

Posterity vs Celebrity: Handel Studies and the 21st Century

Berta Joncus

In the late summer of 1977, the Voyager I and II probes were launched on missions which have since carried them beyond our solar system, making them the only man-made objects ever to reach interstellar space [slide 2]. Each carries an LP recording, ‘Sounds of Earth’. The twenty-seven music selections on this recording, chosen by a committee headed by Carl Sagan, include three Baroque pieces. All of them are by Johann Sebastian Bach.

Why didn’t Handel make the cut? By the 1970s, many judged Handel’s musical science to have been inferior to Bach’s [slide 3].¹ In some ways Handel was a victim of his own success. Whereas Bach had laboured in relative obscurity, Handel was an off-the-charts celebrity in his lifetime [slide 4]. The perception was that Handel’s stardom had, in contrast to Bach, compromised his integrity.²

Today we acknowledge Handel’s celebrity without prejudice, but we’ve yet to fully account for its *process*: how did Handel ‘make it’? Of which aspects of 18th-century celebrity production did he make use, which did he help develop or even invent, and which theories of modern celebrity can help explain his success at the time, despite his failure with posterity at NASA? In hope of illuminating these questions, I will here focus on Handel’s concertizing in Rome and his conflict with another celebrity – the castrato Senesino [slide 5].

Let me start by sketching some core theories of celebrity studies, a discipline which developed in the 1960s at the intersection of sociology and the study of theatre, cinema, popular music, and other media [slide 6, animated]. Theoretical models common to celebrity scholars

include Max Weber's 'charisma concept'[slide 6, animated], according to which an individual comes to be seen as the ideal spokesperson for a community;³ the Marxist view of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer that capitalism [slide 6, animated], by subordinating all cultural production to consumerism, makes autonomous artistic expression impossible;⁴ Richard Dyer's conceptualization [slide 6, animated] of the star as both semiotic sign and creator of that sign;⁵ Francesco Alberoni's identification [slide 6, animated] of shared wealth, a literate public, and freedom of speech as requisite to celebrity production;⁶ Leo Braudy's theory of reciprocity [slide 6, animated], which implicates audiences in the process of artistic creation;⁷ Chris Rojek's recognition of the re-invention [slide 6, animated] which the celebrity persona must undergo to satisfy fans;⁸ and Daniel Boorstin's insistence that mass reproduction of a celebrity's likeness [slide 6, animated] is the most powerful builder of their personality cult.⁹

Celebrities fascinate us because they address deep-seated emotional, social, and possibly even spiritual needs. According to Adorno, Horkheimer and others, the vacuum of faith created when the Enlightenment delegitimised the authority of the Church was filled by the worship of secular figures perceived to possess special powers [slide 7]. These powers constitute what Joseph Roach calls the star's 'unbiddable' state, that complicates fan identification with the celebrity through the celebrity's un-likeness to the fan. For eighteenth-century musical celebrities, as Martha Feldman explains, the live performance was the key test of star quality, and *opera seria* provoked the most excessive rites of worship. The opera house was where star singers' mix of virtuosity, charisma, gender-bending, and embodiment of absolutist ideals affirmed their other-worldly powers and entranced their devotees [slide 8].¹⁰

Celebrity theory can illuminate Handel's career in particular [slide 9; repr slide 6]. His virtuosity and charisma enraptured the Roman Arcadian Academy, whose artistic ideals he

expressed and embodied. As a performer-composer, Handel staged both his selfhood *and* the works communicating that selfhood in a way that Dyer helps us to understand. It was in London, however, that Handel first encountered a developed celebrity industry and its print-hungry consumers. Here he devoted himself to composing for Quality, yet the Italian opera with which he supplied them was immediately commodified in print and English-language stage performance for the middling and lower sorts. By 1729, these domesticated variants had helped fix Handel's reputation as Britain's foremost composer.

Italian opera confronted Handel with two problems [side10]. First, its principals were, like Handel, agents of their own star production and so not necessarily disposed to do as they were told. Second, English critics accused Italian opera of fomenting social decay. These problems together caused Handel to clash, publicly and damagingly, with Senesino. One of the ways he negotiated this conflict was to replace opera with oratorio in his repertoire; another was to re-invent himself as a celebrity. As he had in Rome, from 1735 Handel added organ concertos to his oratorios, allowing him to stage his own virtuosity for paying audiences. At about this time Handel seemed also to realize the importance of his likeness for his celebrity, and was likely a major mover behind the century's breakthrough celebrity effigy: his own statue, the first ever of a composer, in Vauxhall Gardens. But such moves, while they served Handel well in the rough and tumble of London commercial life, served him less well in the view of posterity, when measured against the more austere artistic concerns of the anti-celebrity J.S. Bach. As a result of which Handel has not, *yet*, been sent into interstellar space.

