

# HANDEL'S RECEPTION AND THE RISE OF MUSIC HISTORIOGRAPHY IN BRITAIN

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The year 1776 brought historic changes to Britain. Revolution in its American provinces ended with the founding of the United States, which tore apart the British soul. For a nation who had hitherto understood itself to be the land of the free and the home of the brave, America's independence was an identity crisis: either allow disobedience to the Crown or establish order through civil war.<sup>1</sup> The King's decision is well known; even more so is its outcome: America was lost to Britain.

Loss and pain create (or invoke) opportunities for self-reflection, however. It was also in 1776 that Britain gained in awareness through seminal achievements of the mind. *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*, by Adam Smith, instituted modern economics.<sup>2</sup> Edward Gibbon's *The history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* brought European historiography to a sublime peak.<sup>3</sup> With ink still fresh on the pages of *A voyage towards the South Pole, and round the world*, James Cook was embarking on a third naval expedition in hopes of discovering new lands for the British Crown.<sup>4</sup>

Amidst such distinguished company the *General histories of music* of Dr. Charles Burney and Sir John Hawkins arrived.<sup>5</sup> The scope, methodology, and sheer effort put into these works were without precedent.<sup>6</sup> Hawkins's five thick volumes of narrative

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Although RILM uses the original spelling of Händel's name, at the author's request in this article the English variant is used.

<sup>1</sup> See James E. Bradley, *Popular politics and the American Revolution in England: Petitions, the crown, and public opinion* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1986) 216. Also, Stephen Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 164–65.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*, 2 vols. (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776).

<sup>3</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire... volume the first* (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776).

<sup>4</sup> James Cook, *A voyage towards the South Pole, and round the world, performed in His Majesty's ships the Resolution and Adventure, in the years 1772, 1773, 1774, and 1775*, 2 vols. (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1777).

<sup>5</sup> Charles Burney, *A general history of music, from the earliest ages to the present period. To which is prefixed, a dissertation on the music of the ancients... volume the first* (London: author, 1776); John Hawkins, *A general history of the science and practice of music*, 5 vols. (London: T. Payne, 1776).

<sup>6</sup> "I spared no expence or pains either in acquiring or consulting [printed materials]... With respect likewise to manuscript information, and inedited materials from foreign countries, few modern writers have perhaps expended more

were “the produce of sixteen years labour”.<sup>7</sup> Touting his professionalism, Burney wrote, “I have frequently spent more time in ascertaining a date, or seeking a short, and in itself, a trivial passage, than it would have required to fill many pages with conjecture and declamation.”<sup>8</sup> Music scholarship was coming of age.

The rise of music historiography in Britain can be approached from various angles: the tradition of empiricism, the emergence of nationalism, the shifting paradigm in music aesthetics, and so on. The angle I am concerned with here is the reception of Handel in the middle of the pivotal 18th century (1730s–1780s). By examining vital intersections of the two phenomena, I will suggest that Handel’s reception was not simply a contributing factor in this development but more likely a precondition for its appearance.

**DEFINITIONS.** I should clarify first some terminological issues. The critical weight we assign nowadays to historiography was hardly known in 18th-century Britain. If Johnson’s *Dictionary* is of any help, historiography was simply the art of writing history,<sup>9</sup> rather than—as Forkel would have it—“history writing that has become conscious of its own ends and purposes”.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, the projects of Burney and Hawkins were as distant from the philosophical concerns of Forkel as London was from Göttingen.<sup>11</sup> Also, the empirical historiography of Burney and Hawkins appeared in a variety of formats—as critical reflections, brief accounts, memoirs, and so on—in the works of other authors. Few of them had, of course, the material, intellectual, and psychological resources, not to say the ideological conviction, of the two distinguished writers. Thus, I do not limit my examination to the multi-volume *Histories* of Hawkins and Burney, or to the year 1776. I rather tend to view the rise of music historiography as a wave beginning with Avison’s *Essay on musical expression* (1752),<sup>12</sup> arriving at its peak in 1776 and receding, on whatever level one is ready to accept, in 1789 with the concluding volumes of Burney’s *History*.<sup>13</sup> If 37 years seems too long a period, we should remember that Hawkins needed 16 years and Burney at least 20 to complete their respective works.<sup>14</sup>

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money and time, undergone greater fatigue, or more impaired their health in the search of them, than myself.” Burney, *History*, vol. 1, iv, v.

<sup>7</sup> Hawkins, *History*, vol. 1, preface, [2].

<sup>8</sup> Burney, *History*, vol. 1, xii.

<sup>9</sup> Johnson defines history in three ways, as “The knowledge of facts and events”, “Narration; relation”, and primarily in the words of Pope, “A narration of events and facts delivered with dignity” (the definition remains unaltered in subsequent editions): Samuel Johnson, *A dictionary of the English language*, 2 vols. (London: J. Knapton et al., 1756) 1: [H1P HIS–H1V HOB].

<sup>10</sup> Vincent Duckles, “Johann Nicolaus Forkel: The beginning of music historiography”, *Eighteenth-century studies* 1/3 (spring 1968) 277.

