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### An overview of Dramatic Music in England, 1710-1759

Before his arrival in England in 1710, Handel encountered considerable success with *Agrippina* in Venice (1709-10). At the Queen's Theatre, Aaron Hill, a dramatist and poet, quickly conceived a plot for Handel, employing Giacomo Rossi as his librettist. The plot was based on Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Handel completing the libretto within two weeks. The plot of *Rinaldo* was taken from earlier works, but despite this, *Rinaldo* is regarded as a fine opera – Handel obviously ensured its impressive nature in both content and performance (February 1711), which, as in Purcell's time, was lavishly staged. Staging included mountains, waterfalls and even a flock of sparrows and chaffinches. The orchestra was more varied and colourful than those to which London audiences were used, employing four trumpets, three recorders for birds and a star cast that included the castrato, Nicolini. Handel directed from the harpsichord, the opera running for fifteen nights to full houses. Future revisions were performed in subsequent seasons. Although *Rinaldo* received a good reaction, Addison, perhaps angry at the manner in which his *Rosamond* was received, wrote letters of complaint to *The Spectator*.

*Rinaldo* followed the conventions of *opera seria*, devised on the formal structure of Italian models. These disposed the dramatic and emotional pattern of the characters precisely through intricate plots and lavish theatricality. Narrative was carried forward through recitatives and plots were complex enough to allow a variety of contrasts in arias to be presented. Arias were divided amongst the singers in the following manner:

1. Principals – five arias
2. Other main characters – three
3. Minor characters – one or two

Solo arias were predominant with sparing use of duets. Large ensembles rarely occurred with a chorus of principals being reserved for the end. Arias were mainly da capo and served as an emotional commentary, allowing the singer to stand apart from a situation, heighten a dramatic situation and, ultimately, receive applause. They were generally structure thus:

- A – tonic-based
- B – shorter, usually in a contrasted key
- A – full recapitulation of opening, allowing for embellishments.

The da capo format allowed for the aria to move the action forward, the repeat intensifying the emotions. Scenes did not lead to a curtain as this was raised after the overture and not dropped. Therefore, scene ends employed exit arias (see later notes).

London audiences, generally incapable of understanding Italian, were provided with translations. Plots were adapted from texts centred on classical or mythological stories, interpreted into contemporary situations, usually as love affairs. This approach brought them down to a human level, typical of the eighteenth-century. Emotional impact came through the suggestion of death, suicide, rape etc., but this was never portrayed visually, rather through the awareness of such actions between characters. Typically, problems were solved towards the end, which, as in Jacobean drama, was usually joyous. The production of *Rinaldo* fused the spectacle of the Jacobean masque with the drama of the Italian opera in that productions were expensive, lavish spectacles, later to cause financial difficulties.

Handel's first London opera period lasted for five years (1711-1715), during which time five new operas were performed. These were:

*Il pastor fido*, 1712 – Rossi's version of Guarini's 1585 text. Despite some charming music, well set to a rather poor libretto, *Pastor* shows a hasty production and composition. The music was written in a deliberately pastoral style with none of the flamboyance of *Rinaldo*, a reduced number of arias and short, abbreviated recitative. Hogwood suggests that this, rather than

being, was only a representation of an Italian ideal, “less compelling and more stereotyped than English pastoral precedents of which Handel was probably ignorant.”<sup>1</sup>

*Teseo*, (Queen’s Theatre, January 1713) – Possibly finding that he had misjudged public taste, Handel was quick to make amends. *Teseo* was high drama with a supernatural plot and elaborate stage machinery, interspersed with recitatives “in which the wild and savage fury of the enraged sorceress... and her incantations, are admirably painted by the instruments.”<sup>2</sup>

*Amadigi d Gaula*, (QT May 1715) – The text by Nicola Haym (after Antoine Houdar de la Motte, 1699), was substantially altered from the original, therefore causing some structural weaknesses. Similar to *Teseo*, Handel responded to the Italian ideal – a plot based on magic transformations and elaborate scene changes. The score demonstrates a high degree of invention, concentrating on the emotions and sufferings of characters, important in that he made his characters convincing as people.