Handel was a virtuoso of the keyboard, but he stunned listeners in a manner similar to opera stars. In her book *Handel as Orpheus: Voice and Desire in the Chamber Cantata*, Ellen Harris traces how, from 1706, Handel turned his Italian patrons into fans, provoking their

adoration and desire [slide 11].¹¹ Handel's patrons in Rome led and organized Academy events at which Handel performed. These gatherings typically featured so-called 'Olympic games' in which the assembled patrons, literati, and music virtuosi vied with one another. Consider this report of Alessandro Scarlatti jostling with the poet Giambattista Felice Zappi [slide 12]:

No sooner had [Zappi] finished his recital than [Scarlatti] ...began to transcribe the verses recited, with the music thereto ... the souls of those present received of them so great delight that they ... urged both poet and musician to display their skill afresh ... their contention was so close that scarce had the one finished repeating the last line of the new air than the other ended the last stave¹²

Ursula Kirkendale argues that Benedetto Pamphili's cantata 'Händel, non può mia musa' came out of just such a gathering, hosted by the Marquis Ruspoli.¹³ We can imagine the topic of the 'game' being Orpheus, prompting Pamphili's cantata in praise of the 'new Orpheus' Handel, whose 'lyre' renders Pamphili's 'Verses' unworthy.¹⁴ We can imagine Handel improvising his simple keyboard setting of these verses, highlighting the Orphic powers by which, for instance, his music shadows the anapest meter of 'Ogn'un canti e all'armonia / Di novello Orfeo si dia' to add weight to the words 'armonia' and 'novello Orfeo' [slide 13].

Pamphili had first glorified Handel in his libretto to Handel's oratorio, *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*. The literary model here was Petrarch's *Trionfi*, itself modelled after an emblem book in which mottos accompany pictures of allegorical figures [slide 14].¹⁵ In writing his *Trionfi*, Petrarch turned the emblem book into literature, describing the competitions and triumphal ceremonies of allegorical figures such as Pleasure, Fame and Time. Extending this model, Pamphili's *Trionfo* incorporates music as a communicative means and at one point allegorizes Handel.¹⁶ This occurs when Pleasure, seeking to seduce Beauty, reveals his palace,

whose highest delight is the music-making of Handel, who here appears *in propria persona* as an incarnation of Pleasure. Emblem books traditionally depicted Pleasure as an enticing youth,¹⁷ and Pamphilius has Pleasure describe one of his palace-dwellers as ‘a charming boy with a smile on his lips’.¹⁸ At this juncture, Handel tossed off his the first-ever organ concerto:

[example slide 16]

To ensure audiences got the point, Pamphilius has Beauty exclaim, ‘Be silent! What sounds do I hear?’, to which Pleasure answers, ‘A graceful youth / awakens wondrous delight / with enchanting sound’. As Harris points out, this characterization oozes with homoerotic desire.¹⁹ Beauty also identifies Handel’s virtuosity in a reference to his flashy right-hand passage [slide 17]: ‘He has wings on his right hand; indeed, with his hand he performs / feats beyond mortal skill’. In this scene Handel transitions from being a performer of non-diegetic music with the band to being a *dramatis persona* addressing his audience through diegetic music.

Theory sees the celebrity as at once virtuosic, charismatic, entitled, and notorious. By 1708 Handel commanded the virtuosity and charisma to make *cognoscenti* swoon: a bold, alluring, blond youth, he embodied the Academy’s Arcadian ideals. But he couldn’t become ‘a celebrity’ in the modern sense until he moved to London where, uniquely at this time, there was the literacy, print industry, press freedom, and spread of wealth necessary to the creation of media figures in their full entitlement and notoriety. Such figures occupied public and private spaces, mainly through their likenesses, while being physically absent. This presence-while-absent whets audience appetite to encounter the celebrity in real life.

On his arrival to London in 1710 [slide 18], Handel likely assumed that he would rely on absolutist patronage as he had in the past. Handel’s virtuosity allowed him to transcend his social rank, and among his high-ranking fans were the Hanoverian monarchs, who otherwise found

commoners repellent. But in 18th-century London there was also a lively debate over the political implications of high culture, within which too much elite appeal could breed suspicion. While the self-advancement of the middling sorts depended on aping the manners of the entitled, a increasingly polite and commercial citizenry prided itself on its industry and earned merit.

Italian opera in London, because a plaything of the rich, was riven with identity politics. The volume, vitriol and variety of English critics' rants against Italian opera are familiar to Handel scholars. A dominant motif was luxury: as Michael Burden explains, Italian opera became a synecdoche for how the upper classes wasted resource.²⁰ By devoting himself to Italian opera from 1719 to 1727, Handel came to be identified with the nobility *and* seen as an enabler of its over-indulgence. Small wonder that *Rinaldo*, though a career break-through, provoked Handel's first bad press. In *The Spectator* of 6 March 1711, Joseph Addison derided the notion that 'Seignior Hendeel' was the storied 'Orpheus of our Age', and suggested instead that his creation of *Rinaldo* 'in a Fortnight' evidenced its artistic flimsiness.²¹ From 1719, *castrati* and *prime donne* also of course became lightning rods for charges of license, from 1724 also in obscene verse epistle alleging that greedy Italian stars not only hoovered up British wealth but were also sexually depraved 'Defects of Nature'²².