<sup>11</sup> On Forkel’s project, see Duckles, “Forkel”, 277–90.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Avison, *An essay on musical expression* (London: C. Davis, 1752). Burney himself designates this work as the starting point of serious music criticism in Britain: “Musical criticism has been so little cultivated in our country, that its first elements are hardly known. In justice to the late Mr. Avison, it must be owned, that he was the first, and almost the only writer, who attempted it. But his judgment was warped by many prejudices.” Burney, *History*, vol. 3, vi.

<sup>13</sup> Both Burney and Hawkins acknowledge earlier historiographical projects: “attempts have been made at different periods to trace the rise and progress of music in a course of historical narrative”: Hawkins, *History*, vol. 1, xviii (review in xviii–xxii).

<sup>14</sup> Hawkins, *History*, vol. 1, preface, [2]; Burney calls his *History* “a work that has been thirty years in meditation, and more than twenty in writing and printing”: Burney, *History*, vol. 4, 684. On the other hand, both works were the outcome of part-time study and writing.

**CHRONOLOGY.** The rise of music historiography in Britain coincided with the end of Handel's creative career and the anxiety it generated about English music. Avison's *Essay on musical expression* from 1752 and the debate it set off came at the very moment of Handel's disarmament as a composer.<sup>15</sup> In fact, a critical issue in the Avison-Hayes debate was the status of Handel in English music.<sup>16</sup> The mid-to-late 1750s was a period of concern for Handelians. Italian opera made an impressive comeback in 1754–55 thanks to Signora Mingotti, who “revived the favour of our lyric theatre, with considerable splendor”.<sup>17</sup> Letters from March 1755 speak of a “poor Handel [who] has been most ungratefully neglected this year”,<sup>18</sup> and report that “The oratorio was miserably thin; the Italian opera is in high vogue, and always full.”<sup>19</sup> That same year, Thomas Arne openly challenged Handel by performing oratorios against Covent Garden's series,<sup>20</sup> prompting someone to observe “the Town at Present is much fonder of Arne than Handel”.<sup>21</sup> In the 1757 blockbuster *An estimate of the manners and principles of the times*, John Brown censured the public neglect of Handel's music.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, the following year saw one of the first extensive discussions of Handelian repertoire in William Hughes's *Remarks upon music*.<sup>23</sup>

Handel's death in 1759 marked the end of an age for English music. And it is the big events, the peaks and discontinuities, which create the incentive for historiography. Exactly in 1759, Hawkins began work on his *History*.<sup>24</sup> In the conclusion of his magisterial project in 1789, Burney, too, admits that this work “has been thirty years in meditation”.<sup>25</sup> The cultural anxiety following the composer's demise found expression in

<sup>15</sup> Deteriorating sight forced Handel to interrupt the composition of *Jephtha* on 13 February 1751. A month later Sir Edward Turner recorded that “Noble Handel hath lost an eye”: Sir Edward Turner to Sanderson Miller, 14 March 1751[1]: *An eighteenth-century correspondence: Being the letters of... to Sanderson Miller, Esq., of Radway*, ed. by Lilian Dickins and Mary Stanton (London: John Murray, 1910) 165. The beginning of the 1752 season found Handelians in despair: “I am sorry to say that I believe this Lent will be the last that he will ever be able to preside at an oratorio; for he breaks very much, & is I think quite blind on one eye”: Thomas Harris to James Harris, 9 January 1752: *Music and theatre in Handel's world: The family papers of James Harris, 1732–1780*, ed. by Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 281. Temporary improvement from eye surgery did little to reverse his plunge to darkness, and in January 1753, the press reported “Mr. Handel has at length, unhappily, quite lost his sight”: [unidentified London newspaper], 27 January 1753: Otto Erich Deutsch, *Handel: A documentary biography* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1955) 731.

<sup>16</sup> The entire corpus of this debate is available in *Charles Avison's Essay on musical expression: With related writings by William Hayes and Charles Avison*, ed. by Pierre Dubois (Aldershot, U.K.; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Burney, *History*, vol. 4, 463.

<sup>18</sup> C. Gilbert to Elizabeth Harris, 11 March [1755]: Burrows and Dunhill, *Handel's world*, 304.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Delany to Mrs. Dewes, 3 March 1755: *The autobiography and correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany*, ed. by Lady Llanover, 3 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1861) vol. 3, 338–39.

<sup>20</sup> See Ilias Chrissochoidis, *Early reception of Handel's oratorios, 1732–1784: Narrative—studies—documents*, 3 vols. (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2004) vol. 1, 295–97.

<sup>21</sup> William Shenstone to Lady Luxborough, [29–]30 March 1755: *The letters of William Shenstone*, ed. by Marjorie Williams (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1939) 438.

<sup>22</sup> [John Brown], *An estimate of the manners and principles of the times* (London: Davis & Reymers, 1757) 46.

<sup>23</sup> William Hughes, *Remarks upon church musick. To which are added several observations upon some of Mr. Handel's oratorio's, and other parts of his works* (2nd ed.; Worcester: R. Lewis, 1763; original edition, 1758). Not only does Hughes make references to the *Estimate* (Remarks, 42) but he also paraphrases Brown's quotation of the “Colossus” passage in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*:

Why Man, he doth bestride the narrow World	Why Man! He does bestride the Musick World
Like a Colossus; and we petty Men	Like a Colossus; and We poor, petty Composers,
Walk under his huge Legs; and peep about,	Walk under his huge Legs, and pick up a
To find ourselves dishonourable Graves	Crotchet to deck our humble Thoughts
([Brown], <i>Estimate</i> , 44)	(Hughes, <i>Remarks</i> , 46)

<sup>24</sup> Hawkins, *History*, vol. 1, preface, [1].

