

# The Training Value of Handel's Vocal Works in Vocal Pedagogy

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doi:10.56397/RAE.2023.03.04

## Abstract

Vocal technique training is a crucial aspect of vocal education, aimed at refining and developing the human voice instrument. By utilizing a variety of training methods and content, singers can achieve aesthetic auditory art that provides listeners with a profound emotional experience. However, mastering this skill is an abstract concept, with each singer having their unique experiences and challenges. In vocal education, selecting the appropriate vocal works is essential in shaping the human voice instrument. The composer Handel, widely considered the greatest composer of the German Baroque period, created a vast collection of classic operas and oratorios throughout his life. The elements of rhythm, melody, and dynamics in Handel's vocal works have a profound impact on a singer's breath control, rhythm, and dynamics, making them an essential part of vocal education. Handel's vocal works remain popular today due to their complex and dynamic elements that provide an exceptional learning experience for singers in vocal education. Overall, this paper demonstrates the importance of utilizing Handel's vocal works in vocal education to produce skilled and expressive singers.

**Keywords:** Handel, vocal works, vocal pedagogy, vocal technique training

## 1. Introduction

Vocal music is a captivating auditory art that has been enjoyed by humanity for centuries. The beauty of this art form is that it relies on the human body's natural abilities to shape the instrument of the human voice into a tool for creating a wide range of sounds and emotions. To achieve the desired vocal quality, various training methods have been developed (Lu, L. P., 2016). These methods place a strong emphasis on developing a singer's intonation, timbre, breath control, and rhythm. Vocal technique training can include exercises that focus on breathing, posture, vocal range, vocal resonance, and pronunciation. Through regular practice and training, a singer can refine their technique and enhance their vocal abilities.

One of the most prominent composers of vocal music is the great German composer George Frideric Handel. Handel, from the Baroque period, created a vast repertoire of vocal works that perfectly complement the human voice. His works demonstrate a keen understanding of the human voice in terms of rhythm, melody, dynamics, and emotional expression. Handel's works are a testament to the value of vocal technique training and provide an excellent example of how vocal music can showcase the full range of the human voice (Li, N., 2017).

## 2. A Brief Overview of Handel's Life and Creative Achievements

George Friedrich Handel, a celebrated composer of the Baroque era, was born in 1685 into a middle-class family in Halle, Germany. Despite showing exceptional musical talent from a young age, Handel's father initially discouraged him from pursuing music as a career. However, after receiving advice from a duke, he allowed Handel to study music under the tutelage of Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow, an outstanding organist in the city. Under Zachow's guidance, Handel developed a strong foundation in harmony and absorbed the strengths of various styles of composition, which greatly influenced his vocal works (Guan, J., 2007).

Handel's vocal works are considered an important component of bel canto, a singing style characterized by smooth, flowing melodies and virtuosic ornamentation. As one of the main representatives of serious opera

composition, Handel's works are not only a music style, but also representative works of the origin of bel canto. This makes them of great significance to the training of vocal techniques.

Throughout his life, Handel traveled extensively throughout England, Germany, and Italy, and composed more than 40 operas, over 30 oratorios, and numerous choral works (Roland, R., 1979). In vocal training, Handel's works are an essential resource, with selected pieces from his operas and oratorios being used to teach singers at various stages of their learning. These works are carefully chosen to improve the singer's artistic cultivation and mastery of vocal techniques.

In conclusion, George Friedrich Handel was a gifted composer whose vocal works are an essential component of bel canto and have significant value in vocal technique training. Handel's unique style, which fused different musical traditions, has made his works popular and enduring, and his legacy continues to inspire and influence generations of musicians.

### **3. Artistic Characteristics of Handel's Vocal Works**

#### *3.1 Emphasis on Tonality for Ease of Expression*

Handel's approach to music was distinct from the norm of his time, which was dominated by polyphony (Roland, R., 1979). He placed great emphasis on tonality, using it to create grand and magnificent effects with simple techniques. His works, such as operas and oratorios, are characterized by rich tonal music forms and diverse harmonic functions that allow singers to express their emotions more easily and audiences to become fully engaged in the music. Handel's use of tonality allowed him to create music that was more accessible and expressive than many of his contemporaries. His works were notable for their emotional depth and ability to evoke a wide range of feelings in listeners. By prioritizing tonality, he was able to create music that was more approachable, yet still highly complex and nuanced.

This focus on tonality was not only beneficial for singers but also for the audience. Handel's use of tonal harmony style and diverse harmonic functions allowed him to create music that was both majestic and intimate, evoking a range of emotions in listeners. His music could be solemn and reflective, joyous and celebratory, or poignant and emotional. Handel's use of tonality also allowed him to experiment with different musical forms and structures. He often incorporated elements from other genres, such as dance and folk music, into his works, creating a rich tapestry of sound that was both innovative and accessible.