Both *Amadigi* and *Teseo* demonstrate an important feature of *opera seria*: the emphasis on high voices. In the former, the only male voice was that of Nicolini, an Italian castrato, and the other male character being sung by a female contralto. Popularity might have influenced his choice of a high voice, but pitch must have had other attractions as Handel frequently used women for male roles when castrati were not available. Tenors were a rare commodity and bass parts were usually reserved for monarchs, old men, villains or comedy roles, the high voice being representative of youth and vitality.

Since the production of *Rinaldo*, English composers abandoned *opera seria*, despite some serious advocacy for English versions. An attempt at producing an opera in 1712 had been made by the poet and amateur musician, John Hughes (1677-1720). Hughes was as staunch as Addison on the suitability of English as a vessel for opera, and opposed the domination of *opera seria*. His preface to the libretto for *Calypso and Telemachus* demonstrates that his views were for textual rather than aesthetic reasons – English could be understood! Hogwood comments that his sudden death might have been a missed opportunity for Handel:

Handel was the one composer who could have turned the enthusiasm of such people as Pepusch, Galliard, Hughes and Haym into national opera; had he done so, Dr. Johnson’s famous epithet on Italian opera... would have required some amendment.<sup>3</sup>

For *Calypso and Telemachus*, Hughes turned to a Hanoverian oboist, Ernst Galliard (ca. 1687-1749), who had come to England in around 1706. *Calypso* was not a success; this is possibly due to several reasons: primarily Galliard was weak as a composer, but the spectacle London audiences were expecting only one year after *Rinaldo*, coupled with the unavailability of castrati (being unable to sing English), were undoubtedly instrumental in its failure.

1715 saw another attempt at producing an English musical drama on the London stage. Coley Ciber, manager at Drury Lane, reintroduced the dormant English masque, engaging another composer, Johann Pepusch (1667-1752) for the score for his *Venus and Adonis*. Despite the plot lacking in dramatic content, the scoring is effective, showing Italian influences by emphasising strings and woodwind and employing secco recitatives. The masque must have met with considerable success as the score (without the recitatives and choruses) was quickly published. The following season saw three more Pepusch masques produced at Drury Lane: Ciber’s *Myrtillo and Laura* (November 1715), Hughes’s *Apollo and Daphne* (January 1716) and Barton and Booth’s *Death of Dido and Aeneas* (April 1716). All were limited to four singers, the two main roles in each being reserved for sopranos. *Myrtillo and Laura* was described as a ‘pastoral interlude’, being an emotional and coquettish interplay between shepherds and shepherdesses that ended with a ballet of ‘nymphs and swains’. The remainder were tragedies of which *Apollo and Daphne* was the better, more concentrated with an ‘excellent grasp of the potential expressiveness of Italianate secco recitative’.<sup>4</sup>

These masques proved to be moderately successful, and their influence resulted in Handel’s *Acis and Galatea*, composed in 1718 for performance at the Duke of Chandos’s country

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<sup>1</sup> Hogwood, Christopher, *Handel*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1984, 67.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 66. Johnson’s viewed Italian opera not only as ‘exotic and irrational entertainment’ but also as one ‘which has always been combated and has always been retained.’ (Ibid., 103).

<sup>4</sup> Platt, Richard, ‘Theatre Music 1’, *The Blackwell History of Music in Britain: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. Diak Johnstone and Roger Fisk, Oxford: Blackwell, 1987, 117.

residence, Cannons, but not heard in London until 1732. A later Cannons masque, the first version of *Esther* (1720), was possibly seen by Handel as a sideline, Italian opera being the more important. *Acis* was performed on a small scale with only one voice per part in choruses (five parts in all). The score reflects the size of the orchestra at Cannons; there were no violas, bassoons or contrabasses, it comprising of only seven players, two oboes (doubling recorders), two violins, two 'cellos and continuo.

