

OF HANDEL, LONDON TRUMPETERS, AND TRUMPET MUSIC

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The publication of *Handel's Trumpeter: the Diary of John Grano*¹ provides a useful opportunity to review a number of issues concerning Handel, his trumpet music, and the professional circumstances of those who played it in London. It has to be said first of all that *Handel's Trumpeter* has no first-hand anecdotes of meetings with the composer: the nearest we came to this are some encounters with his principal music copyist (and probably orchestral manager) John Christopher Smith the elder. Nor are there any first-hand references to performances under the composer's direction, for this is the journal of the sixteen months beginning on 30 May 1728 during which Grano was living "under the Rules" in the Marshalsea Prison, Southwark, to which he had been committed for debt. "Imprisonment" does not seem to be quite the appropriate word for the curious world that the diary describes: although confinement was one aspect of the regime, debtors who were able to live on the "Master's side" of the prison had considerable freedom both in their social arrangements and in the liberty they had, under certain conditions, to pass considerable parts of the daytime in the outside world. Thus, although there are predictable social problems with the fellow-prisoners with whom Grano is thrown into close proximity, he sustains the flame of his professional skills and dignity, maintaining contact with other leading performers, preserving his technique by regular practice (his habit of doing so between 6 and 8 AM probably did not help his social relationships), taking pupils which he taught at the prison, composing new music and writing out performing parts, arranging (as far as was practicable) benefit concerts for himself, and performing in a variety of events. We have valuable reports of music club performances, though all too rarely accompanied by complete details of the programs performed: we gain a sense of the events and their hazards (there was one disastrous concert for which virtually none of the supposedly promised performers turned up), but not of the musical experience whose quality made the effort worthwhile. Apart from the formal public and semi-public concerts, there are the reports of events in which Grano entertained a particular company or patron, again tantalizing in that they tell us how often these things happened (especially to someone like Grano who had an established reputation, a network of contacts, and dire need of a financial patron who would guarantee his release), but not about what was performed, or what it was that (as Grano often records) gave satisfaction to the listeners. Clearly Grano could be socially at ease with his patrons, apparently dining at the same table with them, and most patrons understood a social etiquette in which the musician should be given a guinea or two as well as the meal. Two events made considerable changes to the sort of life that he led at the Marshalsea. The first was his removal into a room of his own (from his original shared accommodation), and the second was the progress of new legislation concerning debtors (coinciding with a committee of inquiry into prisoners' conditions), which seems in practice

to have led to a breakdown in the severity of the rules of residence. The later part of the diary sees Grano roving around London most of the time, without even being obliged to return to the Marshalsea every evening.

His final release was apparently secured through the support of Humphrey Parsons, one of the Members of Parliament for London, Master of the Grocers' Company and subsequently Lord Mayor of London. In the background there are various threads that remain mysterious to the story. Parsons was a Jacobite and a Freemason. Grano was a practising Roman Catholic: his "spiritual exercises" feature nearly as often in the narrative as his musical exercises. But there is no sign in the diary of any Jacobite sympathies, nor that he was aware of this side of Parsons's life; nor does his religious affiliation seem to have been significant in his dealings with his fellow musicians. There is a passing loyal reference to King George II,² which may well reflect Grano's genuine sentiments (the King soon afterwards also becomes important to Grano for signing the Insolvent Debtors' Act): but some sections of the diary were obviously written in the expectation that they would be read by other people at the time, and Grano may have been planting a sentiment that would work in his favor with the authorities.

Among the many interesting and curious biographical facts that John Ginger has elucidated for his commentary to the diary, Masonic affiliation recurs frequently, and Grano himself was a Freemason. Whether some of the music clubs were a cover for Masonic meetings, or (more importantly) whether Masonry was a significant employer of professional musicians, it is however impossible to judge. I was interested to see, among the musicians with whom Grano worked during the period, the name of Thomas Gethin, a Chapel Royal singer who features in Handel's church music from the 1720s. When I wrote an article about Gethin in 1975,³ I was unaware of the Masonic affiliation that Ginger has discovered: it would still be handy to know the time-span and extent of Gethin's Masonic commitment. An intriguing reference, from the period when Gethin was closely associated with Grano in the preparation of a concert, concludes "N.B. Mr Gethin lay with me etc."⁴ Given the usage of the time, "lay with me" does not imply a homosexual relationship, but one is bound to wonder about the "etc." There is a curious lack of reticence about Grano's heterosexual relationships in the first half of the diary, in view of the fact that we are left guessing about the significance of so much of his social life thereafter.