<sup>25</sup> Burney, *History*, vol. 4, 684. For the complications in dating Burney's project, see Kerry S. Grant, *Dr. Burney as critic and historian of music* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983) 49.

the *Memoirs of the life of the late George Frideric Handel*, a substantial work of biography and criticism.<sup>26</sup> Its appearance in the spring of 1760 and the role of John Christopher Smith, Jr. in its creation suggest that it was meant as a publicity tool for the first post-Handel oratorio season. In 1763 John Brown's *Dissertation on the rise, union, and power . . . of poetry and music* (an ambitious specimen of old-fashioned historiography) concluded with a scheme of reforming Handelian oratorio.<sup>27</sup> Handel features prominently in Burney's *Tours*, either as a topic of discussion with foreign celebrities or as a yardstick of assessing musical development on the Continent.<sup>28</sup> The historiographical *annus mirabilis* of 1776 coincided with the institution of the "Concert of Antient Music", a hothouse of the Handelian cult.<sup>29</sup> Burney's *Account* of the Handel Commemoration Festival was the official chronicle of the monumental performances in Westminster Abbey.<sup>30</sup> With that same event Burney concludes his *History*,<sup>31</sup> whose last volume also includes the monumental "Review of Handel's operas".<sup>32</sup>

**SUBJECT MATTER.** British music historiography dealt not simply with the course of music through the ages, but also with the fluctuation of music's status in the previous two centuries. Modernists sought to highlight the achievements of their own age, to make evident how much music had advanced in recent decades, and to promote the new Italian style.<sup>33</sup> This was the incentive for Burney's celebrated tour. In *The present*

<sup>26</sup> [John Mainwaring], *Memoirs of the life of the late George Frederic Handel* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1760; repr. ed., New York: Da Capo Press, 1980).

<sup>27</sup> John Brown, *A dissertation on the rise, union, and power, the progressions, separations, and corruptions, of poetry and music. To which is prefixed, The Cure of Saul. A sacred ode* (London: L. Davis and C. Reymers, 1763) 232–38.

<sup>28</sup> "But it seems to be with the serious French opera here, as it is with our oratorios in England"; "But for this kind of music [i.e., sacred], that of Handel will, I believe, ever stand superior to all other writers; at least I have heard nothing yet on the continent of equal force and effect"; "[Farinelli] gave me an account of his first performance at court to his late majesty George the II<sup>d</sup>. in which he was accompanied on the harpsichord by the princess royal, afterwards princess of Orange, who insisted on his singing two of Handel's songs at sight"; "With respect to a true oratorio chorus accompanied with instruments in the manner of Handel's, I heard but few all the time I was in Italy": Charles Burney, *The present state of music in France and Italy: Or, The journal of a tour through those countries, undertaken to collect materials for a general history of music* (London: T. Becket, 1771) 32, 157, 216, 365; "for [Gluck] is as formidable a character as Handel used to be: a very dragon, of whom all are in fear"; "[Gluck] went [to England] at a very disadvantageous period; Handel was then so high in fame, that no one would willingly listen to any other than to his compositions"; "Faustina . . . spoke much of Handel's great style of playing the harpsichord and organ when she was in England"; "[Wagenseil] has a great respect for Handel, and speaks of some of his works with rapture"; "[Gluck] is a great disciplinarian, and as formidable as Handel used to be, when at the head of a band"; "[Hasse] always spoke respectfully of Handel, as a player and writer of fugues, as well as for the ingenuity of his accompaniments, and the natural simplicity of his melody"; "In 1727 he [Quantz] arrived in London, where he found the opera in a very flourishing state, under the direction of Handel"; "I was particularly delighted with a chorus in [CPE Bach's *Passione*], which for modulation, contrivance, and effects, was at least equal to any one of the best choruses in Handel's immortal *Messiah*". Charles Burney, *The present state of music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces*, 2 vols. (London: T. Becket, J. Robson, and G. Robinson, 1775) vol. 1, 259, 267, 320, 329, 344, 351; vol. 2, 187, 255–54 [reversed pagination].

<sup>29</sup> See William Weber, *The rise of musical classics in eighteenth-century England: A study in canon, ritual, and ideology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) 173–77, 205, 248. Burney comments: "Here the productions of venerable old masters, particularly those of Purcell and Handel, are performed by a select and powerful band, with such correctness and energy, as the authors themselves never had the happiness to hear". Burney, *History*, vol. 4, 683.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Burney, *An account of the musical performances in Westminster-Abbey and the Pantheon . . . in commemoration of Handel* (London: For the Benefit of the Musical Fund, 1785).

<sup>31</sup> "And such is the state of practical Music in this country, that the increase of performers [in the Handel festivals following the commemoration], instead of producing confusion, as might have been expected, has constantly been attended with superior excellence of execution". Burney, *History*, vol. 4, 683.