Additionally, Handel's approach to tonality influenced many composers who followed him. His use of tonal harmony and diverse harmonic functions paved the way for the development of Classical and Romantic music, inspiring composers such as Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms (Roland, R., 1979).

Overall, Handel's emphasis on tonality was a significant departure from the norms of his time, yet it allowed him to create music that was both innovative and accessible. His approach to music continues to influence and inspire musicians and audiences alike, highlighting the importance of tonality in the art of music composition.

#### *3.2 Neat Syntax and Lively Melody*

Baroque music is known for its neat syntax and lively melodies, characterized by strict control of tempo (Guan, J., 2007). Once a tempo is established, it must be maintained with regularity throughout the piece. This requires singers to carefully manage the contrast of dynamics between different musical phrases, in order to better interpret the work.

Despite the rigid tempo control, Baroque music often features constantly changing rhythms that add complexity and excitement to the music. The melodies are usually lively and energetic, with a focus on virtuosity and technical proficiency. This emphasis on technical skill is evident in the elaborate ornamentation and trills that are common in Baroque music. In addition to technical proficiency, Baroque music also values emotional expressiveness (Zhang, J., 2014). Singers are expected to convey a wide range of emotions through their performance, from joy and exuberance to sadness and despair. This requires a deep understanding of the music and the ability to infuse each note with the appropriate feeling. Overall, the neat syntax and lively melodies of Baroque music require singers to possess a high degree of technical skill and emotional expressiveness. The strict control of tempo and constantly changing rhythms add complexity and excitement to the music, making it a beloved and enduring genre among music lovers.

Handel's vocal works exemplify the best of Baroque music, with their emphasis on tonality, concise lyrics, and ornate ornamentation. These works offer singers a chance to showcase their technical abilities while also conveying a wide range of emotions to their audience. The limited vocal range and use of repetition in Handel's works allow singers to develop their vocal control and showcase their natural, graceful voice (Zheng, Y., 2021). In conclusion, the Baroque period was a time of great innovation and creativity in music, with Handel standing out as a master of the craft. His works continue to be celebrated for their beauty, complexity, and emotional depth, offering singers a chance to showcase their talents and captivate audiences around the world.

### 3.3 Ornate Ornamentation, Limited Vocal Range

In Handel's vocal works, ornate ornamentation is a defining characteristic (Li, N., 2017). Singers are often required to perform long passages of elaborate and intricate phrases, which demand precise control over breath and voice. Each note must be accurately grasped and seamlessly connected to the next, creating a gorgeous aesthetic that dazzles the audience. Despite the complexity of the ornamentation, Handel's vocal works have a limited vocal range. The intervals between notes are small and do not require high pitches or large volumes, focusing instead on the natural range of the voice. This allows the singer to fully exercise control over their voice, showcasing a natural and gentle tone that is easy on the ears.

By focusing on the natural range of the voice, Handel's music enables singers to develop their vocal control and showcase their technical abilities (Zheng, J., 2012). The emphasis on breath control and precise articulation also allows singers to convey a wide range of emotions through their performance. Overall, Handel's vocal works are a testament to his skill as a composer and his understanding of the human voice. The ornate ornamentation and limited vocal range demand a high degree of technical skill from singers, while allowing them to showcase their natural talent and control over their voice. The result is a beautiful and expressive style of music that continues to be cherished by music lovers around the world.

### 3.4 Concise Lyrics Are Beneficial for Performance

Handel's vocal works often feature simple and concise lyrics, with frequent repetition of phrases (Miao, G., 2008). While this may seem limiting, this approach actually allows singers to focus on the nuances of their performance and convey a rich emotional content through different melodies, rhythms, and dynamics. The concise lyrics in Handel's vocal works demand a high level of technical skill from singers. Breath control, tone quality, rhythm, and dynamics must be precisely executed to convey the intended emotion of the lyrics. This requires a deep understanding of the music and the ability to infuse each note with the appropriate feeling.

By working with concise lyrics, singers are able to refine their technical abilities and focus on the finer details of their performance. This level of training is beneficial not only for the performance of Handel's music but for singing in general, as it strengthens the singer's overall vocal control and expression. Overall, the concise lyrics in Handel's vocal works are a testament to his skill as a composer and his understanding of the human voice. They demand a high degree of technical skill and allow singers to showcase their ability to convey a rich emotional content through precise execution of melody, rhythm, and dynamics.

