

Homosexual Context and Identity:  
Reflections on the Reception of *Handel as Orpheus*

With the publication in 2001 of my book *Handel as Orpheus: Voice and Desire in the Chamber Cantatas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), I publicly entered the field of gay and lesbian studies for the first time. When I began my work for this project, I had not considered the idea of opening that particular door, but the research path led me there so dramatically that my decision was simply whether as an historian I would report my findings or not. I was aware that placing the composer of *Messiah* into the context of a homosexual culture would be disturbing to some, and I was also aware that authorial identity and advocacy, which always exist to some extent in historical writings, take on greater weight when the topic of sexuality enters the text. Like an innocent abroad, however, I had not realized to what extent the issue of personal identity—Handel’s and, to a lesser degree, my own—would play in the reception of this book. Despite the contextual and musical argument of my book, response to it often focused solely on whether or not Handel was “gay,” a question I had declined to answer for lack of definitive evidence (as exists, say, with Michelangelo or Tchaikovsky). And despite extensive experience with academic publication, I had never before been the object of such personal scrutiny: rather than engendering a serious discussion of the issues raised by its content, my work led in some quarters to questions about my biological gender and sexual orientation and to criticism of my motivation and scholarly integrity. Happily for me, the book has also garnered considerable praise,<sup>i</sup> but this seems only to have further angered some critics.

Although new to me, the experience of having my central argument misread and reduced to the question, “Was Handel Gay?”—and the frequent emphasis on my intentions rather than the content, is hardly unique in the history of writing on sexuality. If the story of the reception of *Handel as Orpheus* has any interest at all, therefore, it will not be because it is unusual but because it is common. It is only my vantage point that may be somewhat different, as a senior scholar coming into this field for the first time. For those who demand up-front to know my motivation for writing this paper (even though I now know that stating it will not cause all readers to believe it), I will be pleased if experienced scholars nod in recognition and younger scholars take courage to publish the results of their research. A discussion of the reaction to *Handel as Orpheus* requires that I begin with a description of the cantatas and a précis of my arguments.<sup>ii</sup> Those familiar with the book may want to skim the next **000** pages.

The more than 100 cantatas by Handel are musical miniatures based on texts that tell of the pleasures and pains of love. Not only rich in intrinsic beauty, they offer a previously unsuspected glimpse into his life, his patronage, and contemporary culture. Until recently, however, so little was known about the cantatas that editions and descriptions of them resorted to alphabetical order as the only available organizational principle.<sup>iii</sup> Only with the archival and source studies of the past few decades, has it become clear that Handel’s composition of cantatas is restricted to the span of years from 1707 to 1722.<sup>iv</sup> These boundaries immediately indicate the importance of the cantatas in one respect, for given the period of their composition, they become documents of Handel’s stylistic development between his departure from Germany in 1705 or 1706 and the beginning years of the Royal Academy of Music, established in London in 1720 for

the production of opera, which catapulted Handel into his mature role as a public composer.

The specific period of 1706/7 to 1722, however, represents more than just critically important years in Handel's stylistic development. From his arrival in Italy in 1706 until his move into his own house in London in 1723, Handel often lived as a guest in the homes of the aristocracy. This living arrangement marks this time as unique, and, as such, underlies and chronologically delimits Handel's composition of cantatas. During these years Handel wrote cantatas, serenatas and other compositions for his hosts and patrons. After moving out of this circle of aristocratic patronage, Handel never seriously returned to the genre of the Italian secular cantata.<sup>v</sup> Moreover, he left the cantatas unpublished, the only genre in Handel's oeuvre of which that can be said.<sup>vi</sup> The reason for this unusual hesitation on Handel's part certainly does not lie in public indifference toward the cantata as a musical form; many close contemporary colleagues, including Johann Pepusch and Giovanni Battista Bononcini, saw their cantatas successfully into print.<sup>vii</sup> Further, Handel continually borrowed from the cantatas in his later works, thereby attesting to his high opinion of their musical value. Even the borrowings themselves would hardly have prevented prior publication, as Handel also borrowed freely from published works of his own and others. The cantatas thus represent the most private music of this quintessentially public composer; perhaps for that reason, they have never been given the attention they deserve and have never been studied within the context of their composition. To do so demanded a closer look at Handel's aristocratic patrons.

From 1706/7 to 1722, Handel's patrons included the Medici in Florence, cardinals Pamphili, Ottoboni, and Colonna in Rome, the marquis (later prince) Ruspoli, also in Rome, and lord Burlington and the earl of Carnarvon (later duke of Chandos) in London. A significant common denominator among these patrons that provides a new context crucial to an understanding of the cantatas is the association of a number of them with the homoerotic, or as it was named at the time, sodomitical, culture of the eighteenth century.<sup>viii</sup> In Florence, the princes Ferdinando and Gian Gastone de Medici, both married, engaged in open homosexual affairs.<sup>ix</sup> In Rome, the Cardinal Ottoboni certainly did not maintain his vow of celibacy, if this is meant to imply complete sexual abstinence and not, as sometimes in this period, simply remaining unmarried.<sup>x</sup> At the Roman Arcadian Academy, hosted during Handel's Italian years by the marquis Ruspoli, men in pastoral garb took on pastoral pseudonyms and recreated pastoral poetry in the classical tradition of Socratic or Greek love,<sup>xi</sup> and the *conversazione*, the regularly scheduled social and artistic gatherings, at the homes of cardinals Ottoboni and Pamphili were hardly different. During Handel's first decade in London he also resided in aristocratic homes, and the social and sexual context was likely similar to that in Italy.<sup>xii</sup>

Although it is often difficult in eighteenth-century sources to distinguish between so-called Socratic love or passionate friendship, on the one hand, and an active homosexual relationship, on the other (and it is clear enough that this difficulty is frequently intended<sup>xiii</sup>), proof of sexual intercourse is hardly a necessary prerequisite to a discussion of same-sex love and desire. In general, the portrayal of heterosexual relationships includes attraction and unfulfilled longing as well as sex, but these gradations of passion are frequently overlooked or denied in discussions of

homosexuality, especially among those hostile to same-sex relationships. It should be obvious, however, that homosexuality, just like heterosexuality, encompasses various states of preference, desire, and sexual intimacy. Therefore, although it is often impossible—and unnecessary—to state who did what with whom within Handel’s patronage circle, it is possible to say of this homosocial<sup>xiv</sup> circle that its members were certainly sexually active, with strong leanings, if not exclusive preferences, for same-sex partners. Lord Burlington, for example, has been associated with homosexuality through a relationship (perhaps homoerotic, perhaps homosexual) with William Kent, and the circle of artists at Burlington House and later at the country home of the earl of Carnarvon at Cannons, including John Gay and Alexander Pope have also been connected to the English sodomitical sub-culture.