Drury Lane lost several of its best singers to the new Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre in 1717. This had opened in 1714, but the manager, John Rich, previously had lack the financial resources to stage operas. When able, however, he lured singers with revivals of *Thomyris* and *Camilla*, engaging Galliard to compose new scores. In 1718, two of Galliard's masques were produced: *Pan and Syrinx* in January, and *Decius and Pauline* in March. The following year saw Pepusch's *Circe*, based on a play by Davenant. It is open to conjecture whether this was an opera or a masque as only three of the songs survive. These are well written; although lacking the rich and subtle nature of Handel, they are at times imaginative. Masques were again fashionable and caught the imagination whereas Italian opera dropped out of favour with the public. At Lincoln's Inn Fields, Rich began to use the masque as an element of a new English hybrid, pantomime.

### 1719-1728

1719 saw several aristocrats discussing a scheme to return Italian opera to the London stage, feeling that London, like Hamburg and Dresden, should be a cultural centre. They secured the assistance through subscription of fifty-eight notables, to which was added a £1,000 annual subsidy from the king for five years.

The royal charter enabled the establishment of the Royal Academy of Music in May 1719, Handel being issued with instructions to travel to Italy to secure the tenure of leading foreign singers, especially the castrato Senesino, who could not be released until the following year. Ensuring the services the sopranos Durastani and Salvai, Handel returned to be appointed 'Master of the Orchestra', Paulo Rolli (1687-1765) being appointed as secretary and staff librettist. Haym was soon involved in providing libretto.

The Academy seemed reluctant to involve English music in its activities, although Thomas Roseingrave did direct a performance of Alessandro Scarlatti's *Narcisco* in May 1720, to which he added four of his own songs.

Oddly, the first season did not open with a Handel opera, rather Giovanni Porta's *Numitore* (April 1720). Platt suggests that this might have been due to Handel's preoccupation other Academy affairs, but *Numitore* was soon succeeded by *Radamisto*, which drew a large crowd at prices of up to forty shillings for a ticket. This was his first opera for five years, and incorporated a large orchestra, and, in keeping with the style to which Academy audiences were used, elaborates sinfonias and ritornellos. The libretto was by Haym.

With costs rising and a poor prosperity, the Academy began to be seen as increasingly extravagant and amateurish. It did survive nine seasons, stimulating the composition of some of Handel's finest operas, as well as introducing the works of two other composers, Bononcini from Rome and Ariosti. The emphasis was without doubt on Handel's output, with two-hundred and thirty-five performances of his music, as opposed to one-hundred and fourteen of Bononcini's, fifty-three of Ariosti's and a mere thirty of others.

The orchestra consisted of thirty-four personnel. Apart from twenty-five strings, Handel incorporated the four oboes, three bassoons and a trumpet. The continuo section comprised a theorbo, archlute and two harpsichords, one of which was played by Handel. The focus of attention was undoubtedly on the Italian stars and with the exception of *Flavio* the operas of the Academy years were typically heroic in style, based on either classical or historical models.

In 1726, the Academy put on a publicity stunt, having the two rival sopranos singing in the same operas. By trying to accommodate Francesco Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni, however, the librettists and composers had to carefully manipulate the plots, and productions, already regarded as too excessive and lavish by the public, were brought further into disrepute, when the two stars came to blows on stage during Bononcini's *Astanatte*.