<sup>32</sup> Burney, *History*, vol. 4, 222–436.

<sup>33</sup> Avison begins his *Essay on musical expression* thus: "As the public Inclination for Music seems every Day advancing, it may not be amiss, at this Time, to offer a few Observations on that delightful Art": Avison, *Essay*, 1. Even Hawkins admits that "the art of combining musical sounds is in general better understood at this time than ever" (Hawkins, *History*, vol. 5, 432). The attitude is not new, however. Jessie Ann Owens finds most of 16th- and 17th-century writers

state of music in France and Italy from 1771, he explains that “music was never in such high estimation, or so well understood as it is at present, all over Europe... no one of the liberal arts is at present so much cultivated, nor can the Italians now boast a superiority over the rest of Europe in any thing, so much as in their musical productions and performances.”<sup>34</sup>

Antiquarians, by contrast, viewed this progress as unscientific and dangerous, driven as it was by unchecked innovation. Holding on to English and Continental masters of the past, they struggled to remind their contemporaries of music's perfection in the context of vocal polyphony and church tradition. William Hayes, for instance, titles his response to Avison in 1753 “REMARKS ON Mr. AVISON'S ESSAY ON MUSICAL EXPRESSION. WHEREIN The Characters of several great Masters... are rescued from the Misrepresentations of the above Author; and their real Merit asserted and vindicated.”<sup>35</sup> Other central statements can be found in Hawkins, particularly in *An account of the institution and progress of the Academy of Ancient Music* (1770) and the preliminary discourse in his *History*,<sup>36</sup> where he condemns “the almost total ignorance which prevails of the merits of most of the many excellent artists who flourished in the ages preceding our own.”<sup>37</sup> To make my suggestion fully transparent, the underlying historiographical concern at this period is not music's past in itself but rather the course that led to the art's current state of perfection or degeneracy, depending on which side one chooses.

When we perceive that the rise of music historiography in Britain was as much about the present as it was about the past, we are in a position to appreciate Handel's role in generating this discourse. Great artists leave long shadows and Handel is a dream of an example.<sup>38</sup> In the early specimens of British historiography, he is by far the most talked-about composer. Two of these, actually, are entirely devoted to his life, work, and legacy: the *Memoirs* of 1760 and the *Commemoration account* of 1784. Handel is a bone of contention in the Avison-Hayes debate and in Oliver Goldsmith's essay on national schools of music (1760).<sup>39</sup> His oeuvre receives extensive discussions in Hughes's *Remarks on music*, the bulky pamphlet *An examination of the oratorios* (1763), and John Potter's *Theatrical review* (1772), and becomes a target of reformation in John Brown's *Dissertation on ... poetry and music*.<sup>40</sup> Hawkins's references to Handel run to more than 60 continuous pages, prompting a reviewer to call him “justly the hero of this

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on music to generally value the music of the present more than that of the past. Jessie Ann Owens, “Music historiography and the definition of ‘Renaissance’”, *Notes: Quarterly journal of the Music Library Association* 47/2 (December 1990) 307.

<sup>34</sup> Burney, *France and Italy*, 2, 3.

<sup>35</sup> [William Hayes], *Remarks on Mr. Avison's Essay on musical expression* (London: J. Robinson, 1753); see also his affirmation that, with regard to English cathedral music, “the further we look back, the more excellent the Composition will be found, and the most properly adapted to the sacred Purposes of Devotion”. Hayes, *Remarks*, 45.

<sup>36</sup> [John Hawkins], *An account of the institution and progress of the Academy of Ancient Music, with a comparative view of the music of the past and present times. By a member* (London: [?], 1770); Hawkins, *History*, vol. 1, lxxiv–lxxix.

<sup>37</sup> Hawkins, *History*, vol. 1, lxxvii.

<sup>38</sup> See Ellen T. Harris, “Handel's ghost: The composer's posthumous reputation in the eighteenth century”, *Companion to contemporary musical thought*, ed. by John Paynter, Tim Howell, Richard Orton, and Peter Seymour, 2 vols. (London; New York: Routledge, 1992) vol. 1, 208–25.

<sup>39</sup> See [Oliver Goldsmith], *The British magazine* 1 (1760) 74–76, 181–84; and Chrissochoidis, *Early reception*, vol. 1, 322–23.

<sup>40</sup> [?John Brown], *An examination of the oratorios which have been performed this season, at Covent-Garden Theatre* (London: G. Kearsley, R. Davis, and J. Walter, 1763); [John Potter], *The theatrical review; Or, New companion to the play-house* (London: S. Crowder, J. Wilkie and J. Walter, 1772) 2 vols.



work”.<sup>41</sup> And the single largest chapter in Burney’s *History* concerns the London career of Handel as an opera composer.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps we should not forget that Hawkins used Handel also as a primary source, beginning with his biographical sketch of Agostino Steffani probably from the 1750s,<sup>43</sup> when Handel had both the time and incentive to revisit past events.