An awareness of the social-sexual milieu of Handel’s cantata years is crucial to an understanding of the works written under its stimulus. For example, the pastoral cantatas do not simply depict “the woes of...a shepherd deserted, rejected or betrayed by his nymph,” has been repeatedly asserted,<sup>xv</sup> but are a set of texts in which the sexual identity of the singer is often unspecified and further made ambiguous by a performing tradition that used women and castrati interchangeably.<sup>xvi</sup> In the Italian cantata *Lungi da me*, the singer addresses a male lover as “Handsome Tirsi” and “Beloved Tirsi, my adored god!” In *Lungi n’andò Fileno*, the singer cries out to a male lover, “Fileno, the better part of my life, Soul of my soul, Heart of my heart!” In neither case is the sex of the singer identified, and there is no reason to assume, as others have and I once did, that since the love object is in both cases male, the “voice” is female. Further, the treble range provides no marker, for most masculine and heroic roles were taken by castrati and, even given a

female singer, one must take into account the commonplace of “breeches parts,” or male roles sung by women. Sometimes the sex of the love object and singer are both hidden, as, for example, in *Stanco di più soffrire*, a cantata that can be identified directly with the meetings of the Arcadian Academy;<sup>xvii</sup> the love object is rhetorically represented by “the adored mouth” (“dell’adorata bocca”) so that the sex of the beloved *is* left (or, perhaps, *can* be left) unidentified. Sometimes the texts seem more explicit, as in the large trio cantata *Cor fedele*, where two shepherds, Tirsi and Fileno,<sup>xviii</sup> after unsuccessfully pursuing the same shepherdess, Clori, decide that women are impossible, sing a duet about “the woman of today” and go off together. This ending, which excludes Clori starting halfway through Part II but offers two arias for Fileno and one for Tirsi (in addition to their closing duet), does not demand a homosexual reading, of course, but allows it and, perhaps because of its unusualness, encourages it. Strikingly, for a later, and perhaps more public performance in Naples,<sup>xix</sup> Handel composed a new ending that includes Clori, even though the cantata steadfastly maintains a conclusion without a successful heterosexual pairing. The alteration, however, ameliorates the ending and raises the issue of dual – private and public – meanings.<sup>xx</sup>

One of the earliest cantatas Handel set, *Hendel, non può mia musa*, compares Handel to Orpheus. This work provided a primary impetus for my title, and my reading of the text has been singled out for criticism in some reviews: let me summarize my interpretation. On the surface this text, by Handel’s patron Cardinal Pamphili, reads as an effusive tribute to Handel’s musical skills: Pamphili writes that Orpheus’s music moved the trees, rocks, birds and beasts, but that Handel’s music is even greater since it has reawakened his dormant poetic muse. Consideration of this text in more depth

requires the reader/hearer to recognize that the myth of Orpheus tells not only of the power of Orpheus's song, especially in winning Euridice back from death, which is not mentioned by Pamphili, but also recounts that after failing the test of restraint laid upon him as a requirement for Euridice's rebirth, and losing her a second time, he refused the interest and advances of other women and became, as Ovid and others write, the originator of human male homosexuality. Orpheus then was killed by the women of Thrace for disdainning them. I offer multiple examples of the significance of this homoerotic element to various versions of the Orpheus story (including the earliest Greek version by Phanocles in 250 BCE and the dramatic rendition by the Florentine Poliziano in the 16<sup>th</sup> century) and its recognition in English translations of Ovid, as well as in numerous seventeenth- and eighteenth-century examples of the use of Orpheus's name to represent homosexuality, and I argue that Pamphili's text about Handel compares him not only to Orpheus the great musician but also to the homosexual and homoerotically attractive man.

The text reads in part (aria text in italic, recitative in roman; translation by Terence Best)<sup>xxi</sup>:

<i>Poté Orfeo col dolce suono</i>	<i>Orpheus with his sweet sounds</i>
<i>Arrestar d'augelli il volo</i>	<i>Could stop birds in their flight</i>
<i>E fermar di belva al piè;</i>	<i>And the wild beast in its tracks;</i>
<i>Si muovero a un sì bel suono</i>	<i>Trees were moved by such beautiful sounds,</i>
<i>Tronchi, e sassi ancor dal suolo,</i>	<i>And rocks were even lifted from the ground,</i>
<i>Ma giammai cantar li fé.</i>	<i>But he never made them sing.</i>

Dunque maggior d'Orfeo	So you, greater than Orpheus,
Tu sforzi al canto	Force my muse into song,
La mia musa all'ora	Just when it had
Che il plettro appeso avea	Hung the plectrum
A un tronco annoso, e immobile giacea.	On a hoary tree, and lay motionless.

<i>Ognun canti, e all'armonia</i>	<i>Let everyone sing, and inspired</i>
<i>Di novello Orfeo si dia</i>	<i>By the harmony of the new Orpheus,</i>
<i>Alla destra il moto</i>	<i>Let the hand move again on the lyre</i>
<i>Al canto voce</i>	<i>And the voice find such song</i>
<i>Tal che mai s'udì.</i>	<i>As was never heard before.</i>
<i>E in sì grata melodia</i>	<i>And in such pleasing melody</i>
<i>Tutto gioia l'alma sia,</i>	<i>Let the soul be all joy, and so,</i>
<i>Ingannando il tempo intanto</i>	<i>Whiling away the time,</i>
<i>Passi lieto e l'ore, e il dì</i>	<i>Let it happily pass the hours and the day.</i>

In *Handel as Orpheus*, I offer this interpretation (p. 43; footnotes also quoted):

The pervasive literary association of Orpheus throughout history with the origin of homosexuality, coupled with the lack of any reference in Pamphili's text to Orpheus's skills in the Underworld, encourages a reexamination of the cantata, and one need not struggle with esoteric meaning to uncover the sexual innuendo.<sup>xxii</sup> All the animate and inanimate objects that Pamphili lists as attracted to Orpheus—"bird," "wild beast," "tree trunk," and "rocks"—are familiar metaphors for the male



sexual organs;<sup>xxiii</sup> these symbolize the male sex generally, enabling Pamphili to claim that Orpheus attracted men and boys with his voice. The musical references also have sexual subtexts; specifically, the verb “to sing” can mean to have sexual relations.<sup>xxiv</sup> Pamphili’s own situation is rather graphically described with his image of the plectrum, which had previously hung unused and motionless on a dry tree. As a result of his “musical” awakening, he goes on to wish that everyone can “sing,” calling on the hand to move and the voice to sing in a new way, and thus for the hours, and even the whole day, to pass pleurably.

It is worth noting that this reading is partially subverted in the published translation by Best, where the phrase “calling on the hand to move” (“*alla destra il moto*”) is tacitly altered from the Italian to read “let the hand move again on the lyre,” neatly eliminating, with the addition of the phrase “on the lyre,” the interpretive ambiguity of the original.