## 4. Recommended Repertoire of Handel's Vocal Works for Various Stages of Vocal Pedagogy

### 4.1 Beginner Stage

*Lascia ch'io pianga* is an aria from Handel's opera *Rinaldo* and is frequently omitted in practical vocal training due to its recitative section (Zheng, J., 2012). It should be noted that in foreign vocal training, recitative (Recit) is considered a subject for advanced-level training and requires specialized training. The aria is relatively short (42 measures) and has a basic structure of a traditional da capo aria form (A-B-A). When returning to section A, variations are often employed to differentiate it from the initial A section. The aria is set in a slow tempo, *larghetto*, with phrases consisting of two measures. The melodic phrases are not long, and the vocal range is not wide, spanning up to the note G2. This musical structure is highly advantageous for constructing bel canto vocals and can help cultivate a student's sense of musicality, grasp of style, and stable vocal technique.

The piece *Si tra i ceppi* is selected from Handel's opera *Berenice* and is more often sung by Bass-Baritone or Bass roles in the opera, and has become a classic piece for male low voices (Roland, R., 1979). The music is fast-paced and has long coloratura passages, but the range is not high and runs within the normal and comfortable range of the voice, which will not cause extra vocal burden. It is an excellent material for training the coloratura ability of male low voices. Additionally, it is important to note the legato sections in Handel's works. Generally, if the legato connects to a strong beat note in the next beat, the strong beat loses its emphasis, but in Handel's music, the strong beat note is to be emphasized.

The work *Ch'io mai vi possa* is more suitable for the basic training of female vocalization and coloratura soprano. The song is in 3/8 time signature and has the characteristics of a dance music. It consists of short phrases of 2 bars, with obvious jumps, which is beneficial for the flexibility training of female voice. The second and third sections of the music have two occurrences of coloratura phrases in the latter half, with not too high a vocal range, making it suitable as a foundational training for coloratura soprano and lyrical soprano.

Many of Handel's vocal works are suitable for training at the foundational level and have the following characteristics: beautiful and smooth melodies that facilitate the cultivation of musical sense; a moderate range with few large intervals; the use of high notes mostly in passing, with few sustained or slurred notes; moderately fast runs in the mid-range and near the break, which are easy for singers to maintain vocal agility and lay the foundation for developing coloratura ability in the high range (Miao, G., 2008).

#### 4.2 Intermediate Stage

*Ah! Spietato* is an aria from the opera *Amadigi* and is typically sung by a coloratura soprano or a lyric soprano with strong coloratura abilities. The piece consists of three sections: A, B, and A'. After section B, the piece returns to section A, often with added ornamentation to form A'. Section A is set in a slow tempo, largo, with phrases that are stretched out. Though the phrases are not long, the slow music tempo requires the singer to have strong breathing capabilities. By singing this piece, students can improve their breath control abilities. Section B is set in a fast tempo, allegro, creating a sharp contrast with section A. This section mainly focuses on training the student's articulation for vowels and consonants, which is important for executing fast coloratura phrases while maintaining stable vocal positioning and clarity of language. This also requires vocal ability and technique. Another famous Handel piece that is similar to this aria is *Piango La sorte mia* from the opera *Giulio Cesare*.

The work *Care selve* is not very long, only 21 bars, with a low range and a small span, with the lowest note (F1 for male or female voices in E major) and the highest note reaching A2. From the surface of the score, it presents a certain difficulty for the heroic dramatic tenor, but it is not too difficult for the lyric tenor or soprano. In actual singing, however, this piece often makes people hesitate, because it uses a lot of notes near the passaggio and has long note values, requiring the singer to have good breath control and the ability to switch flexibly and use their voice near the passaggio. This piece has a good training effect on legato ability, and if the student's breathing ability is lacking, it may be difficult to complete the entire song. In this case, the piece can be broken down into relatively easy musical phrases and gradually transitioned to more difficult ones, until it can be performed as a whole.

#### 5. Conclusion

The two most important abilities in bel canto singing are the ability to produce a smooth and connected sound (legato) and the agility to sing rapid and intricate passages with precision (Zheng, Y., 2021). Handel's vocal works are of great benefit to the development of these two abilities and are therefore essential in bel canto training. His works are of moderate difficulty, offering a range of pieces suitable for both advanced singers and beginners. While these demands may be challenging, singing Handel's vocal works offers a wealth of benefits for singers. In voice teaching, Handel's vocal works can be a valuable tool for helping students to refine their singing technique and expressiveness. Teachers can use Handel's music to teach breath control, phrasing, and expression, as well as to expose students to different styles of music and historical periods. Moreover, studying Handel's music can also help students to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of vocal music, as well as of the beauty and complexity of the human voice.

In conclusion, singing Handel's vocal works is a challenging yet rewarding task that can help singers to refine their technical abilities, develop their musical interpretation skills, and deepen their understanding of the art of singing. Through studying and performing Handel's music, singers can achieve a greater appreciation and mastery of the human voice.

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