**SOCIAL CONTEXT.** Handel qualified as a privileged historical subject in a number of ways. From a reception standpoint, Burney and Hawkins wrote for readers who were already positively inclined towards Handel.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, many who supported these historiographical projects were Handel partisans. Hawkins, a child of the Academy of Ancient Music, had social contacts with Handel and his circle,<sup>45</sup> and dedicated his *History* to George III, a professed Handelian.<sup>46</sup> Burney, too, received crucial help in his European Tour by Lord Sandwich,<sup>47</sup> who would later become the moving spirit of the Concert of Antient Music and the Handel Commemoration Festival.<sup>48</sup> It was Sandwich, actually, who passed on to the King Burney’s prospectus of a chronicle of the 1784 Festival.<sup>49</sup> Notwithstanding his modernism, Burney was too conscious of his social position to resist a decidedly pro-Handel audience.<sup>50</sup>

**MATERIAL CONDITIONS.** Materially, too, Handel was the best match for the new type of empirical historiography. His prolific output and long presence in a vibrant public space formed rich documentary ground for historiographical discourse.<sup>51</sup> The glamor and controversy he generated fill over 1500 pages in news stories, poems, and critical commentary.<sup>52</sup> Hayes’s assertion of “his Works being almost out of Number” is not an

<sup>41</sup> *The gentleman’s magazine* 47 (1777) 274.

<sup>42</sup> Burney, *History*, vol. 4, 222–436.

<sup>43</sup> [John Hawkins], *Memoirs of the life of Sig. Agostino Steffani, some time master of the Electoral Chapel at Hanover, and afterwards Bishop of Spiga* ([London, ?1740–1758]).

<sup>44</sup> On 21 April 1784, John Stanley communicated to Charles Burney that “there is little reason to suppose that any other than M<sup>r</sup> Handels Musick would succeed, as people in general are so partial to that, that no other Oratorios are ever Well Attended”. *The letters of Dr Charles Burney. I: 1751–1784*, ed. by Alvaro Ribeiro, S.J. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) 417, n6.

<sup>45</sup> Laetitia-Matilda Hawkins, *Anecdotes, biographical sketches and memoirs* (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1822) vol. 1, 195.

<sup>46</sup> “He hears no other Music if he can help it, & therefore knows every movement of Handel’s popular works”. Charles Burney to Thomas Twining, 1 September 1784, in Burney, *Letters*, 437.

<sup>47</sup> “Lord Sandwich has been pleased to honour me with Letters to all our ministers & Consuls resident in the several Cities through which it is my design to pass”. Charles Burney to Count Firmian, 22 June 1772, Burney, *Letters*, 118–19. The Earl of Sandwich to James Harris, Jr., 8 June 1772. Burrows and Dunhill, *Handel’s world*, 677; see also letters to James Harris, Jr., from his father and from James Gray, 30 June and 3 July 1772. *Ibid.*, 678–79.

<sup>48</sup> See Weber, *Classics*, 149–51. In 1785 Horace Walpole marveled “at the Earl, who at our age can enter so warmly into any pursuits and find them amusing! It is pleasant to have such spirits, that after going through such busy political scenes, he can be diverted with carrying a white wand at Handel’s jubilee—and for two years together!” Horace Walpole to Lady Ossory, Monday 20 June 1785, in *Horace Walpole’s correspondence with the Countess of Upper Ossory II*. The Yale edition of Horace Walpole’s correspondence, vol. 33, ed. by W.S. Lewis and A. Dayle Wallace (New Haven: Yale University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1965) 468.

<sup>49</sup> See letter of Charles Burney to Thomas Twining, 31 July 1784. Burney, *Letters*, 423–24.

<sup>50</sup> Grant, *Burney*, 243–44, 287–89.

<sup>51</sup> “The long residence of Handel in this country, the great number of his compositions, and the frequent performance of them, enable us to form a competent judgment of his abilities”. Hawkins, *History*, vol. 5, 282. Historically, Josquin was the first composer whose reception benefitted from the print culture; see Jessie Ann Owens, “How Josquin became Josquin: Reflections on historiography and reception”, *Music in Renaissance cities and courts: Studies in honor of Lewis Lockwood*, ed. by Jessie Ann Owens and Anthony M. Cummings (Warren, Mich.: Harmonie Park Press, 1997) 271–80.

<sup>52</sup> See Deutsch, *Handel*, revised as *Handel Handbuch. IV: Dokumente zu Leben und Schaffen*, ed. by Walter Eisen and Margret Eisen (Kassel; Basel; London: Bärenreiter, 1985), and Chrissochoidis, *Early reception*, 654–1432.

exaggeration.<sup>53</sup> An evaluative chart from 1776 gives Handel the highest score in the category of “quantity published or known”, 18/20, with the second highest mark being only 9/20.<sup>54</sup> Handel’s printed music before 1800 amounts to over 1500 items;<sup>55</sup> and Winton Dean estimates that the dramatic odes and oratorios of the composer received 586 performances during his lifetime alone.<sup>56</sup> When Avison offers musical examples, he chooses Handelian repertoire because “these Instances must also be most universally understood”.<sup>57</sup> Burney’s famous chapter on Italian opera in England would have been unthinkable without the author’s collection of early English newspapers.<sup>58</sup> But the increased coverage of music in the London press owed substantially to Handel.<sup>59</sup> By raising the stakes of musical life, he helped make it a visible sector of British culture, as it had never been before.<sup>60</sup>