My homoerotic interpretation of some of Handel’s cantatas, including the Orpheus cantata, indicates the possibility of readings that do not reside on the surface of the text. There is no written documentation laying out the intentions of the texts’ authors or Handel; no evidence indicates that such readings were either intended or understood. The lack of such evidence, however, does not indicate the absence of disguised meanings, for when a text carries both a surface meaning and a sexual connotation, the latter, as would be typical of the period, is likely to be subtly or amusingly disguised. Armando Marchi, in discussing eighteenth-century pornographic texts, makes an important distinction between erotic and obscene literature by noting that whereas “an obscene text requires no act of interpretation,” the erotic text in which sexual activities are euphemistically described requires “the reader’s active participation.”<sup>xxv</sup>

My conclusion that Handel's cantatas emerged from and were musically influenced by an ambience that included same-sex love as an important, but not exclusive, attribute depends on the cumulative weight of evidence, not on any single aspect of it. This evidence includes, as I have tried to show in this summary, chronological boundaries that delimit Handel's cantata composition to the years 1706 to 1722, the social-sexual milieu of Handel's patrons, and extensive textual analysis and interpretation. The purpose of my analysis was not to expose the sexual activity of Handel or any individual member of the circles in which he moved, but rather to examine the artistic impact of the homosocial influence, which may be found, I believe, in the development of some important attributes of Handel's mature style. I proposed four distinct developmental stages.

The earliest years of Handel's cantata period, 1706-07, are dominated by a set of cantatas representing women's voices (though not necessarily performed by women). These women, including Lucrezia, Clori, Diana, Armida and Hero, are, respectively, raped, delirious, vindictive, deserted, and desolate. Their impassioned and unrestrained voices do not follow normative formal patterns; their melodies are frequently jagged, their harmonies disruptive. In contrast, the cantatas Handel wrote for male characters at this time exhibit formal clarity, stylistic control and restraint. Atypical of his music that survives from earlier in Germany, the early cantatas for uncontrolled women's voices offered the young composer an opportunity to extend the boundaries of standard practice early in his career. I argue that Handel found the breadth and depth of his own expressive voice by trying on the voices of abandoned women.

In the second stage of cantata composition, during the middle years of his Italian period, 1707-1708, Handel largely abandoned cantatas for specified (female) characters, and most often, undoubtedly as a result of his patrons' wishes, set texts that offered instead a more conventional conceit of nameless lovers who pursue, but rarely win, their loves. The texts describe a separation of lovers that cannot be bridged regardless of proximity, and both the poetry and Handel's settings emphasize this virtual distance with a style, gendered male, that favors artifice rather than direct passion. That is, in this main body of cantatas, Handel moves from the unrestrained expression of highly-charged emotion modeled on the voices of women to an intimate idiom that permits the manly expression of innermost feeling through carefully controlled ornamentation and refined stylization.

The third stage, at the end of Handel's Italian sojourn, 1708-1709, saw the composition of a handful of multi-voice cantatas that depict a dramatic action. In almost every instance, this action is the sublimation or transformation of desire. There is the humorous example of *Sans y penser*, where the French shepherd Tirsi chooses drink over the shepherdess Silvie; Handel provides a wonderfully tipsy setting of Tirsi's final air. More suggestively, in *Cor fedele*, mentioned earlier, Handel depicts the shepherdess Clori in large, exuberant arias and in dissonant and harmonically deceptive recitative. The two shepherds, Tirsi and Fileno, decide to reject this emotional female and go off together in music of greater simplicity and restraint. In *Acis, Galatea e Polifemo*, an earlier Italian setting of the Acis and Galatea story Handel would later set in London, Polifemo represents the feminizing danger of loving women too much. Polifemo (singing like an abandoned woman) fails to curb his excessive musical utterance, and, when deserted by

Galatea, loses his art as well as love, closing the cantata not with an aria of his own but by quoting Acis in recitative. His fate can be contrasted with that of Apollo in *Apollo e Dafne*. Losing Dafne, Apollo appropriately transforms the unrestrained passion of his desire into the controlled elegance of his art, closing the cantata with an aria of elegiac artistry. Throughout his cantatas generally, Handel affirms the importance of artistic control and illustrates the ideal possibility of sublimating sexual desire in the pursuit of artistic excellence.

In the last period of cantata composition, in London from about 1712 to 1722, Handel introduces gaping silences in his music. Silence in music has a long history. In vocal music it was tied to specific words – such as “sigh” or “death” – as a form of word-painting, or used to emphasize a pause following punctuation. With the rise of instrumental music in the seventeenth century, silence was also introduced to dramatic effect in music without text. Handel’s early Italian music makes use of both of these traditions. What is innovative about his use of silence in the London cantatas is the introduction of instrumental-style silences into texted works quite apart from the setting of a single word or, say, the demarcation of a period or question mark. Silence is used in these works as an expression of overwhelming emotion. The inability or unwillingness to speak was an important subject in Handel’s cantata texts early on, as in *Stelle, perfide stelle*, 1707, where the pastoral lovers “suffer with hope and love in silence.” Silent gaps in the music, which become an increasingly important part of Handel’s mature vocal style in a variety of dramatic scenarios, were fully developed only after 1711 in cantatas that sing of unrequited desire.<sup>xxvi</sup>

In my analysis of Handel's stylistic trajectory through his cantatas from female-gendered excess, to male-gendered artistic control and sublimation, to silence, I deliberately avoided assigning Handel a specific sexuality. Not only would it be anachronistic to declare that Handel had a specific sexual identity, but, more importantly, Handel's sexual activity remains unprovable based on the known documents. Further, this information is unnecessary to a revised understanding of the social, literary and sexual context of Handel's cantatas. Much of the reaction to *Handel as Orpheus*, however, focused not on the music and its texts but rather on the linking of Handel's name with homosexuality, even if only in context. Because the personal has a tendency to trump the general, the known activities and beliefs of an artist have a significant impact on how his or her work is heard and understood. I sometimes refer to this as the "Wagner principle," whereby Wagner's music is not judged on its intrinsic merits but in light of the composer's anti-Semitism. In the same way, the suggestion that Handel may have experienced homoerotic desire or worked within a homosocial context is anathema to some, who are unwilling to abandon the Handel they "know."

Although my book has perhaps increased agitation about the place of (homo)sexuality in Handel's life, this subject has been present in Handel literature for years. Earlier it lurked in the background, but recently the tenor of the discussion has changed, most particularly after cultural historian Gary Thomas presented a paper at the 1989 Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society entitled "Was George Frideric Handel Gay?" This paper, particularly in its published and expanded version, introduced gay and lesbian studies to Handel scholars. Nonetheless, the

“problemization” of Handel’s sexuality, as Thomas states, dates from many years before this date.<sup>xxvii</sup>

In 1985, Jonathan Keates, citing a comment loosely attributed to George III that “Handel was very well built and lacked nothing in manliness,”<sup>xxviii</sup> concludes that this “more or less sums everything up.” He continues

We can surmise that while in Italy he fell in love with the soprano Vittoria Tarquini, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that he may have felt attracted to certain of his leading singers such as Margherita Durastanti, Anna Strada and, in later years, Kitty Clive and Susannah Cibber. The assumption that as a lifelong bachelor he must perforce have been homosexual is untenable in an eighteenth-century context...<sup>xxix</sup>

The immediate forerunner for Keates’s sexual speculations was probably Paul Henry Lang, who, in 1966, identified Handel as a man “of normal masculine constitution...attracted by and sensitive to feminine charms.”<sup>xxx</sup> Beyond exaggerated accounts of Handel’s female conquests, which, as Thomas points out, seem intended to rebut the silent possibility of homosexuality, Handel literature has also contained a number of pointed refutations of homosexuality long before Thomas raised the issue. Keates (1985) offers one example (“the assumption that...he must perforce have been homosexual is untenable...”), but as early as 1947 Percy Young, without any prior referent, states: “Since it is the fashion of the day to associate genius with either homosexuality or venereal disease, it had better be stated that there is no particle of evidence to suggest that Handel was tainted by either.”<sup>xxxi</sup>