Grano's diary is in many ways a disturbing document, describing a life that seems on the whole chaotic and aimless: even allowing for the demoralizing effects of the Marshalsea regime, Grano drifts casually from one event to another. There is no impression of a structured approach to dealing with his situation: he does not appear to know the extent of his debts (or even the number of his possible creditors), nor does he have a plan for raising a specific income to deal with the problem. It may be that, prison or no prison, this was a reflection of the day-to-day life of many professional musicians in early eighteenth-century London, who could only take whatever opportunities offered themselves. It is hard to resist the impression, however, that in 1728-29 Grano, then about thirty-five years old, had lost the thread of his career: it may well be significant that there is no further documentation of his musical activity after a benefit concert at Stationers' Hall in December 1729.⁵ He had

probably become “yesterday’s man” as a trumpeter, and the transition had come upon him quickly: in 1727 he had been the principal trumpeter for the Royal Entertainment given at the City of London on Lord Mayor’s Day, and his *Solos for a German Flute, a Hoboy or a Violin, with a Thorough Bass for the Harpsichord or Bass Violin* had been published in April 1728, only a month before he was called to the Marshalsea. Above all, during the period of the diary he was cut off from the major and more solid careers that were available in Westminster, compared with the professional opportunities that were offered by the City and Southwark. However many musicians from the west end visited him, there is no sign that they presented him with the prospect of re-entry into that circle.

That Grano had formerly enjoyed a place in this (slightly) more stable environment is not in doubt, and there had certainly been a time when he was “Handel’s Trumpeter.” He was the trumpeter named (as “Granon”) in the roster of the opera orchestra for the season 1709-10, immediately before Handel’s arrival,⁶ and again for the initial draft roster of the orchestra for the Royal Academy of Music ten years later.⁷ It therefore seems a fair assumption that he was the principal trumpeter at the King’s Theatre, Haymarket, throughout the first opera companies with which Handel was associated (1711-1717), and for the Royal Academy from the time of its foundation, perhaps even until the original Academy’s last season of 1727-28.⁸ As he is the only trumpeter named on the surviving rosters from the period, we can assume for the moment that many of the first trumpet parts in the Academy opera were probably written with him in mind.

Beyond the opera house, and later the oratorio theater, Handel’s music for trumpet is almost entirely accounted for by music for the court. His most remarkable use of the instrument is the obbligato to the opening movement of the Birthday Ode for Queen Anne (*Eternal Source of Light Divine*, HWV 74), probably composed for performance on the Queen’s Birthday (6 February) 1713.⁹ Although the combination of male alto and trumpet as complementary “voices,” which is found here, had been an established formula in London’s music at least since the days of Purcell, the extended lyrical use of the trumpet to answer and complement the voice in the context of a string-accompanied *accompagnato* movement seems to have been original, at least on this scale and intensity: though we have no reason to suppose that Handel found the experiment unsuccessful, he never tried it again. The Birthday Ode was Handel’s only court ode, and in his first years in London he seems to have displaced John Eccles, the Master of the Queen’s Music, whose duty it was to provide the odes, in supplying music for the Queen’s birthday.¹⁰ The performing forces for the traditional odes for the monarch’s birthday and the New Year Odes were provided mainly by those who were already in Court employment—singers from the Chapel Royal and string players from the Royal Musicians—but extra performers were undoubtedly brought in, either to fulfill special musical roles or to make up the ensemble. Unfortunately the records for the employment of these additional performers are rather sporadic for the period of Handel’s first years in London, nor in general do they name particular performers in any period.