Although 20th-century audiences do generally not know Bononcini's music, during the Academy years, the public regarded him and Handel as fierce rivals. Bononcini's music was "tender, elegant and pathetic",<sup>5</sup> excelling at composing charming and sweet melodies. His

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<sup>5</sup> Platt quoting Hawkins, *ibid.*, 122

weaknesses lay in his not being able to extend his music without undue repetition, as opposed to Handel who demonstrates that not only can he show the same qualities in his melodic lines, but also that he can infuse them with a kinetic energy through the dramatic incorporation of wide intervals. Bononcini avoided this. Although he kept abreast of contemporary trends in orchestration, Bononcini lacked Handel's imagination, restraint and ability to flavour accompaniments.

Subscription was introduced to the Academy during the 1721-2 season. Combined with the box-office successes of Bononcini's operas, *Crispo* and later *Griselde*, the Academy's failing fortunes turned temporarily. The 1723-4 season was even more successful with the newly arrived Cuzzoni's appearance in *Ottone* (January 1724). The following year saw the production of Handel's *Giulio Cesare* with Cuzzoni as Cleopatra and Senesino as Caesar. This, along with the following *Tamerlano* and *Rodelinda*, were great triumphs, constituting "one of the peaks of his [Handel's] career", in that they demonstrate his dramatic superiority over other composers of the time.<sup>6</sup>

Many of the conventions of *opera seria* restrict dramatic expression, but Handel, often stretching the rules, exploited its limitations and turned these to his advantage. His music gives life to his characters in a way that was hitherto unseen, and hardly expected from the libretto. For example, his Caesar has an unusual humanity, all too rare in operatic heroes, and this is demonstrated excellently in his soliloquy in Act I, where the twisting and unexpected modulations through enharmonics and unexpected keys help to bring his humanity closer to the audience.

Similarly, women are portrayed sympathetically. For example, Handel heightens the pathos one feels towards Cornelia by juxtaposing her against the passionate and intense Cleopatra. Cleopatra's arias themselves allow the audience to understand her character and emotional turbulence through an astonishing variety of moods.

*Giulio Cesare* is scored lavishly, the orchestra responding appropriately to the subject matter. For example, when Cleopatra sets out to seduce Caesar, the orchestra is divided into two, one in the pit, the other on stage (consisting of oboe, violins, viola, gamba, harp, theorbo, bassoons and cellos). The simple orchestration of Cleopatra's Act 3 lament, when she believes Caesar to be dead, adds poignancy and further heightens the pathos.

*Tamerlano* allowed Handel to use the services of the tenor, Borosimi, in the role of Bajazet, who unusually, commits suicide on stage. This is approached by means of a long, continuous stretch of music that includes five accompanied recitatives, two ariosos and some secco recitative. In what is relatively a short period time, Handel achieves rapid changes of mood through changes of time and unexpected modulations. Example 1 shows Bajazet's death: heightened by the disconnected syllables that are "gasped" out amidst the pulsating quavers and semiquavers of the strings. Note how the use of the diminished seventh and its chromatic alterations further add to the drama by taking the music through a wide range of keys to end in G minor.

Act 2 demonstrates Handel's effective use of the exit aria. Here Handel gradually empties the stage of characters through a fifteen-minute finale. This is achieved thus:

1. During the trio for Bajazet, his daughter Asteria and Tamerlano, the latter orders their execution and leaves the stage.
2. Three short arias follow for Asteria's father, lover and rival, each separated by several short bars of recitative. During each, the character leaves, the exit aria having the *no da capo*. Consequently the momentum is continued.
3. Asteria is now left alone where she sings a long, contemplative *da capo* aria.

This highly original structure heightens the dramatic and emotional content of the finale.

1727-8 was the last for the Royal Academy of Music. Although Italian operas were considered elitist and running-costs were high, it appears that the main reason for closure was a lack of singers, many having travelled to the continent at the end of the season, and being unwilling to return with no financial guarantees of the future. The final blow for Italian opera in London came in the form of the production of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* in January 1728. This was to become one of the greatest theatrical successes of the 18th century.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 123.