Although Thomas did not prove that Handel was “gay,” he debunked the notion that Handel had an ever-expanding number of female conquests. The response in the

Handel community was twofold: first, a revived defense of the nineteenth-century image of Handel as a celibate and, second, direct protestations against the homosexual theory. In a biography published in 1994, Donald Burrows not only alleges Handel was celibate but suggests a specific cause:

We can only speculate on the effect that Georg Händel [senior's] death had on his son. Perhaps the event was so traumatic for the 11-year-old that it produced a psychological insecurity that explains the apparent celibacy of his adulthood.<sup>xxxii</sup>

He then firmly dismisses the possibility of homosexuality:

Given the structure of eighteenth-century London society, no conclusions can be drawn from the fact that most of Handel's known social and professional relationships were with men. It certainly would be wrong to read secular modern assumptions about social behavior into the life of someone who had probably received a fairly strict Lutheran upbringing in eighteenth-century Germany.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Neither side in this heated debate, however, offers any definitive evidence about Handel's sexual activity. That is, his vaunted manliness, Lutheran upbringing, early loss of his father, and even, his rumored affair, when he was 24, with the soprano Vittoria Tarquini, who was married and about 15 years his senior, hardly prove him either an exclusive heterosexual or, for that matter, a celibate. Similarly, the exposure of the rake and lady-killer image of Handel as a fabrication does not signify he was homosexual, any more than does his bachelorhood, male friends or, even, as has been (facetiously?) suggested, his apparent love for exotic plants. Rather, both sides seem to reflect the intensely personal emotions aroused by issues of sexuality, and early reaction to the first

announcements of *Handel as Orpheus* by Harvard University Press, before the book was even available, elicited from several newspapers a spate of headline-grabbing stories that played on these deeply-felt feelings.

The first shot came from *The Sunday Telegraph* (London: 21 October 2001) with the banner “Handel was gay – his music proves it, claims academic.” This article set the stage for many succeeding pieces by stressing the identity of Handel as “gay” and of me as an American academic. This personalization took on a number of variants. For example, the ante was sometimes raised by referring to Handel as *Messiah* composer, thus underscoring the (scandalous) association of a musical icon with homosexuality. A brief notice in *The Irish Independent* (October 22, 2001), entitled “Handel was gay, says professor,” begins “George Frederick Handel, the composer of ‘The Messiah’, was homosexual according to a forthcoming book ...” An article in the *Dallas Voice* (October 26, 2001) titled “Leading scholar of Baroque English composer argues that Handel was gay,” begins “George Frederic Handel, composer of the beloved oratorio *The Messiah*...” (Given the varied spellings of Handel’s middle name in these articles, I should point out that Handel spelled it “Frideric.”) The headline in the gay publication *PlanetOut* states it most succinctly: “Book claims ‘Messiah’ composer was gay.”

My own persona in these articles was presented less clearly than Handel’s, of course, although certain identifying features recurred with full negative weight given to each label: for “academic,” “professor,” and “American,” for example, one should probably read “out-of-touch,” “egghead,” and “crass.” One intriguing feature of the *Telegraph* article is that after I am identified correctly as Ellen T. Harris, I am thereafter referred to as Dr. Ellis. A fascinating contraction of my names, which I may consider for



future publications, it also seems to be an unconscious reference to Dr. Havelock Ellis, the pioneering British sexologist from the beginning of the twentieth century. The replication of this name in subsequent articles, while it clarified each publication's sole source of information, increased confusion about my identity. The close resemblance between the surname of Ellis and my given name of Ellen, led at least one journalist to decide that my name must be Dr. Ellen, making me sound like a person who dispenses sexual advice. In the news story in *PlanetOut* (October 23, 2001) "professor Ellen Harris" turned into Harris (as in "Harris has translated") and then into Ellen ("There was little doubt, however, that Handel was supported by a gay circle, says Ellen."), which is either another mistaken use of my first name as a surname or oddly familiar. I even received an email asking for my gender—"Please clear up one confusing point arising from your given name—are you Ms. or Mr.?"

Not only my background and gender, but my relationship to homosexuality was queried. I was accused of overlaying a homosexual theme onto my study of the cantatas simply in order to enhance its market value. This tack was taken by the *Gay Times* (1 December 2001) in an article referring to recent biographies of General Montgomery, John Lennon, and Hitler, as well as my book (not a biography per se), entitled "I want to sell you a story." Quoting from the Sunday Telegraph (and naming me Dr. Ellis), the *Gay Times* describes the book (at the time not yet available) as "tosh" and concludes (using in common with other reports the derogatory sense of the title "professor"), "oh please, professor, give us a break." Alternatively, I was accused of having a personal or political ax to grind—some reports, especially those on-line, discounting the book on the assumption I must be gay. *Private Eye* (2-15 November 2001) made fun of claims that

Handel might have been gay by listing the “Tell-tale Signs”: 1) He was unmarried, 2) wore a wig, 3) lived near Soho, 4) liked playing with his organ, 5) looked like Elton John, 6) was “musical,” and 7) wore stockings and high heels.”

The only thoughtful response to the pre-publication news frenzy, in my view, was Philip Hensher’s commentary in *The Independent* (23 October 2002) entitled: “Touches that reveal so much more than an artist’s skill.” On the one hand, Hensher acknowledged that the news stories made my argument sound ridiculous. On the other, he considered the possibility that sexuality might play a role in an artist’s work and discussed his sense of this in the work of Schubert. These musings, however, led to a heated correspondence attacking the very idea of such a connection between sexuality and music.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The relation between composer and composition is, however, a worthy topic for serious discussion. Although an absolute and essentialist association of specific traits with specific sexuality must be dismissed,<sup>xxxv</sup> use of distinctive musical techniques within the context of specific period, individual style, and text (where there is one) can certainly have personal meaning. Most of those who reject a personal connection between an artist and his work transform any stated association into an essentialist one in order to condemn it. In *Handel as Orpheus* I argued, as stated above, that Handel’s use of silence as seen within a specific repertoire (the cantatas composed in London), a specific moment in the development of his mature style, and specific cantata texts can be related to the theme of forbidden love (same-sex love being an important component of that). I did not write, as was sometimes reported, that any composer’s use of silence at any time in his or her life, or even, for that matter, Handel’s use of silence later in his life, is an indication of

homosexuality. As Hensher wrote, and I agree, “Put like that, it sounds complete rubbish, and it’s tempting to dismiss it immediately.”

The actual appearance of *Handel as Orpheus* stemmed the tide of newspaper stories—the availability of my written argument (in which the word “gay” never appears), seemed to render the excited and silly headlines difficult to justify. Since then the reviews have gotten my name right, and some, have, to my great relief, understood that my argument focuses on the impact of homoerotic culture on Handel’s creative output rather than on Handel’s sexual identity.<sup>xxxvi</sup> It has been somewhat surprising, however, to see how often the scholarly community has mirrored the themes of the headline journalists in combining an avoidance of the broad topic with a focus on the personal (Handel and/or me). There has been a tendency, first, to essentialize my discussion of the homosocial context and focus instead on Handel’s identity and, second, to vilify the entire social-sexual and contextual approach to music and attack me personally on that account.

