

## Handel's German Arias

Das zitternde Glänzen HWV 203  
Süßer Blumen Ambralflocken HWV 204

Johann Christoph Pepusch (1667-1752): Trio Sonata in C major for flute, violin and continuo  
Largo – Allegro – Adagio – Presto

Singe, Seele, Gott zum Preise HWV 206

Trio Sonata Op. 5 No. 6 in F major HWV 401 for flute, violin and continuo  
Largo-Adagio – Allegro-Adagio – Adagio – Allegro – Minuet: Allegro Moderato

Künft'ger Zeiten eitler Kummer HWV 202  
Meine Seele hört im Sehen HWV 207

Johann Christoph Pepusch (1667-1752) was organist at the Charterhouse from 1737 until his death in 1752. As a teenager, Pepusch worked at the Prussian court, but seems to have found Prussia rather too militaristic, and came, via the Netherlands, to London, settling there in about 1704. He was long involved with Drury Lane, playing the viola there and supplying some of the music for the *Beggar's Opera*; he also married one of the Drury Lane sopranos, Marguerite de l'Epine. As director of music at Cannons during the 1710s and 1720s, Pepusch worked closely with Handel. A keen musicologist, with a DMus from Oxford, Pepusch co-founded the Academy of Ancient Music, and was elected to Royal Society in 1746; he seems largely to have stopped composing after 1729 in order to devote himself more to his musicological studies. This charming trio sonata follows the baroque *sonata da chiesa* format (slow-fast-slow-fast), and opens with a *Largo* full of imitation between the melody lines. The following *Allegro* is also imitative, with the instruments throwing and catching quaver and semiquaver phrases. The lovely *Adagio* is a sarabande in A minor, with imitation of a different sort – a canon at the fifth; and imitation returns again for the thrilling race-you-to-the-end *Presto*.

Handel's Opus 5 set of trio sonatas, for 'two Violins, or German Flutes,' were published in 1739. They are a rich source for the borrowings-spotter, most of the music being recycled from elsewhere - although No.6 was itself actually recycled, for the famous organ concerto performed at *Israel in Egypt* that Lent ('the Cuckoo and the Nightingale'): you will, no doubt, find the *Largo* and second *Allegro* familiar. The opening *Largo* has all the F-major lushness of, for example, Cleopatra's 'V'adoro pupille'; it is followed by a busy fugue, whose subject is based on a repeated note (a motif Handel used elsewhere, for example, in the Cannons Anthem No.4). After running helter-skelter, this movement suddenly stops and becomes a serious *Adagio* (analogous to the overture from *Acis and Galatea*). The trio is taken into the minor for a beautiful, tragic duet between the melody instruments, but the sun comes out again for the next *Allegro*, another fugue, and the sonata is rounded off by a charming minuet.

The nine German arias (we hear five tonight) give us some insight into Handel's personal faith and religious beliefs, as well as his circle of friends. The texts were by Barthold Heinrich Brockes (1680-1747), a gentleman-poet whom Handel knew early on in both Halle and Hamburg. Handel set Brockes' Passion libretto to music in 1716 for performance in Germany, and the nine German arias, composed a few years later, might have been also for

public performance in Germany, but they were not published, and there is no record of any public performance of them: they might equally have been for Handel and Brockes' own delight. In the 1740s, Brockes wrote that 'two of my children...gave a lovely concert of our great Handel's pieces...in honour of the Creator of nature...', and back in 1727, Brockes wrote that Handel had set his texts 'in an exceptional way.'

The words were from the first of Brockes' volumes of *Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott* ('Earthly Comforts of God;'), a collection of cantata texts reflecting on the manifestation of God in nature. The revised volume of this was published in 1724, and give a *terminus ante quem non* for the date of composition. Similarities between some of the arias' phrases and arias from *Tamerlano* and *Rodelinda* suggest a composition date of c.1725: these similarities were not so much borrowings as phrases current in Handel's imagination. However, there was a common source for one of the arias, the Italian cantata *La bianca rosa*, which became, in *Tamerlano*, 'Bella Asteria', and here 'Künft'ger Zeiten eitel Kummer.' (Handel would later borrow the cantata's other aria for *Ariodante*.) Apart from the occasional similarities, the originality of the nine German arias suggests that Handel found the texts genuinely and personally inspiring.

Handel, according to Sir John Hawkins (1776), 'throughout his life manifested a deep sense of religion'. Both he and Brockes were educated in the heartland of the Lutheran Pietist movement, which emphasised simplicity and a personal relationship with God and Scripture, and, although neither identified themselves as Pietists, the nine German arias show the influence of this movement upon both men. The poems that Handel chose were small excerpts from different cantatas, and so – if he chose them himself, and there is no reason to believe that he did not – perhaps we may see the spiritual issues that mattered to him. Most of the texts extoll the glories of God in nature; 'Künft'ger Zeiten', on the other hand, is about spiritual serenity overcoming earthly cares.