Mediation of Handel's compositions tended to make them less toxic. His Italian operas and *danses noble* became plain British fare thanks to London's music sellers [slide 20], and to its playhouses, which allowed these elite works to go public in the form of overtures, collections of 'Favourite Songs', song sheets for voice and for German flute, keyboard lessons, collected dance tunes, notated choreographies, playhouse entr'acte music, and, from 1728, ballad opera songs. It was in fact during the 1720s – before Handel's oratorios – that his music was first seen as a national resource. By 1729 Handel had passed a key threshold of modern celebrity by being able,

as Nick Couldry puts it, to ‘influence the rules of the game [and] ... shape what counts as capital’.²³

Handel’s celebrity was particularly hard to escape because the public encountered his output in a dizzying variety of forms. Some indication of the cultural distance a single Handel composition could travel can be seen in the progress of the solo air ‘Son confus’ pastorella’ from the Italian opera *Porro* to a ballad-opera version. First printed in John Walsh’s *Favourite Songs in ... Porus*, it resurfaced as a song sheet, a playhouse benefit, an English-language version, and one of Kitty Clive’s signature playhouse interlude songs – all within the year of the opera’s premiere. The next year Henry Fielding and Mr Seedo changed it to a comic duet for quarrelling lovers in the Clive vehicle *The Lottery*, which became a playhouse staple.

‘Son confusa’ is also an example of how Handel’s borrowings helped him appeal to common taste. In ‘Son confusa’, as John Roberts tells us, Handel borrows from a musette-styled air by Telemann.²⁴ Handel’s slicing and dicing of Telemann’s ideas evidenced a ‘stylistic eclecticism’, in the words of Graham Cummings, that gave Seedo a variety of materials to work with when turning the number into a duet: catchy motifs, sequential heightening, elegant phrase shapes, striking modulations, and a drone bass. This may be heard through a comparison of the A section, first of Handel’s aria and then of Seedo’s arrangement:

[slide 21 and audio x 2]

Arrangements like Seedo’s helped make Handel a British celebrity, an astonishing achievement given that the average consumer of his music had probably never heard him perform.²⁵ By 1729, when Handel and Heidegger opened London’s ‘second’ Royal Academy to perform operas, Handel was powerfully positioned: still first composer at court, and he was also exclusive composer for the new academy, whereas previously he’d had to share duties with

Giovanni Bononcini and Attilio Ariosto. But was Handel in control of the company? The revolt against him in 1732 suggests that he was less so than he may have thought.

Handel had failed to account the clout of Senesino, and this initial conflict soon bred a celebrity war. From 1733, writers imagined encounters for Handel that were soaked in satirical references: he became ‘Tweedle Dee’ to Senesino’s Tweedledum, twins in the vices of arrogance and greed. But how did this antagonism between these two practitioners of *opera seria* arise?

Senesino’s career mirrored Handel’s own in many ways. Like Handel, he was the darling of an Italian academy – in Senesino’s case the Accademia dei Rozzi in Siena, where from 1707 he refined his stage techniques.²⁶ Like Handel, his operatic break-through was in a dramatization of Tasso’s *La Gerusalemme liberata*.²⁷ Like Handel, he came to London as a charismatic virtuoso adored by international Quality. And like Handel, he sought to control his celebrity production: as Melania Bucciarelli has shown, Senesino took personal interest in his earnings, his parts, his company on stage, the scheduling of his benefits – the first benefit of a season going to the top performer – and, in a pasticcio, what numbers he sang.²⁸

The Handel-Senesino relationship was fraught from the start. Having been wooed by London opera personnel since 1717,²⁹ in the summer of 1719 Senesino was the only singer that the Royal Academy’s directors explicitly tasked Handel to engage. He failed to do so. As Bucciarelli points out, Senesino didn’t just spurn Handel’s offer but almost certainly led him on. In July Handel wrote the Earl of Burlington that he expected to make contract with Senesino,³⁰ but weeks later Senesino contracted to stay at Dresden – only to leave Dresden in 1720 once the Royal Academy had met his salary demand.³¹ Senesino and his artistic partner, the castrato Matteo Berselli, reportedly engineered their expulsion from Dresden by ripping up their scores

and refused to continue, which either got them dismissed, or precipitated the collapse of the company in February, or both.³²

What was bad for the Dresden opera was good for Senesino, who as recently September 1718 had demanded much less to come to London, 1,000 guineas and the ‘choice of some operas’.³³ By holding back until 1720, Senesino secured 1,500 guineas and, apparently, the right to choose works.³⁴ Three days after arriving London, Senesino convinced the Royal Academy to stage *Arsace*, a pasticcio of his choice.³⁵ Its plot, featuring Queen Elizabeth and Earl of Essex, gave him openings to appeal to native pride; as Bucciarelli shows, Senesino also imposed his choice of new arias in the face of managerial resistance.³⁶