As opposed to the news reports that trumpeted my supposed conclusions, the scholarly reviews have focused more on my argument and evidence. The criticisms, nevertheless, tend to follow a recognized pattern of hostile response to studies of homosexuality. James Saslow identified these in a keynote address for the first session on sexuality ever presented at the American Handel Society (The University of Iowa: February, 2003). Saslow enumerated three “arguments contra queer studies in the arts” that

run in a sequence, in which each complaint stakes out a potential fallback position from the previous one. 1) There’s insufficient evidence; 2) Even if there were

enough evidence, it's embarrassing, even shameful, to consider it at all; and 3) Even if it were not morally objectionable, it doesn't matter anyway because it falls outside the scope of our profession.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

As Saslow illustrated, objections to *Handel as Orpheus* made use of all three of these arguments to different degrees.

The anti-historical third position, which rejects data because "it doesn't matter," once commonly heard in regard historical studies of homosexuality, is now openly stated with less frequency. Still, the attitude hangs in the air. In an early and positive review, Joshua Kosman (*San Francisco Chronicle*, February 17, 2002) responded to this objection *a priori*:

This question [does it matter?] is raised every time a scholar tries to suggest a gay aspect to some musician's private life...As long as the musicians in question are straight, their personal lives are presumed to be of interest to posterity. It is only when homosexuality enters the picture that "don't ask, don't tell" goes into effect, and the privacy of long-dead artists suddenly becomes paramount in some quarters.

Alas, the question was also raised explicitly in an early review for *Handel-L* (the online Handel discussion list) by Helen Elsom (January 29, 2002). Speaking of the persecution of sodomites in London in the early eighteenth century, she writes:

While the persecutors might imaginably have seen Handel's pastoral cantatas and *Acis [and Galatea]*, an English serenata of 1718 for which I offer a homosexual interpretation] as suspect, not very much follows if they did (except that they had dirty minds). And then nothing of interest follows historically if Handel did have sex with men, or have homoerotic desires.

The notion that if data does not appeal to the writer it is of no interest historically is so unscholarly that I have no other comment than to say that such views do not deserve to be credited.

The tactics used to discredit (rather than dismiss) the evidence I present are more interesting to examine. In particular, I was struck by the repeated attempt to contradict my argument by the use of a rigidly binary either/or approach that depends on a false antithesis, claiming “if this, then not this.” Although such positions have already played a role in Handel studies (Handel cannot be gay because he was Lutheran<sup>xxxviii</sup> or because he was manly<sup>xxxix</sup>), I had not expected such an entrenched rejection of multiple meanings and identities or such repudiation of ambiguity. The most obvious false antithesis derives from the common view of modern sexuality as a form of identity. The construction of an insurmountable barrier between homosexuals and heterosexuals leads to various false claims, such as, person X cannot have been gay because he was married, because he is known to have had a heterosexual affair, because he fathered children. Even in our own era of identity politics, the premise of absolute, sexual categories does not hold, and it certainly doesn’t represent the more flexible range of sexual activity in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, this binary approach governed a number of the responses to my discussion of sexuality in Handel’s circle.

Like the newspaper journalists, a number of scholarly reviewers focused their attention on whether or not specific individuals were gay—if not Handel himself, then those of his circle. The hope seemed to be that if one person in the circle could be shown to be a “healthy heterosexual,” then maybe the possibility of homosexual influence could be dismissed. For example, Anthony Hicks in his review, “Fantasia on a theme” (*TLS*:

May 31, 2002), writes that there is “no documentary evidence” to indicate that the artistic gatherings hosted by the “undoubtedly heterosexual” marquis Ruspoli were male-dominated especially given that they included female singers and some women of rank. The phrase “undoubtedly heterosexual” attacks the possibility of homosexuality on the false basis of inflexible sexual identities. Further, the position that a group cannot be male-dominated or homosocial if there is a diva or two and/or a few aristocratic women present is simply indefensible. Hicks further states that neither of Handel’s early London patrons Lord Burlington and James Brydges (later Duke of Chandos) “can be assumed to be homosexual...and one would assume that, as family men, any musical gatherings at their houses would have been as mixed [i.e. heterosexual] as Ruspoli’s.” The underlying premise of this statement seems to be that if these patrons were “family men,” then they certainly did not engage in homosexual affairs, nor would they have attended homosocial gatherings. This, at best, is a simplistic argument that depends on modern assumptions of an exclusive binary sexuality. It overlooks the general tenor of the eighteenth century and such specific eighteenth-century models as Lords Hervey and Beckwith (both married with children), not to mention the lower class mollies prosecuted for sodomy, a majority of whom were married. (It also overlooks the more recent examples of Oscar Wilde and Leonard Bernstein, who were both “family men”: that is, married with children.)

The poverty of this point of view is brought home when Hicks claims that the “assertion made in 1981 by the architectural historian John Harris [no relation] that William Kent’s place in Burlington’s household ‘was a very special one, and there is no reason not to suppose a close homosexual relationship’,” which I cite, has been

successfully refuted by Lindsay Boynton in *Belov'd by Ev'ry Muse* (a set of essays edited by Dana Arnold and published in 1994), “to which Harris makes no reference.” The criticism of my bibliographic control depends on the assumption that few readers will know of this article. The “set of essays” is a 50-page glossy publication celebrating the tercentenary of the birth of Burlington. Boynton’s contribution (pp. 21-27 with ample illustrations) focuses on Londesborough Hall, Burlington’s home in Yorkshire. Her comments on Burlington’s sexuality are in passing. She writes that she “cannot accept” the likelihood of a homosexual relationship between Kent and Burlington because “the letters exchanged by the Burlingtons make it impossible to regard their marriage as anything but a close one emotionally, even if they were often physically apart and even if she did at one time have a lover.”<sup>x1</sup> She expands her comments in a footnote that deserves quotation in full (but without the references):

As to the supposed homosexual ménage at Burlington House, the insinuation is based on no evidence, direct or indirect, but on the presumption (not always correct) that males deeply concerned with the creative/visual arts are almost invariably ‘so’. It does not bear examination: (1) the impression that Kent ‘lived with’ Burlington...is wide of the mark—Kent had a room at Burlington House, as did numerous other protégés, where he lived his own social life (2) Kent apparently had at least one mistress by whom he probably fathered children and he left the bulk of his estate to them...(3) the alleged relationship could not have existed without comment, whereas Burlington’s reputation is, to the best of my knowledge, not only entirely clear of scandal but positively that of an upright and—in the best sense—virtuous man (4) his marriage was far closer than has been generally allowed—his

wife was almost cloyingly in love with him, notwithstanding her affair with the Duke of Grafton, and, if he was less effusive, that was self-evidently part of his character.<sup>xli</sup>

As an example to the scholarly community of the kind of substantial evidence Hicks claims to be looking for, this is pretty weak stuff. I do not believe that anyone has suggested that Burlington and Kent lived in the same room at Burlington House (even Lady Burlington, as was common to the period, did not share a bedroom with her husband), and men with verified homosexual relationships were not always publicly accused of such: Lord Bateman is one example.<sup>xliii</sup> More than anything, however, Boynton's "reasons" depend on the theory that proven heterosexual activity provides an inoculation against homosexual desires. That is, because Kent had at least one mistress and because the Burlingtons were married (even though *she* is allowed a heterosexual, extramarital affair) a homoerotic or homosexual relationship between Kent and Burlington cannot be possible. This holds no water as any kind of proof.