## Later operas

### 1732-1737

After the closure of the Royal Academy of Music, Handel and Heidegger became partners, opening a Second Academy in December 1729. The Old Academy directors, who lent them also scenery, costumes and machines, leased the King's Theatre to them. Seasons ran between November and June, with two performances each week. Although Handel wrote several new operas, and revived others, without the attractions of such singers as Senesino, public interest was lacking. When Senesino did return two years later, his relationship with Handel was strained to the point that when the Opera of the Nobility, another company, was later founded at the Lincoln Inn's Fields Theatre at the end of 1733, Senesino left the Second Academy to join their rivals. The Opera of the Nobility subsequently leased the King's Theatre on the dissolution of Handel and Heidegger's partnership in June 1734. The reason for the break-up is not known, although it is fairly certain that the partnership was not a financial success. Surprisingly Handel was invited to continue composing operas at Covent Garden, where he stayed until his stroke in 1737. John Rich, the manager, whose previous forays into dramatic music were limited to pantomime and the hugely successful production of *The Beggar's Opera*, continued to stage his usual repertoire of plays, ballad operas and pantomimes, in between which Handel had to produce his operas.

Handel returned to the theme of magic for the operas *Orlando* and *Alcina*, performed in January 1733 and April 1735 respectively. Both were based on the same text by Ariosto, and Handel's use of subject material now ran contrary to the conventions of *opera seria*, his imagination appearing to find some freedom in a text not restricted by historical or classical plots. The staging of *Orlando* was described by Coleman as "extraordinarily fine and magnificent" Furthermore, the use of magic as a plot indicates a forward-looking ideal which Platt regards as being possibly influential on the works of Gluck.<sup>7</sup> Although the story is complicated, Handel, as usual, portrays the moral and emotional strengths of his characters in a sympathetic way. The finale to Act 2, where Orlando's passion and jealousy deriving to madness, demonstrates Handel's ability in portraying his characters' emotions through a series of accompanied recitatives and ariosos, including some bars in 5/8 (see Example 2). Similarly, the extremes of this character's emotions are displayed profoundly at the end of the passage, where a rondo of contrasting episodes occurs. The rondo theme is that of a gavotte, returning three times, suggesting a temporary release from his insanity.

In 1732, Lampe and Carey have made an attempt of producing a full-length English opera, the first for thirteen years. Audiences were seeking alternatives to Italian opera and only two weeks after completing *Orlando*, Handel was approached by Aaron Hill, to write an opera in the vernacular. Whatever the reason, Handel ignored the request and it appears that English opera did not hold much public interest. Lampe's *Amelia* (March 1732) gave only ten performances, and although Carey's libretto was printed, only five of its songs survive, perhaps indicating that the work did not offer a satisfactory alternative.

Lampe and Thomas Arne senior organised the first English opera season, the second performance of which was an unlicensed performance of "*Acis and Galatea*" in May of 1732. Handel retaliated by presenting some alternative concert performances in front of a backdrop, his own singers performing in a mixture of English and Italian.

J. C. Smith's *Terminia* opened the 1732-3 season at the Theatre Royal. The following March saw the performance of Arne's re-working of Addison's *Rosamond*. Arne's daughter, Susanna, meanwhile made her debut in her father's *Britannia* in November 1732, which was lavishly produced with elaborate and transparent scenery. This received only four performances. Other revivals of English operas took place that season, but little interest was shown and the closure of Smith's *Ulysses* in April 1733 was to be the last of any season of English opera in the Italian style.

In December 1733, another company presented an Italian opera, staging its first production at the Lincoln's Inn Fields. This was the Opera of the Nobility, which, like the Royal Academy, was formed by a group of nobles with both political and musical reasons. In particular this was set up in opposition to Handel, feeding the antagonism between George II, Handel's patron, and his son, Frederick, Prince of Wales, who supported the new company. Employing

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 138

Senesino and Cuzzoni, and for the second season the legendary castrato Farinelli, Nicola Porpora (1686-1768) became the Opera's composer-in-residence. By 1737, however, the Opera of the Nobility closed its doors for good, Senesino and Farinelli having both left. The Opera, however, was responsible for the introduction to England although new style of opera: simple, undramatic and homophonic in style, which singers found a perfect vehicle for showing off their virtuosity. Further to this, The Opera of the Nobility gave London audiences a taste of things to come in the comic intermezzos staged between the acts of serious operas. These appear to have contracted little attention.