In 1729 Handel was again chasing Senesino, now for the second academy. Again, he failed at first, with Senesino again consenting only the following year, and only after the London offer had been substantially sweetened. Writing to Senesino in May 1729, Paolo Rolli related having heard that Senesino ‘had received’ Handel ‘coldly’ in Venice, and that Handel ‘complained and wailed about it’.³⁷ For the 1729-30 season Handel and Heidegger had to make shift with the aging castrato Bernacchi, but the following summer enlisted the fixer Owen Swiney, then based in Bologna [slide 24]. In a letter of 7 July 1730 Swiney wrote to Francis Colman, special envoy in Florence to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, that ‘Senesino or Carestini are desired at 1200 G[uinea]s each, if they are to be had’.³⁸ Eleven days later, with time running out before the season’s start, Swiney pleaded to Colman, ‘I was in hopes of the Hon[ou]r of a Letter from you, to let me know whether Senesino had accepted the offer of 1200 G[uinea]s’.³⁹ A fortnight later, Colman wrote to Antonio Cocchi: ‘I am very much surprised that we have had no answer yet from Senesino, & therefore must desire you to write him again this afternoon ... that I may have Senesino’s answer tomorrow’, enclosing ‘Mr Handel’s letter’ giving ‘all the reasons in

it why' the opera's 'Undertakers cannot go beyond the offer of 1200 guineas'.⁴⁰ But they did go beyond 1200 guineas: on 16 October 1730 Handel wrote to Colman: 'I see [you engaged] Senesino on the basis of 1400 guineas, which we accept ... Senesino arrived here 12 days ago, and I have not omitted to pay him ... the hundred guineas of his salary on account, as you had promised him'.⁴¹

Handel's climb-down was made necessary by the apparent failure of his attempt back in June 1730 to find a way around Senesino, At this time Handel had asked Colman to scout for a woman who 'can sing a male role', and to omit from contract articles any mention of 'first, second and third' roles, because that 'restricts us in the choice drama' and 'is a source of great inconvenience'.⁴²

Second academy productions from 1730 to 1733 suggest that Senesino again had his choice of parts. [slide 26]⁴³ After a two-year absence, he returned to the London stage in November 1730 as Lucejo in *Scipio*, a work that, like *Arsace*, appealed to patriotic sentiment.⁴⁴ Next came *Ormisda*, a revived pasticcio whose airs the singers chose; here Senesino, in taking up Bernacchi's part from the previous season, could display his superiority in four new arias.⁴⁵ After a revival of Handel's *Partenope* came another pasticcio, *Venceslao*, again void of Handel's input, followed by *Poro*, a new, warmly received production whose title role aligned with Senesino's dramatic line in heroes. Thereafter came two revivals: *Rodelinda* with its signature Senesino role, and *Rinaldo*, heavily revised, and sumptuously re-staged with Senesino taking over the title role debuted by the legendary castrato Nicolini. The 1731-32 season was likewise stuffed with Senesino-friendly productions: a revival of *Corialano* by Attilio Ariosto – would Handel have chosen an opera by his Royal Academy rival? – as well as the premieres of *Ezio* and

Sosarme, and three Senesino hits, *Porro*, *Admeto* and *Giulio Cesare*. In every production, Senesino took the title role.

Was Handel's 1732 pivot to English-language oratorio in part a revolt against Senesino's dominion? *Esther*, Handel's first-ever oratorio for a paying audience, reined in his soloists, who now had to share numbers with a choir [slide 26]. Instead of Italian, the principals sang English. Instead of acting, for which Senesino was renowned, they concertized. Instead of occupying the stage, 'all ye Opera Singers' were 'in a sort [of] Gallery',⁴⁶ while Handel took centre stage. The oft-quoted satire: 'H[ande]l, was plac'd in a Pulpit ... by him sate Senesino, Strada, Bertolli and Turner Robinson' registered a hierarchy now ruled by Handel.

Handel's oratorios also immersed audiences in what Viscount Percival called the 'Church stile'.⁴⁷ Into *Esther* Handel folded his two grandest coronation anthems, *Zadok the Priest* and *My heart is inditing*, in an act not so much of self-borrowing as of self-aggrandisement.⁴⁸ Advertisements boasted of 'Musick ... disposed after Manner of the Coronation'.⁴⁹ *Esther*'s 'Church stile' also included Handel's introduction of the organ to the opera house.⁵⁰

At this point, however, Handel made four serious errors. First, starting with *Lucio Papirio*, which opened on 23 May 1732, he took over preparing the company's *pasticci*: the earlier patchwork of arias yielded to a score by a composer chosen by Handel, whose music he arranged.⁵¹ Second, once the 1731-32 season ended, Handel tried to replace Senesino, inviting the castrato Il Porporino, then in Dresden, to name his terms.⁵² Third, Handel took this step apparently without consulting his patrons. Fourth, in March 1733 he further alienated opera subscribers by charging them extra to attend the opening of his oratorio *Deborah*.

Of these four mis-steps, Handel's bid to replace Senesino was probably the most serious.⁵³ (slide 27). Handel roped in Giovanni Giacomo Zamboni to negotiate with Il

Porporino, but Zamboni wrote on 26 August 1732 that he wished he wasn't involved.⁵⁴

Replying to Handel's offer on 24 September 1732, Il Porporino identified Handel's error: only the command of a royal, either Princess Ann or the Prince of Wales, could justify Il Porporino breaking his Dresden contract.⁵⁵ Handel didn't have that. Worse, Senesino appears to have heard of this, and by late 1732 was planning a rival company.⁵⁶ By January 1733 the Handel-Senesino rift registered in *Orlando*, a production that flatly contradicted Senesino's stage line and was coolly received.⁵⁷ But it was the scandal of *Deborah* that got the press involved.