Hicks adheres to similarly rigid and exclusive categorizations in his reading of the cantata texts. He rejects my homoerotic interpretation of Pamphili's Orpheus cantata text, since Pamphili, as he writes, is merely paraphrasing the opening lines of Book Eleven of *Metamorphoses* in his use of the words "beasts, trees and rocks." Thomas McGear, "A gay-studies Handel" (*Early Music*: November 2002, pp. 609-612), echoes Hicks in a number of his criticisms as here: "The images of birds, beasts, tree trunks and rocks in Pamphili's text were surely chosen not as euphemisms for male sex organs (such as would be found in a bawdy story) but were called for by the story of Orpheus" (p. 611). But neither reviewer explains Pamphili's addition of the word "birds" to head the list,



although this is acknowledged by Hicks, the alteration of “trees” to “tree-trunks” (“tronchi” not “alberi”), or the elimination of the entire segment of the Orpheus story that concerns Euridice, nor do they illuminate how words can be divested of their potential metaphoric or allegorical meaning by prior use. They do not consider the possibility of metaphor in Ovid. Hicks’s dismissal of a homosexual reading of the Orpheus story is inconsistent with his acknowledgement of the plausibility of Pamphili’s homoerotic attraction to Handel, a point not conceded by McGeary, and emphasizes his refusal to contemplate the artistic influence of homoeroticism.

Like the journalists, some scholarly reviewers also bring my identity into play. Although a negative construal of “academic” and “professor” are lacking for reasons of self-protection, some British reviewers could not resist giving “American” a derogatory spin or even using my book to criticize American scholarship generally. Clifford Bartlett, in *Early Music Review* (April 2002, pp. 3-4), claims that a “gay Handel” is “currently fashionable among American genderists,” and says that he “look[s] forward to future books arguing that Handel was a Zionist, a Papist spy, or a nonjuror.” Stanley Sadie in *Early Music Today* (vol. 11, no. 1: February/March, 2003, p. 27) takes the opportunity to condemn American scholarship with a broad brush:

Those who wish to be convinced [of my homosexual interpretations] surely will be. Others will view this book as an attempt, and none too sure-footed, to leap on to the bandwagon that in recent years has been rattling so noisily and so destructively through the fabric of American musicology.

Sadie’s statement, which charges me with choosing a homosexual theme in order to be part of a popular movement (by jumping unsurely onto this bandwagon), impugns

my scholarly integrity as well as my nationality. Further, both Hicks and Sadie suggest that I am, at best, disingenuous or, at worst, hypocritical in regard my statements on Handel's sexuality. Hicks acknowledges that I do not myself assert that "Handel was gay" (however, the *TLS* editors, in sync with their newspaper colleagues, chose the lead "Was Handel Gay?" for their cover) but, he continues, "her title, interpreted on her own terms, bears the meaning "Handel as Gay Musician", and she does not encourage dissent from that view." Sadie repeats this accusation: "Harris does not specifically claim Handel as a homosexual, although that is the sense of her title..." As I read these statements, they reject the ambiguity of Orpheus's double meaning that I propose and propose instead that I (deliberately?) hide behind a refusal to identify Handel's sexuality while encouraging a homoerotic reading. What is certainly true is that I do not object to a homosexual Handel – or, for that matter, to a heterosexual or a celibate Handel. To the extent that this sets me apart from some of my British colleagues, it undoubtedly reinforces their view of my identity as an American woman not only residing among but perhaps colluding with the purveyors of so-called "new musicology" and fashionable gender theory.

Obviously, identity matters.<sup>xliii</sup> We listen to more immature Mozart than to mature Stamitz not because the young Mozart is always better, but because what we know of the mature Mozart makes his juvenilia more compelling to hear. And if details about a composer's life are relevant to that composer's work, then, so too, I suppose are details about a scholar's life and training relevant to his or her work. My question is, how are we to pull ourselves away from this fascination with personal identity to a broader, yet more nuanced, picture? Certainly, the evaluation of scholarship demands a more serious

approach than simple-minded stereotyping. That is, neither American musicology in general, nor gender studies more specifically, can be accurately described in terms of a methodology that blithely overlooks source studies; nor is my book correctly portrayed as a “fantasia on a theme,” given the inclusion of extensive archival and documentary material. Although reviewers were largely silent on this aspect of *Handel as Orpheus*, my use of source material became the principal focus of attack in a scholarly article by Ursula Kirkendale.<sup>xliv</sup>

Kirkendale presents welcome new source material on the marquis Ruspoli during Handel’s years in Italy, leading her to interesting new hypotheses and speculations about Handel’s music. In offering this material, however, she is at pains to invalidate the work of previous scholars, and *Handel as Orpheus* becomes her prime, but by no means her only, target.<sup>xlv</sup> She supports her argument that Ruspoli was Handel’s principal patron in Italy by sharply criticizing my discussion of the sources, and she attempts to discredit my discussion of sexuality with insult, ultimately tying together these two principal concerns when she states that “Harris seems to have been inspired by the bisexuality of Ferdinando Medici and an alleged homosexuality of Pamphilj and even of Ottoboni (who is known to have had many mistresses) when she downsizes Ruspoli in favor of these three.”<sup>xlvi</sup> This is not the place to refute her many specific accusations, but a few examples of her censure will demonstrate their tenor. She appropriately identifies some errors, and I am grateful to have these pointed out: for example, I mistakenly give the date of the copyist’s bill for *Il trionfo del tempo* as its performance date (p. 388, note 109). More often, however, her criticisms demonstrate less substance than irritation about my treatment of Ruspoli. I do not, for example, maintain that this same copyist bill of 14 May 1707

“precedes any mention of Handel in those of Ruspoli.” What I write (on the page she cites) is that “the first definite mention of Handel...in Rome” occurs in an earlier copyist bill in the Pamphili accounts “recorded on 12 February 1707.”<sup>xlvii</sup> She asserts that I misattribute to Keiichiro Watanabe “an assignment of ‘Hendel, non può mia musa’...to 1707 rather than to the year of its earliest bill [in the Ruspoli accounts], 1708 ‘on the basis of handwriting,’” continuing that “in general, Watanabe wisely refrained from assigning specific years or cities to cantatas through handwriting or watermarks.” What Watanabe writes, however, is that this cantata “belongs to the same [early] period” as three other 1707 cantatas “because of similarities in the handwriting.”<sup>xlviii</sup> She also charges that I incorrectly identify the Duke of Alvito as Handel’s primary Neapolitan patron, but what I actually write on the page she cites is that the cantata *Sento là che ristretto* may “possibly” represent the “‘voice’ of the Duke of Alvito as bridegroom” based on Handel’s association in Naples with the Duke’s wedding. As I write elsewhere, “Handel’s primary patrons in the Neapolitan area were the Duke Gaetani d’Aragona and his wife Aurora Sanserverino,” the bride’s aunt.<sup>xlix</sup> Kirkendale charges in the same note that I associate two soprano cantatas with Naples rather than with Ruspoli in Rome on the basis of their range but is unable to provide a page reference since this is not my argument.<sup>1</sup>