1737 saw the production of three new Handel operas, *Armillo* in January, *Giustino* in February and *Bernice* in May. These were performed at Covent Garden, receiving little success, which, coupled with financial failure and overwork were probably the cause of Handel suffering a minor stroke. For several months, this was to affect him both physically and mentally and after his recovery, Handel began to turn more towards the composition of oratorio, it being easier to stage and direct. His last opera was *Deidamia* produced at Lincoln's Inn Fields in January of 1741. The arias demonstrate that even Handel could be influenced by the latest trends in style. Nevertheless, *Deidamia* was a failure and Handel turned almost exclusively to oratorio.

Italian operas continued to be performed at the King's Theatre on a sporadic basis for which audiences tended to be aristocratic. The Venetian, Baldassare Galuppi (1706-1785) was appointed official composer at the King's Theatre for the seasons 1741-1743, and produced the most popular operas of the period. His operas demonstrate what is today referred as *galant* style, described by Burney as 'the hasty, flimsy style which reigned in Italy at this time, and which Handel's solidity and science taught the English to despise.'<sup>8</sup> One might have to question the latter part of Burney's comment, however, as this style was far from despised.

### **1737-1760**

Part of the reason for the failure of operas produced by Handel and the Opera of the Nobility was as a result of the impact in this field caused by English burlesques. Essentially a satire of Italian opera, the term was in fact one of several used for Italian comic operas of the light intermezzo variety. The popular dramatist and amateur composer, Henry Carey (ca. 1689-1743) had written pantomime music and arranged songs for the Drury Lane Theatre's early ballad operas in the 1720s. At the end of that decade, he turned his farce of 1715, *The Contrivances*, into a successful musical entertainment, providing his own ballad-like tunes rather than employing existing melodies. In the years that followed his leaving Drury Lane in 1731, he had little success as a librettist, having no sense of the serious. His sense of humour, coupled with his intense dislike for Italian opera resulted in his writing two full-length burlesque operas, *The Dragon of Wantley* (May 1737) and *Margery; or a Worse Plague than the Dragon* (December 1739). These comprising songs, choruses and recitative provided by Lampe. The music as well as the text is clearly satirical, the former being at one time thought to be a satire on Handel's *Giustino* in that it contained a sea-monster, despite its being written two years earlier. *The Dragon* was not particularly successful until its revision, under John Rich, at Covent Garden in the autumn of 1737, where it was performed sixty-nine times in the first season. Lampe's music countered the immediate comedy of the text; it was straight-faced, and so charming that Handel was said to have enjoyed it. As a composer, Lampe managed to combine the elements of Italian *opera seria* with German counterpoint and the absurdities of the texts. More than half of the songs were in da capo form, although ensembles were more frequent, choruses being used to heighten dramatic points in the plot.

With the failure of English composers to write vernacular forms of Italian opera, composers turned again to the traditional form of masque. Pantomimes had contained shortened versions for some time, and these eventually became expanded into self-contained forms. In a similar manner, the Pastoral was also developed, its only real difference being that its characters were mainly Arcadian shepherds with a pastoral, rather than lavish, staging.

Like *Acis and Galatea*, Maurice Greene's first dramatic work, *Florimel, or Love's Revenge* (1734), was written for performance in a private house. This comprises only two acts and the plot is simple, requiring only four soloists. The libretto is ill balanced and causes considerable weaknesses in the plot. The scoring, however, is most inventive, containing trios for double-reed instruments, and the last of the Satyr's four songs makes excellent use of two solo

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<sup>8</sup> Burney, Charles, A General History of Music, from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period, ii, 839-40.

horns. Most of the arias are in da capo format, but despite this, the most popular of the songs was 'The Charms of Florimel', a short, five-bar strophic song.