For *Deborah*, as for *Esther*, Handel scaled up earlier compositions. Borrowing two-thirds of its music from earlier works,⁵⁸ he set the whole score on a grand scale: nine soloists, twenty choir members, eight-part choruses, and a band of about seventy-five instruments, including three trumpets, three horns and two organs. What Viscount Percival found 'magnificent', Viscountess Irvine found 'excessive noisy'.⁵⁹ Presumably to cover costs – the house was also 'fitted up and illuminated in a new and particular Manner'⁶⁰ – Handel raised ticket prices, and also charged season subscribers extra. A fracas ensued, as Viscountess Irvine recounts:

Handel thought[,] encourag'd by the Princess Royal[,] it [*Deborah*] had merit enough to deserve a Guinea & the first time it was performed att that price, exclusive of subscribers tickets, there was but a 120 people in the House: the subscribers being refus'd unless they woud [sic] pay a Guinea they insisting upon the right of their silver tickets forc'd into the House & carry'd their point.⁶¹

Imagine provoking your patrons to the point that they would force their way into the opera house! His impertinence made him notorious – then as now an important component of press-fuelled celebrity. An eight-line satire circulated in print and correspondence within days of *Deborah*'s 17 March premiere, equating Handel's exploitation of his post with first minister

Robert Walpole's of his (slide) . In an imagined dialogue between these two 'Projectors', Handel asks Walpole, 'Of what Use is your Sheep if your Shepherd can't shear him?'.⁶² On 7 April a long polemic painted Handel as insolent, arrogant, and relentlessly self-promoting. By ensuring 'No Musick but his own was to be allowed', Handel's secret 'Project' stood revealed: to replace opera with oratorio.⁶³

This was rightly understood to be a pro-Senesino charge against Handel. A contributor to *The Hyp-Doctor* defended Handel as 'a Protestant' safeguarding social and musical 'Harmony' from the risk of subjugation to 'any Italian Band'.⁶⁴ Senesino quickly struck back: with *Orlando* cancelled due to the illness of its *prima donna*, on 22 May 1733 *Griselda*, by Handel's arch-rival Bononcini, was revived [slide].⁶⁵ Two days later, Charles Delafaye wrote to the Earl of Essex about the behind-scenes 'Schism': reacting against the 'arbitrary prince' Handel, Senesino and Cuzzoni were to set up a company at Lincolns Inn Fields.⁶⁶ Handel fired Senesino the following week.

Or did he? Senesino may have engineered this exit, the *Griselda* revival being, like his protest in Dresden, an insubordination so extreme that he had to be discharged, and that allowed him to appear the victim. In any case, accusations against Handel of greed stuck: throughout the summer of 1733, while Handel was leading his works as part of Oxford's degree ceremonies, press reports grossly exaggerated his earnings,⁶⁷ a ballad farce satirized Handel as having alone gained from his Oxford venture,⁶⁸ and a mock news item gave out that highwaymen, hearing of Handel's profits at Oxford, had waylaid his carriage.⁶⁹

By October 1733 Senesino was said to have hired Lincoln's Inn Fields 'for himself and his supporters'.⁷⁰ In November came the satirical pamphlet *Do you know what you are about?* whose author blamed the 'Theatric Squabble' in the first instance on Handel having forced

Senesino to sing ‘English Oratorio’s’, though its root cause was held to be Senesino and Handel’s shared ‘Self-Int’rest, blended with dear Self-Conceit’. Being so alike, the author wonders why they clash: ‘Strange that such Difference should be / ‘Twixt *Tweedledum* and *Tweedle Dee!*’ – a quote from a 1725 epigram written to mock Handel and Bononcini.⁷¹

The slander resurfaced in a 23-page pamphlet *Harmony in an Uproar*, sold from 12 February 1734. A three-part satire, the pamphlet’s middle section is a ballad – mockingly titled ‘a cantata’ – that once more twinned Handel with Senesino. The tune for the ballad verses is the round dance ‘Joan Sanderson, Or The Cushion Dance’. In the steps for the Cushion Dance, the first dancer puts a cushion on the floor and sings ‘This Dance it will no further go! / Because Joan Sanderson will not come too’ – lines that the canny reader would associate with Cuzzoni, whose delayed return to London had kept Senesino’s company from opening. To conclude, all the dancers sing a refrain, whose verses in the 1734 pamphlet, are, ‘And over again, to free us from Pain; All in the Tweedlum, deedlum strain’ – here’s the tune.⁷²

[play Shall we all sing it?]

‘The Tweedlum, deedlum strain’ is clearly Handel’s and Senesino’s, to which Quality foolishly dances over and ‘over again’.

The first part of *Harmony in an Uproar* is a mock trial at which Handel is asked to ‘Swear upon the two Operas of *Ariadne*, *alias* the *Cuckoo* and the *Nightingale*’. As Suzanne Aspden discusses, this passage refers to the Senesino company’s *Arianna in Naxos*, which opened on 29 December 1733, and Handel’s *Arianna in Creta*, which opened about a month later.

The ‘Nightingale’ and the ‘Cuckoo’ likely also stood for Senesino and Handel. In the poem ‘The Cuckoo and the Nightingale’, which had circulated since 1673, the Nightingale asks the Cuckoo to quit the field so that other birds can sing. The Cuckoo refuses; only when the poet,

siding with the Nightingale, throws a stone at the Cuckoo does she fly away. Grateful, the Nightingale assembles all the birds to sing. The parallels between this poem and Handel's situation in 1734 are clear: only Handel's protector, Princess Anne, could rid Handel of his rival Senesino, as Il Porporino had told Handel in 1732.