**IDEOLOGY.** Even ideologically, Handel was useful to modernists and antiquarians alike. For Hawkins, he formed a historiographical terminus in the development of music. He is the last of the masters who brought music to perfection. After him, music ceases to be a science and there is no reason to engage with it.<sup>61</sup> Also, when in 1776 the founders of the Concert of Antient Music had to determine the minimum age of their performing repertoire, they settled on 20 years, a range sufficient enough to include the entire Handelian oeuvre.<sup>62</sup> Burney, on the other hand, used Handel to dismiss the dusty old masters of Hawkins. With Handel’s oratorios and church music still popular, one can easily dispense with the awkward harmonies of John Blow, for instance. This might well explain Burney’s decision to engrave four pages with “Specimens of Dr. Blow’s Crudities” in his *History*.<sup>63</sup> In other words, Handel’s music was sufficiently old and dignified to supplant old English masters, but still popular enough to check modern trends.<sup>64</sup> It could serve both agendas for different reasons.

**UTILITARIANISM.** The novelty of producing historical accounts of music obliged many authors to explain their projects in terms of music’s social usefulness. Burney offers a comprehensive statement in the preface of his first *Tour*: “in England, perhaps more than in any other country, it is easy to point out the humane and important purposes to which [music] has been applied”. He cites as examples the benefit performances of *Messiah* for the Foundling Hospital and similar events for other public institutions.<sup>65</sup> Surely benefit concerts in England preceded Handel.<sup>66</sup> Yet it was his sacred music,

<sup>53</sup> Hayes, *Remarks*, 129.

<sup>54</sup> *The gentleman’s magazine* 46 (1776) 544.

<sup>55</sup> George J. Buelow, *A history of Baroque music* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004) 622, 32n.

<sup>56</sup> Winton Dean, *Handel’s dramatic oratorios and masques* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959) 640.

<sup>57</sup> This note appears in the second edition of Avison’s *Essay on musical expression* (London: C. Davis, 1753) 65n.

<sup>58</sup> Burney, *History*, vol. 4, 194–532.

<sup>59</sup> And vice versa, as Handel’s reputation owed much to the rise of public space and the explosion of print culture in early 18th-century Britain.

<sup>60</sup> In the early part of his career, “Mr. Handel had gotten possession of the public ear, and the whole kingdom were forming their taste for harmony and melody by the standard of his compositions”. Hawkins, *History*, vol. 5, 196.

<sup>61</sup> See Hawkins, *History*, vol. 5, 429–32.

<sup>62</sup> Weber, *Classics*, 169.

<sup>63</sup> Burney, *History*, vol. 3, 449–52. See also Grant, *Burney*, 21 and 143.

<sup>64</sup> “Handel is more and more respected ... among eminent dilettanti”. Burney, *History*, vol. 4, 670.

<sup>65</sup> Burney, *France and Italy*, 4–5.

<sup>66</sup> See, for instance, the Festival of the Sons of the Clergy: Weber, *Classics*, 104–13; also, the Cavendish Weedon’s

oratorios, and personal performances that revitalized such events, socially and financially. This was the case in 1731, when his (“Utrecht”) *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* became a regular feature of the Festival of the Sons of the Clergy;<sup>67</sup> in 1739, with the hugely successful performance of *Alexander’s Feast* for the fund to support deceased musicians and their families;<sup>68</sup> in 1742, with the historic premiere of *Messiah*;<sup>69</sup> and, of course, in the 1750s and beyond with the annual performances of the same oratorio for the Foundling Hospital.<sup>70</sup> Handel’s music attracted crowds and boosted revenue for charity concerts.<sup>71</sup> The rise of music historiography in Britain was a response to the rise of music’s prestige, and for this last Handel had a large share of responsibility, certainly the largest among contemporary composers.

**NATIONAL FAME.** The use of the phrase “general history” in the titles of Hawkins’s and Burney’s projects should not obscure their Anglocentricism. These narratives were written by native historians for an English audience and bore dedications to British monarchs (the King and the Queen, respectively).<sup>72</sup> Their national significance cannot be underestimated. For example, about 60% of volumes 3 and 4 in Burney’s *History* are dedicated to music in England.<sup>73</sup> In this context, the national identity of Handel is particularly significant. He was born in Germany, found glory in Italy, and came to England as a celebrated master of the Italian style. The Hanoverian succession in 1714 put his career in a unique trajectory, as he represented Continental influence in a multinational kingdom ruled by a foreign dynasty. On the one hand, he was living proof of London’s power to attract foreign talent; on the other, he legitimized the Hanoverian monarchy through music whose appeal is still felt hundreds of years later (e.g., “Zadok the Priest”, *Music for the royal fireworks*). His heavy accent and rough manners were tokens of a foreign background, yet his *Te Deums*, royal anthems, oratorios, and odes revitalized English music.

This dual position of Handel generated vital critical discourse. Well after his naturalization, in 1727, the composer was still treated as an outsider. In 1733 Dr. Hearne censured the participation in the Oxford Act of “One Handel, a foreigner (who, they

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monthly concerts: Ruth Smith, *Handel’s oratorios and eighteenth-century thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 160–67.