Thomas Arne, unlike Greene, was more adept in the theatre, and although he produced many songs that were neither popular, nor well composed, his output was generally prodigious. His main influence appears to have been Handel, as can be seen in French overture of *Comus* (January 1736). Arne's music displays a lyrical charm, poise and elegance, as demonstrated in the song from Act 1 of the above, 'By dimpl'd Brook'. This simplicity is suitable to setting such words as those provided by librettist, Dalton's simple words.

Two years after *Comus*, Arne was commissioned to write a masque, *Alfred*, first performed in the grounds of Cliveden House, Maidenhead, in the summer of 1740. The libretto for this was by James Thomson and David Mallet, most of which was spoken rather than sung. More musical lines were added in subsequent years and, by the time of its publication in 1753, it contained twenty-eight songs. Despite another version being produced by Mallet in February 1751, having several numbers by Arne replaced by Burney, it was eventually performed as an all-sung version at the King's Theatre in May, 1753. Some of the music is excellent, especially a part of a 'Funeral Dirge' ('There Honour comes'), which begins with a sad march for oboes and bassoons, the former imitating the sound of the word 'weeping' in the text.

William Boyce (1711-1779), made several attempts to produce music for the London stage before his partnership with Garrick for a planned revival of the latter's farce *Lethe* in 1749. Although this appears not to have taken place, Boyce received considerable success at the Drury Lane Theatre with his *The Chaplet* (December 1749). The composer in residence at Drury Lane was Arne, who Garrick, appointed to the position of manager in 1747, neither liked nor trusted. Garrick was anxious to replace Arne and the success of Boyce's *The Chaplet* coincided with a fall in Arne's popularity – his opera, *Don Saverio* (February 1750), was hissed and booed by the audience throughout its short run. This demonstrates an important factor regarding public taste, as almost all the audience objected to the plot being based on modern characters.

Like Arne, Boyce looked back to older texts for his libretti when modern poets did not provide the material he wanted. His music tends to rely on short strophic songs of the ballad type, obviously designed for an unsophisticated audience. This is demonstrated in his opera, *Peleus and Thetis*, performed at the Swan Tavern in London in April 1747, and two years later at Cambridge. The Apollo Society, a member of which was Boyce's teacher, Maurice Greene, published the text for *Peleus and Thetis*.

*Peleus and Thetis* demonstrates psychological, rather than dramatic, writing. Consequently, the plot lacks action. The recitatives, however, allow the audience to see the interaction between cast members through a variety of emotional crises, typical of *opera seria*. Untypical for music of this period, Boyce makes use of the ensembles for dramatic purposes, the soloists possibly consisting of the four main soloists. The music demonstrates a high quality throughout, having a vigour that is not always present in Arne's music, often developing simple ideas in four-part contrapuntal writing of great beauty.

The only full-length English-sung operas of any interest composed between 1751 and 1760 are Arne's *Eliza* (May 1754) and *Britannia* (May 1755), and J.C. Smith's *The Fairies* (February 1755) and *The Tempest* (February 1756). Arne's were patriotic and were comparatively unsuccessful, although all except *Britannia* were published in full score.

Apart from Eccles, no English-born composers of this period were strong enough to see all-sung opera as a dramatic entity, being able to cope fully with its problems. Perhaps the restrictions of *opera seria* were perhaps too great for composers to reveal the drama through the characters' comments rather than actions – it is worth bearing in mind England's rich tradition of providing entertainments that relied more on the dramatic than the suggestive. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Handel stood alone from all other composers of this period, even though he never managed to combine Italian opera with the English tradition until he turned to oratorio.