Did Handel internalise this view of himself as a Nightingale to Senesino's Cuckoo? His organ concerto HWV 295, commonly known as 'The cuckoo and the nightingale' from the 'cuckoo motif' in its sprightly second movement, suggests a riff on this theme. Handel premiered the work at an oratorio performance on 4 April 1739, continuing a practice of enhancing oratorios with additional appearances at the keyboard that he had started in 1735 to help undercut Senesino's company. Organ scholar William Gudger notes how the 'cuckoo' motive dominates, and how it liquidates contrasting material, particularly when used contrapuntally.⁷³

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tdo8Ai9THGA>

I hear 'The Cuckoo and Nightingale' as another *in propria persona* performance by Handel, like in *Trionfo*. He asserted himself as the virtuoso who can make the Cuckoo do what he wants.

Such double meanings are hard to verify, and Handel's personal reserve makes his intentions particularly hard to divine. His reticence itself suggests the celebrity's need to be an enigma, the easier to move through the spheres of the virtuosic, charismatic, entitled, and notorious. Being an enigma helps the celebrity achieve the necessary contradictions between god-like power and personal touch, between a commodified presence and an actual remoteness.

Handel's Vauxhall Gardens statue famously embodies these contradictions. Less well known is that the statue's original siting aided Handel-worship. Until the late 1740s the statue was positioned in a niche so that the setting sun would suddenly bathe it in light; once the sun sank below the horizon, the statue fell into deep shadow [Fig *].⁷⁴ Such light effects attest to the

sophistication of 18th-century London's celebrity production. But whose idea was the statue? According to a 1752 report by Johann Carl Conrad Oelrich 'some individuals' were responsible for the statue; and historians David Coke and Alan Borg believe that these individuals were led by Handel.⁷⁵ Coke and Borg's evidence for Handel's role is Philip Mercier's portrait of Handel [Fig*], which Handel owned. Painted in the early 1730s, it shows the sitter in a highly unconventional pose: at work, in house gown and wig cap. Coke and Borg reason that the sculptor Louis-François Roubiliac, then young and unknown, would have needed guidance and precedent before hewing such an odd representation into costly Carrera marble; certainly neither Roubiliac nor Vauxhall proprietor Jonathan Tyers would have dared depict Handel so casually without his approval. If Coke and Borg are correct, did Handel's withdrawal of £150 in cash on 20 August 1736 – a transaction identified by Ellen Harris⁷⁶ – cover half the statue's £300 cost?

I began my talk with the launch of J.S Bach's music beyond the solar system. Among the reasons that Bach's works were chosen over Handel's is surely that Handel's celebrity ultimately damaged his reputation. Today we acknowledge that both Bach and Handel at times made their art bend to circumstances. But if we question Handel's integrity less than we did in the 1970s, clear is that celebrity presented him with a specific set of challenges and opportunities that Bach did not confront. Handel's celebrity, rather than dulling, actually stimulated his inspiration. In Rome, he relied on virtuosity and youthful charisma to prove himself, thrilling listeners with music and music-making that affirmed Arcadian Academy taste. Allegorical verse by Pamphilij gave Handel occasion to represent Pleasure *in propria persona* – a clear example of the star as both agent and product.

In London, wealth, literacy, and a free press had caused a recognizably modern celebrity industry to take hold by the time Handel arrived in 1719. It took some time for him to recognize

that this situation had created entirely new kinds of success, as well as quite specific pitfalls. During the 1720s, when Handel's elite compositions seeped into the marketplace almost in spite of their composer, audiences came to know him through humble forms of music-making. Handel's celebrity 'presence' therefore replicated itself aurally, rather than visually as is today normal, at least until the late 1730s when he appears to have acted to erect his own effigy.

When Handel erred it was not by overlooking his popular audience but by alienating the Quality he served. Patrons may have needed his opera scores, but he needed their investment. When he refused to yield to his subscribers' taste for rival star Senesino, serial crises ensued. Handel eventually re-invented himself as an author of oratorios, which he occasionally enriched with organ concertos to display his virtuosity and directorship. On such evenings, as in the Rome of his youth, he was once more the *primo uomo*. And he may yet make it into space.

¹¹ For instance, in 1975 Günther Massenkeil noted that from Wagner onwards, music critics had held Handel inferior to Bach 'Bach und Händel: zur Geschichte eines Vergleichs' *Johann Sebastian Bach und Georg Friedrich Händel : zwei führende musikalische Repräsentanten der Aufklärungsepoche: Bericht über das wissenschaftliche Kolloquium der 24. Händelfestspiele der DDR, Halle (Saale), 9-10 Juni 1976* [sic], ed. Walther Siegmund-Schultze (Halle an der Saale: Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft, 1976), 79-87 – Foundling Museum [Colloquium date is incorrectly 1976 on title-page; papers from the colloquium in 1975 were published in 1976 (see p.4)]. In 1978, Craig Bell protested that Bach's legacy was still obscuring Handel's. Craig A. Bell, 'The Great Mr Handel, *The Music Review* 39 no. 1 (February, 1978): 22-30 – in SH order or in FM? Some of the historiographic grounds for this misjudgement are reviewed in Rampe.