This is particularly frustrating concerning the other major areas of Handel’s music connected with the court, in which trumpets were involved: his church music, largely for

the Chapel Royal. The most serious lacuna concerns the most high-profile event of Handel's early years in London, the state thanksgiving service at St. Paul's Cathedral on 7 July 1713 for which he composed the "Utrecht" Te Deum and Jubilate (HWV 278-79): although performed at the Cathedral it was clearly regarded as a "Royal" service,¹¹ but there is no useful documentation of the additional performers. Whether Grano took part is therefore unknown, but it is possible: while his Catholicism would have excluded him from a court post as a Trumpeter, it is unlikely that the formal constraints on court servants applied to additional performers. The opening movement of the Jubilate has the same alto-and-trumpet recipe as the opening of the Birthday Ode, in similar style but to different effect: the two movements may well have been composed within a few weeks of each other and for the same performers, possibly Grano with Richard Elford from the Chapel Royal.

The "Utrecht" music is intriguing in that its scoring comprised trumpets, strings, oboes and (in one movement) flute, accompanied by the organ, and one must assume that some way was found to accommodate the variety of pitch-standards that may have been characteristic of the instruments that contributed. The Cathedral organ was relatively sharp, and the Chapel Royal organ almost certainly sharper still. I think it very likely that it was the unusual pitch of the Chapel Royal organ that led to the persistence of the "classic" scoring for strings and trumpets (without oboes), derived from Purcell's 1694 Te Deum and Jubilate, in the "Caroline" Te Deum (HWV 280) that Handel wrote for Chapel Royal services in the autumn of 1714. The string players and the trumpeters could probably find instruments that matched the sharp pitch, but oboe players could not: in the 1720s Jean Kytch seems to have had a special sharp-pitched oboe for use in Chapel Royal events. What happened in Handel's anthem *O Sing unto the Lord* (HWV 249a), which was probably written to accompany the Te Deum in 1714, I do not know, for it begins with a movement that includes an oboe solo, and ends with a movement for oboes and trumpets that looks like an afterthought, in contrast to the complementary "Caroline" Te Deum, in which the trumpets are clearly part of the design of the work throughout. Nor is this the end of the story, for HWV 249a also includes a movement with a flute obbligato, annotated by Handel with a rubric about transposition incorporating an instruction for two-step transposition of the organ part.¹² This movement is also deleted in the autograph, however, and it is possible that practical problems in matching woodwind to the rest even led to the complete anthem being abandoned before performance. One intriguing possibility is that the flute obbligato in this anthem was at first conceived for Grano. It is clear from his diary that Grano paid balanced attention to his skills on both trumpet and flute, distinguishing "playing" the flute from "sounding" the trumpet. Because Handel's music copyists wrote flute music into the oboe partbooks, an assumption has often been made that his woodwind players were routinely ambidextrous on oboe and flute. In the Chapel Royal services with which Handel's music was associated, only a single oboe player (Kytch) is named in payments for additional performers. It would have been impractical for Kytch to have changed from oboe to flute in the opening movements of HWV 249a, but perfectly possible for Grano to have played the flute solo and then waited to take first trumpet in the anthem's final movement. On the other hand, it would have been impractical for him to have played

the flute obbligato for “We Believe that Thou Shalt Come” in the “Utrecht” Te Deum, followed immediately by the trumpet opening to “Day by Day.” The more general issues arising from the possibility of Grano being employed as both flute and trumpet player are worth bearing in mind when looking at Handel’s scores, nevertheless: perhaps he played the flute at the opera on nights when the score did not include trumpet parts.

