

Ellen T. Harris:

BAROQUE VOCAL PERFORMANCE PRACTICE*

Vocal performance practice in the Baroque era can be discussed at three levels: 1) good singing style, 2) vocal production, and 3) musical interpretation. Good singing style, including perfect intonation, good breathing technique, clear enunciation of the words, and proper expression of the text, does not differ from period to period. There are elements of vocal production and interpretation, however, that are idiosyncratic to the baroque.

The quality of baroque vocal production that differs most from modern singing techniques is the clear distinction of the two registers. Although Tosi (1723) and Mancini (1774) argue that the registers should be united, it is clear from their other commentary that this blending occurs only in the four or five notes over the break; that is, both writers state that it would be a "great rarity" for a singer to be able to carry the chest voice throughout the entire range. Only toward the very end of the century did this practice become more frequent, and the ability, especially in the tenor voice, is remarked upon with great astonishment.

The use of volume in the baroque is related to the distinction of registers. Tosi and Mattheson (1739) both state that the voice should produce high notes with increasing softness and low notes with strength. In 1791, after singers began to carry the chest voice up into the high register, it was remarked that singers were no longer "developing their voices so as to be soft at the top and full at the bottom, (but) achieving the opposite effect."

The use of vibrato may also be related to registral distinction. Many writers, including Bacilly (1668) and Mattheson, clearly describe vibrato (tremolo) as a vocal ornament to be used sparingly, but especially in anticipation of the trill. Bernhard (1649) says bluntly that vibrato should be totally eliminated in good singing. However, as early as 1592, Zacconi suggests that vibrato can be the "true portal to the passaggi" and used constantly. Although a continual vibrato was probably rare in the baroque, it certainly existed in some singers. After the chest voice was pulled into the high registers, the continual vibrato became common.

Beyond good singing style and vocal production, the baroque singer was trained to exercise great discretion of musical interpretation in terms of articulation, dynamics, tempo, rhythm, and ornamentation. In general, articulation was strongly marked, especially in divisions, and slurring was rare. In texted passages, articulation was linked to the clear articulation of the words. Dynamics, tempo, and rhythm were all treated with great flexibility. The contemporary authors and the surviving scores argue strongly against a limitation to the so-called "terrace dynamics" once so popular in

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twentieth-century performances of baroque music and against a mechanical regularity or "normalization" of rhythm and tempo. Not only do the treatises discuss the gradual increasing and diminishing of volume, but dynamic markings in scores of Gabrieli to Vivaldi indicate flexible and gradual dynamic shadings. And from the time of Frescobaldi and Caccini to Tosi and Mancini, composers and performers discuss taking the beat "now slowly, now quickly" and freely varying the rhythm within the measure (tempo rubato).

Finally, ornamentation must play an important part in the performance of almost all baroque vocal music. The contemporary examples that survive offer clear models and make it possible to deduce a set of rules governing the practice of ornamentation.

A good and effective musical performance of baroque vocal music today does not depend on the singer being able to recreate baroque vocal production, although that is, of course, an important goal. On the other hand, a proper understanding of baroque musical interpretation in terms of articulation, dynamics, tempo, rhythm, and pitch ornamentation is essential.

Christoph-Hellmut Mahling:

ZUR AUFFÜHRUNG UND STELLUNG DER ORATORIEN HÄNDELS IM 19. JAHRHUNDERT

Die Frage nach Aufführung und Stellung der Oratorien Händels im 19. Jahrhundert kann hier nur in Umrissen skizziert und beantwortet werden. Außerdem müssen die Untersuchungen im wesentlichen auf den deutschsprachigen Raum begrenzt bleiben. Grundlage für die Ausführungen bildet vor allem eine stichprobenhafte Auswahl aus Berichten der zeitgenössischen deutschsprachigen Presse¹.

Wesentliche Impulse zur Beschäftigung mit Händels Oratorien sind bekanntlich durch zwei Ereignisse gegeben worden: einmal durch den Bericht Charles Burneys über die 1784 in London veranstaltete Gedächtnisfeier zu Ehren Händels² und durch den Beginn einer Ausgabe Händelscher Werke durch Arnold (1786). Beeindruckt war man offensichtlich von der großen Anzahl der von Burney genannten Ausführenden, worauf zumindest eine Nachricht in "Cramers Magazin der Musik" schließen läßt³. Stimmen die dort genannten Zahlen (268 Instrumentalisten, 225 Sänger) auch nicht genau mit denjenigen Burneys überein, so wird doch deutlich, in welchen 'Dimensionen' hier musiziert wurde. Als eine erste direkte Reaktion auf diese Berichte ist in Deutschland wohl die Aufführung des "Messias" durch Hiller 1786 in Berlin zu bewerten. Natürlich hatte es auch schon zuvor Aufführungen Händelscher Oratorien gegeben⁴, aber in kleineren Besetzungen, die allerdings den Besetzungen in den Aufführungen Händels wesentlich näher kamen⁵. Erstaunlich ist, wie wenig Einfluß auf die Beschäftigung mit Händels Oratorien in der Praxis zunächst die Aufführungen der Werke Händels in der Bearbeitung Starzers (1779) und vor allem in der Bearbeitung Mozarts ("Messias", "Alexanderfest") in Wien gehabt haben. Fanden diese Aufführungen doch aufgrund der Statuten der Tonkünstlersozietät in verhältnismäßig großer Besetzung statt.

Sieht man von diesen mehr oder weniger 'zufälligen' Aufführungen im 18. Jahrhundert ab, so werden Händels Oratorien ein wesentlicher Bestandteil des Musiklebens, insbesondere der Musikfeste⁶, im 19. Jahrhundert, wenngleich auch hier zunächst Werke von Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Karl Heinrich Graun, Benda, Dittersdorf und insbesondere Haydn