²² For instance, in 1975 Günther Massenkeil noted that from Wagner onwards, music critics had held Handel inferior to Bach 'Bach und Händel: zur Geschichte eines Vergleichs' *Johann Sebastian Bach und Georg Friedrich Händel : zwei führende musikalische Repräsentanten der Aufklärungsepoche: Bericht über das wissenschaftliche Kolloquium der 24. Händelfestspiele der DDR, Halle (Saale), 9-10 Juni 1976* [sic], ed. Walther Siegmund-Schultze (Halle an der Saale: Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft, 1976), 79-87 – Foundling Museum [Colloquium date is incorrectly 1976 on title-page; papers from the colloquium in 1975 were published in 1976 (see p.4)]. In 1978, Craig Bell protested that Bach's legacy was still obscuring Handel's. Craig A. Bell, 'The Great Mr Handel, *The Music Review* 39 no. 1 (February, 1978): 22-30 – in SH order or in FM? Some of the historiographic grounds for this misjudgement are reviewed in Rampe.

³ John Breuilly, 'Max Weber, Charisma and Nationalist Leadership', *Nations and Nationalism* 17 no. 3 (2011): 477–99; and Max Weber, *The Essential Weber: A Reader*, ed. Sam Whimster (London: Routledge, 2004), esp. 133–46.

⁴ Theodor W Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, M., 1944. 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) [first published 1944]; repr. in *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*, ed. S. Redmond, & S. Holmes (***) pp. 34-43.

⁵ Some scholars hold that the field of celebrity studies began with Richard Dyers, *Stars*

⁶ Francesco Alberoni, 'The Powerless 'Elite': Theory and Sociological Research on the Phenomenon of the Stars',

⁷ Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (1986)

⁸ Chris Rojek (2004)

⁹ Daniel Boorstin, *The Image, or What Happened to the American Dream* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962).

Boorstin coined the terms such as "pseudo-event," "famous for being famous". He contends – I disagree – that the Graphic Revolution unfolded during the 1850s and that along with this revolution, the "celebrity" came to refer to a particular person rather than to a particular situation.

¹⁰ Feldman

¹¹ E. Harris, *Handel as Orpheus: voice and desire in the chamber cantatas* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), p.246. McGeary voices his disagreement of Harris's reading of this cantata in Thomas McGeary 'Handel in Rome: the homosexual context reconsidered', *Early Music* 44 no 1 (2016): 59–75.

¹² Crescimbeni, *L'Arcadia*, p. 289. Cited in Edward J. Dent, *Alessandro Scarlatti: His Life and Works*, rev. edn. with preface and additional notes by Frank Walker (London, 1960), p. 90; cited in *Joncus Cantata*, p. 515.

¹³ Kirkendale: cited Harris p. 26

¹⁴ *Kantaten mit Instrumenten II : HWV99, 105, 110, 119, 113, 122, 123, 132c, 134, 140, 142, 143 / Georg Friedrich Händel ; herausgegeben von Hans Joachim Marx. Hallische Händel-Ausgabe. ; Serie V: Kleinere Gesangswerke ; 4 Kassel : Bärenreiter 1995*

¹⁵ Mary Parker, 'Handel's 'Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno': A Petrarchan Vision in Baroque Style *Author Music and Letters*, 2003, Vol.84(3), pp.403-413; Gianturco, Carolyn 'Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno: Four Case-Studies in Determining Italian Poetic-Musical Genres *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 01 January 1994, Vol.119(1), pp.43-59

¹⁶ Hyperion sleeve notes; see also Ruth Smith 'Psychological Realism in Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno', in *Handel*, ed. David Vickers (Farnham, 2011) [ebook Routledge 2017]

¹⁷ Smith, Hyperion sleeve notes,

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ Harris, *orpheus*, pp. 45-46.

²⁰ Michael Burden, « Opera, Excess, and the Discourse of Luxury in Eighteenth-Century England », XVII-XVIII [En ligne], 71 | 2014, mis en ligne le 31 mai 2016, consulté le 11 février 2021. URL :

<http://journals.openedition.org/1718/409> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/1718.409>

²¹ HCD, vol 1, 206.

²² HCD vol. I, p. 610; from *The British Journal* 29 December 1722. The group of misogynist verse epistles 1724 to 1736, provoked in 1724 by the Earl of Peterborough's defence of Anastasia Robinson are contextualized, annotated and transcribed in

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²⁴ Roberts, cited in Cummings

²⁵ – a fascinating contradiction to scholars standard assumption that only after Beethoven did 'the work' eclipse the stage virtuoso.

²⁶ Bucciarelli 'From Rinaldo', p. 139

²⁷ Bucciarelli 'From Rinaldo', p. 139

²⁸ Bucciarelli

²⁹ Bucciarelli, *18thcent Music*, p 195

³⁰ HCD; bucciarelli

³¹ Nick Coudry – add citation

³² Bucciarelli *18th century Music*, 60? Page 8 of 35; as she states, (note 43) a translation of Quantz's report is found 'The Life of Herr Johann Joachim Quantz, as Sketched by Himself', in Bruno Nettl, *Forgotten Musicians* (New York, (1951), 293.