In all the settings, Handel makes great use of word-painting, to quite enchanting effect. The shimmering obbligato and soprano lines of 'Das zitternde Glänzen' reflect beautifully the dancing of sunlight off the waves; this is in the key of E flat, which Handel uses elsewhere (for example, *Acis and Galatea*) to represent water. In 'Süßer Blumen Ambralflocken', the rise and fall of the obbligato line suggests the movement of petals in the wind; in the B section, the line, as we would expect, falls at 'da ihr fallt' ('as you fall') and rises at 'himmelwärts' (heavenwards). The dotted obbligato figure in 'Singe, Seele, Gott zum Preise' perhaps represents the world's adornments; a particularly lovely moment is the singer's legato line at 'wenn er Bäum' und Feld' over a pedal bass line, depicting the opening up of flowers in spring meadows. 'Künft'ger Zeiten eitel Kummer' is a sarabande whose stillness suggests the soul's serenity. Its E flat mood is reminiscent of Sesto's 'Cara speme' from *Giulio Cesare*, although the C minor B section brings to mind Asteria's beautiful 'Deh! lasciatemi il nemico' from *Tamerlano*; perhaps this C minor (the tradition baroque 'death' key) also suggests everlasting life. There is some nice word-painting – for example, 'Ehrgeiz' (ambition) is at the top of the phrase's pitch, and so is literally, as well as metaphorically, brought down low. 'Meine Seele hört im Sehen' is in sensuous B flat, and its first phrase, a wide-open embrace, radiates joy. The singer and obbligato line revel in 'jauchzet' (rejoice), imitating each other in a lovely melisma; the soprano stops the music to exhort us to listen, and sings a close-knit phrase opened up by 'deutlich' (clearly) on a ringing top G, and followed by fifth and octave leaps on 'allenthalben', beautifully depicting its ubiquity. The German arias are some of the most delightful pieces that Handel composed, and a window into his soul.

<p>Das zitternde Glänzen der spielenden Wellen  Versilbert das Ufer, beperlet den Strand.  Die rauschenden Flüsse, die sprudelnden  Quellen  Bereichern, befruchten, erfrischen das Land  Und machen in tausend vergnügenden Fällen  Die Güte des herrlichen Schöpfers bekannt.</p>	<p>The shimmering glitter of the playful waves  Silvers the shore, brings pearls to the strand.  The rushing rivers, the bubbling springs  Enrich, fertilise, refresh the land  And make known, in a thousand lovely instances,  The goodness of our splendid Creator.</p>
<p>Süßer Blumen Ambraflocken,  Euer Silber soll mich locken,  Dem zum Ruhm, der euch gemacht.  Da ihr fallt, will ich mich schwingen  Himmelwärts, und den besingen,  Der die Welt hervorgebracht.</p>	<p>Sweet flowers' amber flakes,  Your silver entices me  To the glory which made you.  As your fall, I shall swoop  Heavenwards, singing about  Him who brought forth the world.</p>
<p>Singe, Seele, Gott zum Preise,  Der auf solche weise Weise  Alle Welt so herrlich schmückt.  Der uns durchs Gehör erquickt,  Der uns durchs Gesicht entzückt,  Wenn er Bäum' und Feld beblümet,  Sei gepreiset, sei gerühmet!</p>	<p>Sing, my soul, in praise of God,  Who in such a wise way  Decorates the whole world so splendidly.  Let Him who quickens our ears,  Let Him who charms our eyes,  When He brings trees and field into bloom,  Be praised and glorified!</p>
<p>Künft'ger Zeiten eitler Kummer  Stört nicht unsern sanften Schlummer,  Ehrgeiz hat uns nie besiegt.  Mit dem unbesorgten Leben,  Das der Schöpfer uns gegeben,  Sind wir ruhig und vergnügt.</p>	<p>Vain worries about future times  Do not disturb our soft slumber;  Ambition has never besieged us.  With the carefree life  That the Creator has given us  We are calm and content.</p>
<p>Meine Seele hört im Sehen,  Wie, den Schöpfer zu erhöhen,  Alles jauchzet, alles lacht.  Höret nur,  Des erblüh'nden Frühlings Pracht  Ist die Sprache der Natur,  Die sie deutlich, durchs Gesicht,  Allenthalben mit uns spricht.</p>	<p>My soul hears through seeing,  How, to laud the Creator,  all things rejoice, all things laugh.  Hear now,  The Spring's blossoming splendour  Is the language of nature  Which clearly, through sight,  Speaks to us everywhere.</p>

Katie Hawks 2018  
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