An imagined reading similarly lies at the basis of Kirkendale’s attack on my discussion of sexuality, where she not only joins the chorus of reviewers in attacking American musicology, but rebuffs me personally by declining to use my name in the text. She writes of the cantata *Arresta il passo* that it “certainly does not present a homosexual theme, as one reads in a recent book on Handel’s cantatas obsessed with this topic,

currently so fashionable in America, ignoring archival documents.” She maintains this tone in the footnote: “The writer’s ‘politically correct’ penchant for homosexuality determines the method: assumption of an excessive number of homoerotic meanings through alleged, sometimes forced multiple readings, subtexts, and codes, where in a large number of cases these are neither necessary nor justifying, but distorting.” The bibliographic reference concerning my alleged homosexual reading of *Arresta il passo*, however, does not, and, once more, could not possibly, provide a page reference. What is most remarkable, however, is not Kirkendale’s false assertion that I present a homosexual interpretation of *Arresta il passo*, but rather the alternative reading she provides.<sup>li</sup>

In *Handel as Orpheus*, I discuss *Arresta il passo* as an example of a “pursuit” myth (p. 134) and describe how, within the context of this cantata, the myth could have multiple interpretations. I give the idea of a sexual pursuit a decided heterosexual reading by associating the shepherd Aminta’s final aria of longing, to which the shepherdess Fillide finally accedes, with Handel’s reuse of the setting in his opera *Rinaldo*, where it is put into the mouths of sirens luring Rinaldo to join them in the sea. I continue by explaining how the cantata could also be interpreted religiously as Christ’s pursuit of a human soul, or politically in terms, say, of Spain pursuing the support of Rome in the War of Spanish Succession (p. 160). Ignoring what I actually write, Kirkendale suggests her own reading in opposition to a homosexual interpretation she imagines I have presented. She proposes that the cantata represents a “playful dialogue” between Ruspoli in the role of the shepherd and “the nymph Phyllis [Fillide], representing Handel,” astonishingly citing me as an authority for placing Handel in this role: “As Harris observes..., men sometimes speak with the voices of women in

cantatas.”<sup>lii</sup> Although I acknowledge the well-documented artistic use of women’s voices to represent men, I deliberately did not imagine Handel himself into any specific cantatas, and certainly not into any female roles.<sup>liii</sup> Kirkendale’s very specific reading has Ruspoli luring Handel into employment. “The well-bred Phyllis [depicting Handel] is at first shy, but then begins to sing long melismas on the word ‘cantando, cantando’ [singing]. She [Handel] finally admits defeat (‘Vincesti’), the two [Ruspoli and Handel] swear constancy and fidelity to each other and conclude with a prayer to the gods.”<sup>liv</sup> According to Kirkendale, this reading of the cantata depicts “a serious musical ‘contract’” between patron and composer. This is a fascinating reading, but even if it could be documented, it wouldn’t limit other interpretations. Indeed, more homoerotic than any reading I offer for *Arresta il passo*, Kirkendale’s interpretation seems to build on the very arguments she so vehemently attacks, although she fails, or refuses, to understand their obvious compatibility.

In the study of artists in context, simplistic, superficial and essentialist interpretations have no place. Handel wrote music based on Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran texts and on texts supporting both sides of the War of Spanish Succession. He did not need to subscribe personally to each of these religious and political beliefs in turn in order to write music of great power and beauty. Similarly, the existence of homoerotic influence in the composition of Handel’s cantatas does not prove him homosexual, and even were there firm evidence of *heterosexual* relationships in Handel’s life, it would not prove there was no homoerotic influence in the cantatas (*pace* Kirkendale, who continues to emphasize the rumored relationship between Handel and Tarquini).

Handel's career divides into three overlapping periods based on the three dominant vocal genres in which he composed, and it strikes me as perverse to argue that, in contrast to his later works, the cantatas alone have nothing to do with the context of their composition in relation to their texts. Operas, most of which have texts dealing with politics and succession, dominate Handel's output from 1720 to 1740, and the oratorios, dealing with national religion and community, follow from 1738 to the early 1750s. Ruth Smith has demonstrated how intimately connected the oratorios are to contemporary issues of national religion in England,<sup>lv</sup> and much fruitful discussion and debate has focused on contemporary political allegories in the operas.<sup>lvi</sup> The cantatas, which comprise the earliest period stretching from 1706 to 1722, are based largely on texts of erotic desire and longing. This is not to say that all the cantatas have homosexual subtexts or that all of Handel's patrons had homosexual relationships, but that homoerotic love and sex played a significant role in the contemporary culture and exists as one persistent thread in the cantatas, affecting both the texts and Handel's stylistic development. Whatever Handel did or did not do (and whatever I may be or do) does nothing to change that.

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<sup>i</sup> *Handel as Orpheus* won the 2002 Otto Kinkeldey Prize from the American Musicological Society and the 2002-2003 Louis Gottschalk Prize from the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies.

<sup>ii</sup> In the following précis, I have frequently used language from my book, and I am grateful to Harvard University Press for the freedom to work in this way. The book, of course, contains full references and citations, and I encourage readers of this article to explore the book in its entirety.

<sup>iii</sup> This alphabetical approach can be found in Friedrich Chrysander's late nineteenth-century edition of 94 cantatas, in the 1954 discussion of the cantatas by Anthony Lewis, "The Songs and Chamber Cantatas," in *Handel: A Symposium*, ed. Gerald Abraham (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 179-199, and most recently, the catalogue of Handel's works: Bernd Baselt, ed., *Händel-Handbuch: Thematisch-systematisches Verzeichnis*, vol. 2 (Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1984); other genres are organized chronologically.

<sup>iv</sup> See especially Donald Burrows and Martha J. Ronish, *A Catalogue of Handel's Musical Manuscripts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

<sup>v</sup> It has been argued that Handel revised a group of cantatas as continuo exercises for Princess Anne in the mid 1720's, but none of these represents a newly-composed work; see John Mayo, "Einige Kantatenrevisionen Händels," *Händel-Jahrbuch* 27 (1981), p. 63-77. Handel also wrote an Italian cantata as an "extra song" for *Alexander's Feast* ("Cecilia volgi un sguardo") in 1736; see Burrows and Ronish, *Catalogue*, p. 112, for a



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description of the manuscript containing this work and a later revision (“Caro sempre di gloria”) often listed as a separate composition.

<sup>vi</sup> Handel never published his Chandos Anthems, like the cantatas, written privately for a patron, but he did publish his public anthems, including the Coronation anthems and the funeral anthem for Queen Caroline.