<sup>67</sup> “[T]he Collection... is very near double what has been given in any other year”: *The country journal: Or, The craftsman*, Saturday 27 February 1731, [2]. See also Donald Burrows, *Handel and the English Chapel Royal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 98.

<sup>68</sup> See the report in *The London daily post, and general advertiser*, Thursday 22 March 1739, [1].

<sup>69</sup> See the report in George Faulkner. *The Dublin journal*, Tuesday 13 – Saturday 17 April 1742, [2].

<sup>70</sup> Hayes asserts, “As a moral, good, and charitable Man, let Infants, not only those who feel the Effects of his Bounty, but even such who are yet unborn, chaunt forth his Praise, whose annual Benefaction to an Hospital for the Maintenance of the *Forsaken, the Fatherless, and those who have none to help them*, will render HIM and his MESSIAH, truly Immortal and crowned with Glory”. Hayes, *Remarks*, 130.

<sup>71</sup> By 1761 Handel was considered to be the third “greatest benefactor” of the Foundling Hospital. Frederick Kielmansegge, *Diary of a journey to England in the years 1761–1762*, trans. by Countess Kielmansegg (London; New York; Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902) 87.

<sup>72</sup> “[a]lmost every country in Europe that has cultivated the polite arts, has, since the revival of learning, produced a history of Music, except our own... I knew that a history of Music was wanted by my countrymen”. Burney, *History*, vol. 1, iv, v.

<sup>73</sup> Volume 3 has 622 numbered pages. Of these, 370 describe the state of English music since Henry VIII. Burney offered a lion’s share to Elizabethan music “for the honour of our country; as I fear no other period will be found in which we were so much on a level with the rest of Europe, in musical genius and learning” (Burney, *History*, vol. 3, 149). Of the 685 numbered pages in volume 4, 406 are devoted to English music history, including the progress of Italian opera in London.



say, was born in Hanover)".<sup>74</sup> Another Oxfordian, several years later, urged "Let *British* verse and harmony content!" instead of having English music controlled by Handel, who "careless of a foreign fame, / Fix[es] on our shore, and boast[s] a *Briton's* name".<sup>75</sup> When in 1753 William Hayes attacked Avison for not counting Handel as an English composer, he got the reply: "Is Mr HANDEL an *Englishman*? Is his very Name *English*? Was his Education *English*?"<sup>76</sup> The same topic resurfaced in 1760 in the aptly named *British magazine*. This time, however, the order of positions changed. Placing Handel at the head of the English School, Oliver Goldsmith elicited a reaction that the composer had remained a German to the end of his life.<sup>77</sup> Goldsmith's defense is characteristic of the changing attitudes to the composer: "Handel was originally a German; but, by a long continuance in England, he might have been looked upon as naturalized to the country... Handel in a great measure found in England those essential differences which characterize his music."<sup>78</sup> The simplistic view of Handel as a cultural intruder/savior, one that reflected the Tory/Whig political division, gave way to an image of productive reciprocity. A German composer had shaped much of English musical life in the first half of the century; but Britain, too, had transformed his musical outlook, leading him from Italian opera to English oratorio. Thus, Handel offered an exemplary case of how British culture could absorb foreign influence; and this was a critical attribute for a rising Empire. To the extent that the *General histories* of Burney and Hawkins were meant to be British intellectual monuments of the late 18th century, Handel was an ideal subject.

Finally, Handel qualified as a British icon not only on artistic grounds but also because of his life narrative.<sup>79</sup> Biographers stress his independence, hard work ethics, solid Protestantism, and philanthropy, all of which were understood as defining attributes of a Briton. His career path of gradual disengagement from aristocratic patronage and Italophile nobility paralleled England's liberation from Catholicism. Above all, his painful release from London's Italian opera could easily serve as a metaphor for Britain's conflict with Catholic Powers.<sup>80</sup> When Hayes refers to Handel as "The Man, who hath so bravely withstood the repeated Efforts of *Italian Forces*", he recognizes a British hero.<sup>81</sup> And celebrating heroes was one of the major objectives of historical biography at that time.<sup>82</sup>

I began this essay with the seemingly off-topic link between Britain's political failures and intellectual vitality in 1776. Another such link will conclude my discussion

<sup>74</sup> Hearne's Diary, Thursday 5 July 1733. *Remarks and collections of Thomas Hearne*, ed. by H. E. Salter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921) vol. 11, 224.

<sup>75</sup> "On our late taste in musick", *The gentleman's magazine* 10 (1740) 520.

<sup>76</sup> [Charles] Avison, *A reply to the author of remarks on the Essay on Musical Expression in a letter from Mr Avison to his friend in London* (London: C. Davis, 1753) 45.

<sup>77</sup> *The British magazine* 1 (1760) 74–76, 181–84.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>79</sup> See Chrissochoidis, *Early reception*, vol. 2., 589–602, 608–11.

<sup>80</sup> For this critical stage in Handel's career, see Carole Taylor, "Handel's disengagement from the Italian Opera", *Handel: Tercentenary collection*, ed. by Stanley Sadie and Anthony Hicks (London: Macmillan, 1987) 43–60. The role of warfare in shaping British national identity is explored in Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>81</sup> Hayes, *Remarks*, 129.