Handel may have revived his “Caroline” Te Deum at the Chapel Royal in 1722, but in the following Chapel Royal services marking the King’s return from Hanover in 1724 and 1726 Handel dropped the trumpet from his scores. Thus, unfortunately, at just the time when the Lord Chamberlain’s records begin to record the names of additional performers for these services, we do not have the names of any trumpeters. However, it so happens that for three Chapel Royal services in 1719-20 with which Handel was not involved, the names of the trumpeters were recorded: they were Joseph Abingdon (Abington) and John Goodman.¹³ In the meantime, in 1718, another “Handel trumpeter” had been working for James Brydges, for whom Handel probably composed the obbligato part in a movement from the “Cannons” (or “Chandos”) Te Deum (HWV 281),¹⁴ and the substantial contribution to the last movement of the oratorio *Esther* which, if it were performed in its fullest form, would have been the longest single-movement trumpet part (in terms of bars played) that Handel ever wrote. Unfortunately, as far as the Court records are concerned, trumpeters are hidden among the anonymity of the “extraordinary performers” for the remainder of Handel’s lifetime, so we do not know the names of those who played in, for example, the Coronation Anthems in 1727 or the “Dettingen” Te Deum in 1749. The next certain names that we know for “Handel’s trumpeters” come from the Foundling Hospital *Messiah* accounts of the 1750s: Adcock and Willis.¹⁵

This does not mean that there is a shortage of eligible names for the intervening period: the problem is not to identify trumpeters but to decide what being a trumpeter meant, in musical terms, for any individual. When Handel specified three trumpeters per part on the *Fireworks Music* in 1749, he presumably knew that there were three players in London who would be competent for each part. Nearly forty years previously, although Grano was the only named trumpet player in the opera roster, the score of Handel’s *Rinaldo* required four trumpeters. The trumpeters who were on the Court establishment in the Lord Chamberlain’s department usually numbered twelve, though there were various times when the lists contained sixteen, or nine, names.¹⁶ The Court trumpeters’ duties were presumably principally ceremonial, and their conditions of service seem to have been complicated by the fact that from time to time some of them doubled with posts in the guards.¹⁷ There is a magnificent portrait of a Royal Trumpeter in his court livery, probably of Valentine Snow and painted about the time that he became Serjeant Trumpeter in 1753.¹⁸ But grandeur of appearance (and office) might not have come at the peak of the trumpeter’s playing career. During Handel’s first years in London the Serjeant Trumpeter was John Shore, who had certainly been a serious player in the past. On state occasions, however, Shore carried the mace and not the trumpet, and his active interests around the time of Handel’s arrival seem also to have included a role as Lutenist in the Chapel Royal (playing a special instrument of his own design) and the invention of the tuning fork. It is interesting and probably

significant that, for the Chapel Royal services involving orchestral instruments, the string players from the Royal Musicians attended as part of their service during periods of waiting, while trumpeters had to be brought in specially, along with players of the double bass and woodwind instruments. It seems probable that the players in London who could fulfill the technical demands of Handel's trumpet parts were limited in number, and that this smaller pool was not necessarily coincident with membership of the Court's trumpeters. For most of the time a place (as a trumpeter) at Court may have been an office as much as a function, and many of the names on the roster would have been well past their best playing days.

Which brings us back to the music that Handel actually wrote. His writing for trumpet is idiomatic, practical and yet fairly demanding, particularly given the normal conventions of operatic-style instrumentation which rarely allow a warming-up period before a long-awaited solo. Presumably Handel had learned what he needed to know about writing for trumpet even before he arrived in Italy in 1706, for his writing for the instrument is already well-formed in *La Resurrezione* (Rome, 1708),¹⁹ and ambitious in the cantata *O come chiare e belle*. The necessity of performing "The Trumpet Shall Sound" in *Messiah* has kept Handel's "trumpet style" continuously before the public during the last 250 years: even in 1939 a correspondent to *The Musical Times* believed that Handel never used horns or trombones, but it is inconceivable that such a statement could have been made about his use of the trumpet.²⁰ From the time that the technique and idioms for trumpet music changed later in the eighteenth century, Handel's trumpet music, like Bach's, was naturally perceived as "difficult." Already by the 1784 Commemoration Charles Burney's ears (and the player's lips) had ceased to be attuned to the character of this movement.²¹ Mozart's re-writing of the movement is a sign of the changed practical situation as well as a recognition that the trumpet might not be the correct sound to accompany the reference to a *Posaune* in the German text: in turn it is this movement that usually undermines English-singing choirs' plans to perform *Messiah* with Mozart's accompaniments "for a change." It is interesting that when he played *Messiah* for Handel in 1754 Abraham Adcock received half a guinea—the same rate as any of the cellists and half the fee of the leader: Justice Willis received only eight shillings for playing second trumpet—the same rate as a back-desk violinist or viola player.²² The implication is probably not that trumpet-players were actively under-valued, but rather that "The Trumpet Shall Sound" was not regarded as anything beyond the normal routine of a regular orchestral (as distinct from "fanfare") player. Although Handel shortened "The Trumpet Shall Sound" to the extent of eliding the opening ritornello on the *da capo*, he never omitted the movement or reduced it to its first section only, in Dublin or London: indeed, his various alterations elsewhere in *Messiah* had the effect of drawing more attention to the movement as one of the works' two constant full-scale arias.

