of Melodies and Their Special Characteristics” of *The Perfect Capellmeister*⁴⁴, as follows: the French type of the vocal duet uses “same or similar counterpoint, that is... one voice sings the words at the same time as the other, so that either nothing at all or only here and there something dissimilar or concertato-like sneaks in” and it is appropriate for church music due to its “good qualities of piety and clarity” (Mattheson 1981, 438). The principal Italian type of vocal duet is essentially polyphonic, in “more or less severe contrapuntal writing” (Marx 1986, 121) due to its “fugal, artificial and intertwined nature” (Mattheson 1981, 438). “There must be a fugal or imitative quality, with suspensions, syncopations and clever resolutions.” (ibid., 658) Duets of this category could easily be labelled as “learned” as “they require a true man, and are a great pleasure to the musically-trained ear” (ibid., 438). Mattheson claims that this is encountered in church and chamber music, but “earlier, in Steffani’s time, also in the theatre” (ibid.). He brings forth another, third category, the essentially “secondary type of Italian duets, wherein there is only questioning and

44 Von den Gattungen der Melodien und ihren besonderen Abzeichen (Chapter 13, Part 11).

answering, as in a conversation, [that, A/N] almost achieves general prominence nowadays, especially on the operatic stages“ (ibid., 438). We are left with an interesting stylistic dichotomy: whereas the polyphonic type of Italian duet used to be characteristic of both dramatic and non-dramatic genres around 1700, by the time *The Perfect Capellmeister* came to be written it had become somewhat outdated in opera and almost replaced by the previously outlined category of the dialogue duet. Mattheson in any case finds that these duets, by being more “naïve” or “natural”, can have a deeply moving impact on the audience. In Chapter 3.1 we shall see to which extent what Mattheson outlined corresponds to the already mentioned “modern” type of dramatic duet as defined by Burney, and whether this change of fashion in the structuring of duets is reflected in the overall duets of G. F. Handel and some of his Italian contemporaries.

However, there is a wide spectrum of stylistic diversity in Italian vocal duets beyond the extremes of the strictly contrapuntal chamber and the successive, dialogic dramatic duet, leaving ample room for the use of techniques such as free or pseudo-counterpoint, parallel movement or the successive entries of the voices. Flexibility in the manipulation of these techniques has been, as shown above, labelled prerequisite for a skilful duet. Naturally, this diversity is somewhat greater in dramatic music than in the chamber duet, but—as shall be seen in Chapter 2—the latter is less monolithic than we are inclined to believe. Hopefully, this dissertation will succeed in highlighting some of the two-way influences between different types of duets.