<sup>82</sup> The editor of *Biographia Britannica* (1747), for instance, defined his project as "a BRITISH TEMPLE OF HONOUR, sacred to the piety, learning, valour, publick-spirit, loyalty, and every other glorious virtue of our ancestors, and ready also for the reception of the WORTHIES of our OWN TIME, and the HEROES of POSTERITY": *Biographia Britannica: Or, The lives of the most eminent persons who have flourished in Great Britain and Ireland, from the earliest ages, down to the present times... volume the first* (London: W. Innys, et al., 1747) viii.

of British music historiography, a subject that I consider wonderfully open-ended. In 1550 Giorgio Vasari opened a new chapter in the intellectual history of Europe with *Le vite* of Italian artists.<sup>83</sup> Biographical accounts were no longer the privilege of kings, generals, politicians, or saints. Artists, too, were entitled to historical preservation. Two centuries and a quarter later, music got its own wide historiographical recognition. It did so thanks to the contributions of exceptional musicians, because, in Hawkins's phrasing, "the lives of the professors of arts are in some sort a history of the arts themselves".<sup>84</sup> Of these, no one had as deep and lasting influence on a modern society than George Frideric Handel.<sup>85</sup> To say that the rise of music historiography in Britain owed directly to Handel may sound an exaggeration. But if Vasari's *Le vite* was unthinkable without Michelangelo,<sup>86</sup> are we sure we can imagine the *Histories* of Hawkins and Burney without the colossal legacy of Handel?<sup>87</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori* (Firenze: [Lorenzo Torrentino], 1550); an expanded version appeared in 1568, whose life of Michelangelo was extracted as an offprint titled *La vita del gran Michelagnolo*. For its significance, see Lisa Pon, "Michelangelo's lives: Sixteenth-century books by Vasari, Condivi, and others", *The sixteenth century journal* 27/4 (1996) 1015–37.

<sup>84</sup> Hawkins, *History*, vol. 1, preface, [6]; in a survey of music writing during the Renaissance, Jessie Ann Owens finds that "Many of the writers identify a particular composer as a hero responsible for bringing music to its present state of perfection and correcting the abuses of the past." Owens, "Historiography", 309.

<sup>85</sup> And not only in Britain. Michael Kelly relates that, during his sojourn in Vienna, Gluck showed him "a full-length picture of Handel, in a rich frame. 'There, Sir,' said he, 'is the portrait of the inspired master of our art; when I open my eyes in the morning, I look upon him with reverential awe, and acknowledge him as such, and the highest praise is due to your country for having distinguished and cherished his gigantic genius'." Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences*, ed. by Roger Fiske (London: Oxford University Press, 1975) 129.

<sup>86</sup> For Vasari's treatment of Michelangelo, see Patricia Lee Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and history* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1995) 183–84. Among composers, Josquin was the first to be compared with Michelangelo, by Cosimo Bartoli in 1567. Owens, "Historiography", 310–11; following Handel's death, Burney reserved this link for Gluck: Kelly, *Reminiscences*, 130.

<sup>87</sup> There is a strong current of influence between art history, Vasari in particular, and British music historiography. Avison's *Essay on musical expression* includes a separate section on the analogy between music and painting, which elicits an impressive reaction from William Hayes: Avison, *Essay* [1752], 23–31; Hayes, *Remarks*, 21–32. Hawkins draws on the history of painting to legitimize his project: "a retrospect to the musical productions of past ages is no such absurdity, as that a curious enquirer need decline it. No man scruples to do the like in painting: the connoisseurs are as free in remarking the excellencies of Raphael, Titian, Domenichino, and Guido, as in comparing succeeding artists with them". Hawkins, *History*, vol. 1, lxxix. Available in English at least by 1719 (William Aglionby, *Choice observations upon the art of painting. Together with Vasari's Lives of the most eminent painters* [London: R. King, 1719]), Vasari's *Le vite* had a considerable influence on the genesis of the two *General histories*. According to Hawkins's daughter, the "History of Music" begun... on the instigation of Horace Walpole...". Hawkins, *Anecdotes*, 143. Walpole was the compiler of *A catalogue of engravers, who have been born, or resided in England* (Strawberry-Hill: [?], 1763) and the multi-volume *Anecdotes of painting in England* (Strawberry-Hill: Thomas Kirgate, 1765–1771), and considered himself a disciple of Vasari (see his letter to Richard Bentley, Sunday 23 February 1755, in *Horace Walpole's correspondence with... Richard Bentley...* The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence, vol. 35, ed. by W.S. Lewis and A. Dayle Wallace (New Haven: Yale University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 207–08. Burney took direct inspiration from Vasari. In a letter to William Mason from 27 May 1770, he cites *Le vite* claiming to "see no reason why the life of an eminent musician should not afford as much entertainment as that of a Painter" and compares the entertainment value of da Vinci's life to that of Farinelli's: Grant, *Burney*, 49–50. Both Vasari and Leonardo are mentioned in his *History* (Burney, *History*, vol. 4, 81; *History*, vol. 3, 150). Coincidence or not, finally, the *Handel Memoirs* appeared the same year as the first modern edition of Vasari's biography of Michelangelo (an offprint of the 1568 edition of *Le vite*): Pon, "Michelangelo", 1035.