When Grano called for his trumpet and his flute in order to entertain private company, it seems very likely that some of the music that he played on the trumpet was by Handel. He several times refers to the pleasure and satisfaction that were expressed by the listeners to his performances, but it is difficult to imagine the experience that they enjoyed because, for Handel as for most of his contemporaries, the trumpet was essentially an instrument whose

artistic uses were as part of an ensemble. Although the famous trumpet tunes of Jeremiah Clarke and Henry Purcell can stand alone (though this relies on the listener's imaginative perception of the supporting harmonic rhythm), a chain of uninterrupted solo trumpet music, however well played, would surely have become wearisome without at least a bass instrument and chordal support. Yet players must practise and explore the repertoire alone in the first place. For those wanting to undertake this Grano-like exercise today, Handel's *Complete Trumpet Repertoire*, edited by Robert Minter, was published in the 1970s.²³ Seeing the repertoire laid out end to end, one is struck by the consistency of Handel's trumpet style during his career, and by the fairly constant level of technical demands: we must suppose that Handel was always able to call upon a trumpeter of Grano-like quality. As part of the orchestral texture, whether in the theatre or at Court (and Chapel) events, Handel's trumpeters normally worked in collegial groups of two or three players: while there is clear specialization as to register, the solo "breaks" for the first player are mainly not so substantial as to differentiate that part dramatically from the rest of the group. When it comes to solo obbligato movements to arias in the operas and oratorios, there are peaks which suggest that Handel was writing for a particular player: there are, for example, the first operatic solos in *Silla* (1713) and *Amadigi* (1715), a solo in *Ezio* (1732), a clutch of them around 1736 (*Atalanta*, *Giustino*, *Alexander's Feast*, and the anthem *Sing unto God*), and another group in 1741 with *Messiah* and *Samson*. But the argument cannot be pushed too far, for many works with trumpet solos were revived in subsequent seasons and adequate players must have been available.

In terms of musical style, inevitably D major fanfare-type motifs predominate (though the presence of the trombones in *Saul* and *Israel in Egypt* seems to have pushed Handel into C major), but Handel makes imaginative use of the capabilities and range of the instrument. The doubling of both trumpets on g# should have been enough to have alerted musicians long ago to the inauthenticity of "Chandos Anthem 12"²⁴ as being uncharacteristic of the composer's practice, which in technical terms is fairly conventional, though he does make (possibly experimental) use of the thirteenth harmonic (a# on a D trumpet) in his last oratorio, *Jephtha*. Given the right player and good supporting company, Handel's trumpet music still has much to challenge Grano's successors and to delight the listeners.

NOTES

¹ Ed. John Ginger (Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon, 1998). Although the editorial policy is not stated explicitly, substantial extracts (presumably including all those relevant to music) are reproduced, rather than the complete diary.

² 20 March 1729, Ginger, p. 206.

³ Donald Burrows, "Thomas Gethin: a Handel Tenor," *The Musical Times* 116 (November 1975): 1003-06.

⁴ 9 January 1729, Ginger p. 163

⁵ See Grano's entry (as Giovanni Battista Grano) in Philip H. Highfill, Jr., Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, eds., *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses ... in London, 1660-1800*

(16 vols., Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973-93), 6: 309-10. In spite of the authors' caution over possible confusion between John and Lewis Grano(m), there seem to be no plausible references to John after 1730.