³³ Bucciarelli *18th century Music*, 60? Page 8 of 35. Letter from Senesino to Giuseppe Riva, Dresden 15 (4) September 1718.

³⁴ Bucciarelli *18th century Music*, 60? Page 8 of 35.

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³⁶ *Ibid* 9 of 35. "libretto by Antonio Salvi originally set to music by Giuseppe Maria Orlandini and staged in Florence in 1715, with Senesino, Margherita Durastanti and Berselli in the cast".

- ³⁷ HCD 2, p.295. 16 May 1729 Paolo Rolli London to Senesino [?Siena or Venice]
- ³⁸ HCD 2 p. 369, 7 (18) July 1730 Owen Swiny, Bologna to Francis Colman Florence.
- ³⁹ HCD 2 p. 370 18 (29) July 1730 Owen Swiny, Bologna to Francis Colman Florence.
- ⁴⁰ HCD 2, p. 372 [July-August 1730] Francis Colman, to Antonio Cocchi, Florence
- ⁴¹ HCD, 2 pp. 380-81
- ⁴² HCD 2, p. 367, 19 June 1730 Handel London to Francis Colman, Florence
- ⁴³ Bucciarelli 18th cent music
- ⁴⁴ Ketterer 2001; McGeary 2008
- ⁴⁵ HCD, 2, p. 291 and Timms M&L 1984
- ⁴⁶ Add – see footnote Cambridge companion
- ⁴⁷ HCD 2, p. 524. 2 May 1732 Diary of Viscount Percival
- ⁴⁸ My heart is indicting and Zadok, HCD 2, p. 523.
- ⁴⁹ HCD, vol 2, p. 522
- ⁵⁰ It is likely that the organs that Handel used at the King's Theatre in 1732 and 1733 were of 'a portable bureau'..... type [later] marketed by John Snetzler', Burrows HANDEL'S ORGAN CONCERTOS (HWV 290-93) AND OPERATIC RIVALRY
- ⁵¹ HCD, vol. 2 p. 530; Roberts 'Lucio Papirio' in Landgraff and Vickers .
- ⁵² HCD, vo. 2, p. 543-44. 11 July 1732. Acting on Handel's behalf was Giovanni Giacomo Zamboni. 11 July 1732; *ibid* 550-51 'with regard to the Princess Royal takes in all things'.
- ⁵³ McGeary 159.
- ⁵⁴ 'I beg you to believe that did not readily accept such a commission; but, having been charged with it, I am trying to execute it as well as possible, above all with regard to the interest that the Princess Royal takes in all things which concern Mr Handel and the operas'. HCD, 2, p.55 26 aug 1732
- ⁵⁵ HCD 2, p. 553. 24 Sept 1732
- ⁵⁶ Reportedly, by January 1733, Handel was looking to a rent a new venue. HCD 2, 577. 2 Jan 1733 The Daily Advertiser
- ⁵⁷ Bucciarelli 'From Rinaldo', p. 139
- ⁵⁸ Two-thirds of Deborah came from earlier pieces unknown to the London public, to which Handel added some new material
- ⁵⁹ HCD 2, p. 606; p. 608.
- ⁶⁰ HCD 2, 602, 17 March 1733
- ⁶¹ *Ibid*
- ⁶² 24 March 1733 The Bee: or, Universal Weekly Pamphlet noted 'The following Epigram, which has run about in Manuscript for two or three Days past' HCD 2, 606.
- ⁶³ 7 April 1733 The Country Journal: or, The Craftsman HCD, 2, p. 609-11.
- ⁶⁴ 10 April 1733 HCD, 2, p. p. 612
- ⁶⁵ 22 May 1733 The Daily Advertiser; see HCD 2, p629 that cites Lindgren 1972, I, p. 456: 'it is probable that the revival was instigated by Senesino'.
- ⁶⁶ 24 May 1733 Charles Delafaye HCD, 2, p. 630.
- ⁶⁷ 21 July 1733 Ipswich Gazette'tis computed that Mr Handle cleared by his Musick at Oxford, upwards of £2000', HCD 2, 667; the same earnings were reported on 11 August 1733, *Ibid* 679. On 6 August 1733 Richard Congreve wrote to William Congreve Handel had 'carry'd away 9 Hundred Pounds clear'. HCD 2, p. 672. Thomas Brett put the earnings at £700 and noted how the press inflated this sum. *Ibid*. p. 680-81
- ⁶⁸ *The Oxford Act. A new Ballad-Opera*; cited in HCD 2, 675.
- ⁶⁹ 11 August 1733 The St James Evening post, HCD 2, p. 679.
- ⁷⁰ Prevost – add citation
- ⁷¹ 1725. Miscellaneous poems, by John Byrom, M. A. F. R. S. sometime Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, And Inventor of The Universal English Short-Hand. In two volumes. Manchester : printed by J. Harrop, MDCCLXXIII. [1773]
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⁷³ Gudger 188-89

⁷⁴ Aspden JAMS

⁷⁵ Deutsch 860-61; cited in Coke and Borg, p. 91.

⁷⁶ Harris, M&L 2004, p. 565