⁶ Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, eds., *Vice Chamberlain Coke's Theatrical Papers 1706-1715* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), pp. 127-28.

⁷ Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume "New Light on Handel and the Royal Academy of Music 1720," *Theatre Journal* 35 (May 1983): 161.

⁸ The last performance of the season, 1 June 1728, was Handel's *Admeto* (with no trumpet parts), on the day after Grano entered the Marshalsea. The extent of Grano's visits to Dublin during the "Academy period" is not known, but his name does not appear in Brian Boydell, *A Dublin Musical Calendar 1700-1760* (Blackrock: Irish Academic Press, 1988).

⁹ It is uncertain whether this was performed: the Queen was not in good health at the time, but the absence of any documentary record of the performance is inconclusive as evidence.

¹⁰ Handel had performed in a cantata on the Queen's birthday in 1711, soon after his arrival in London. There is a hiatus in payments from the Lord Chamberlain's records to Eccles for the Court odes in the last years of Queen Anne's reign, but they resume with King George I in 1715.

¹¹ Ill-health prevented the Queen from attending at the last moment, but her coach was included in the state procession.

¹² British Library RM 20.g.6, f. 2v.

¹³ Public Record Office LC5/157, pp. 295, 396; LC5/158, p. 14.

¹⁴ Brydges' payments to musicians from his household accounts include some to a trumpeter (in 1719-21) whose name is given by Graydon Beeks as "A.G. Lemon": see Beeks, "Handel and Music for the Earl of Carnarvon" in Peter Williams, ed., *Bach, Handel, Scarlatti* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.17. It is possible that "Lemon" was a mistranscription by the Cannons scribe, and that the trumpeter involved was Peter Lenoir.

¹⁵ It is not known whether Handel was directly involved in the Lord Mayor of London's Royal Entertainments, for which the trumpeters were D'Avent and Grano in 1714, Grano and Abington in 1727.

¹⁶ See, for example, the establishment lists in Andrew Ashbee, *Records of English Court Music*, 9 vols. (Snodland, Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1988-96), 2: 129 (1689, sixteen names), p.132 (1713-14, nine names).

¹⁷ See Andrew Ashbee and David Lasocki (et al.), *A Biographical Dictionary of English Court Musicians*, 2 vols. (Aldershot: Scholar, 1998), 2: 1209.

¹⁸ See David Edwards and Julie Edwards, "I'm almost Shore it's Snow!," *The Historic Brass Society Newsletter* 5 (Summer 1993): 13-14.

¹⁹ It was for this work that Handel added trumpet parts to movements from the overture to his previous oratorio, *Il Trionfo del Tempo*, the score of which had not included trumpets.

²⁰ Letter, *The Musical Times* 80 (1939): 460, see also *ibid.*, pp. 177-78, 376-77. This gave rise to a useful article by W.F.H. Blandford on Handel's horn and trombone parts (*ibid.*, pp. 697-99, 746-77, 794).

²¹ See Charles Burney, *An Account of the Musical Performances ... in Commemoration of Handel* (London: T. Payne, 1785), Second Performance, pp. 86-87.

²² See the roster and account reprinted in Otto Erich Deutsch, *Handel: A Documentary Biography* (London: Black, 1955), p. 751.

²³ G. F. Handel, ed. Robert Minter, *Complete Trumpet Repertoire*, 4 vols. (London: Musica Rara, 1974). This is complemented by a review by Anthony Hicks, giving further information about the repertory and Handel's trumpet writing, in *The Musical Times* 116 (1975): 456-57. It is an interest-

ing reflection that twenty-five years ago, Minter's preface shows that he assumed that the "piccolo trumpet" was the appropriate instrument for Handel's music.

²⁴ The anthem ('HWV 25') was published in the old Händelgesellschaft collected edition of Handel's works (vol. 34, ed. Friedrich Chrysander, Leipzig: Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft, 1872), but is by Maurice Greene. See H. Diack Johnstone, "The Chandos Anthems: the Authorship of No. 12," *The Musical Times* 117 (1976): 601-03, 998, and 129 (1982): 613.

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