<sup>vii</sup> John Christopher Pepusch, *Six English Cantatas* Bk I (London: Walsh, Randall & Hare, 1710), Bk II (Walsh & Hare, 1720); Giovanni Battista Bononcini, *Cantate e duette* (London: n.p., 1721).

<sup>viii</sup> “Homosexual” is, of course, not an eighteenth-century term; I use it in this paper, as I do in the book, rather than a longer circumlocution and so as not to be limited to the contemporary “sodomite.”

<sup>ix</sup> See Christopher Hibbert, *House of Medici: Its Rise and Fall* (New York: Morrow, 1975), pp. 299-309; Eric Cochrane, *Florence and the Forgotten Centuries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 344; Norman Douglas, *The Last of the Medici*, trans. Harold Acton (privately printed by G. Oriole, Lungarno Corsini, Florence).

<sup>x</sup> Pier Giovanni Baroni, “Un conformista del secolo diciottesimo: Il Cardinale Pietro Ottoboni” in *Ambienti e Personaggi della Vita Politica* (Bologna: Ponte Nuovo, 1969), publishes Ottoboni’s love letters: see also Michael M. Ranft, “Petrus Ottoboni” in *Merkwürdige Lebensgeschichte aller Cardinale der Rom. Cathol. Kirche... v. 2* (Regensburg: Johann Leopold Montag, 1769), pp. 268-281. Although Ottoboni’s recorded affairs are heterosexual, he has also been associated with homosexuality: Gary C. Thomas (“Was George Frideric Handel Gay?”) in *Queering the Pitch: the new gay*

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and lesbian musicology, eds. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas [New York: Routledge, 1993], p. 176).

<sup>xi</sup> See Vernon Lee, *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (London: W. Satchell & Co., 1880); see also Armando Marchi, "Obscene Literature in Eighteenth-Century Italy: An Historical and Bibliographical Note," trans. James Coke and David Marsh, in *'Tis Nature's Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality during the Enlightenment*, ed. Robert P. Maccubbin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 244-60.

<sup>xii</sup> The description of the London artistic circles as homosocial has been hotly debated. For discussions supporting a homosocial context, see, for Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington: John Harris, *The Palladians* (London: Trefoil Books, 1981); for John Gay: David Nokes, *John Gay: A Profession of Friendship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), esp. 36-50, and Yvonne Noble, "Sex and Gender in Gay's *Achilles*" in *John Gay and the Scriblerians*, ed. Peter Lewis and Nigel Wood (London: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 184-215; for Alexander Pope: Dustin H. Griffin, *Alexander Pope: the Poet in the Poems* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978). For a broader context of homosexuality in England, see: Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, repr. 1995), Louis Crompton, *Byron and Greek Love: Homophobia in Nineteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), and the many excellent publications of Randolph Trumbach. For a specific case study see Robert Halsband, *Lord Hervey: Eighteenth-Century Courtier* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

<sup>xiii</sup> See Giovanni Dall'Orto, "'Socratic Love' as a Disguise for Same-Sex Love in the Italian Renaissance," in *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and*

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*Enlightenment Europe*, Kent Gerard and Gert Hekma, eds., in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 16 (1988), pp. 33-65.

<sup>xiv</sup> G.S. Rousseau, “‘In the House of Madam Vander Tasse, on the Long Bridge’: A Homosocial University Club in Early modern Europe,” in *The Pursuit of Sodomy*, p. 311, n1, defines the terms sodomy, homosexuality, homoerotic, and homosocial in a descending sequence of intimacy; the terms offer useful distinctions.

<sup>xv</sup> Donald Burrows, *Handel* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1994), p. 53; also, for example, pp. 24-25.

<sup>xvi</sup> For an excellent discussion of the masking of homosexual imagery in poetry see James Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo: An Annotated Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). This work served as my model in examining the poetry of Handel’s cantatas.

<sup>xvii</sup> The Academy was hosted by the Marquis Ruspoli in 1708; the text may have been written by Paolo Rolli, an Arcadian poet later associated with the Royal Academy of Music in London.

<sup>xviii</sup> Also composed for Ruspoli (1707). Note the same names as in the male object cantatas, which may be significant. Ruspoli’s only regularly paid singer during this period was the soprano Margarita Durastante. As an opera singer, she played both male and female roles; in Handel’s *La resurrezione* she premiered the role of Mary Magdalene, but by papal order was replaced with a castrato after the first performance, women not being allowed to perform in public. Clearly, castrati also played male and female roles. In the treble range, the sex of the singer could never in this period automatically be equated with the sex of the “voice.”

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<sup>xix</sup> Hans Joachim Marx, ed. *Kantaten mit Instrumenten I*: Hallische Händel-Ausgabe, series 5, vol. 3 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1994), p. xi (German) and xviii (English) identifies the additional paper as Neapolitan and suggests a performance in Naples.

<sup>xx</sup> Ursula Kirkendale, who rejects the association of homoeroticism with the cantatas (see below n. 44) nevertheless interprets this cantata as representing Ruspoli's wife, Cardinal Ottoboni and Ruspoli.

<sup>xxi</sup> Translation by Terence Best, in Donald Burrows, ed. *G. F. Handel Songs and Cantatas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>xxii</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of erotic and sexual metaphor in Italian poetry from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries see Jean Toscan, *Le Carnaval du Langage: Le Lexique Erotique des Poètes de L'Equivoque de Burchiello à Marino: XVe - XVIIe Siècles*, 4 vols. (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1981); I am grateful to Christina Fuhrmann for directing me to this extraordinary resource. For discussions of English sexual imagery of the seventeenth century, see Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature* (London: Athlone Press, 1994); and Frankie Rubinstein, *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sexual Puns and Their Significance* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989).

<sup>xxiii</sup> "Stones" has been a metaphor for testicles since at least the twelfth century (Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English . . .*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition [New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1970]). More important, such metaphors can also be documented in erotic Italian baroque poetry. Toscan, *Carnaval du Langage*, identifies "bird" ("uccello" or "ugello"--"augello" being a form of the latter) with the male sexual organ, providing more than forty examples (glossary, p. 1762; discussion and citations,

chap. XLII, pp. 1541ff.) and “tree trunk” (“fusto,” a synonym for “tronco”) as a “métaphore du phallus” (glossary, p. 1699; discussion, pp. 1433-1435).

<sup>xxiv</sup> “Voce” is used to mean “penis” by analogy to emission and penetration of sound (see Toscan, *Carnaval du Langage*, glossary, p. 1768). Toscan associates the verb “to sing” (“cantare”) specifically with sodomy (*Carnaval du Langage*, glossary, p. 1674).

<sup>xxv</sup> Marchi, “Obscene literature,” pp. 245-6.

<sup>xxvi</sup> I have explored the topic of silence in Handel’s music in more depth in “Silence as Sound: Handel’s Sublime Pauses,” *Journal of Musicology* 22 (2005), in press.

<sup>xxvii</sup> See Thomas, “Was George Frideric Handel Gay,” cited above n. 10.

<sup>xxviii</sup> William S. Smith, “George III, Handel, and Mainwaring,” *The Musical Times* 65 (1924), p. 792; Smith suggests that the manuscript notes in a copy of Mainwaring’s 1760 biography of Handel preserved at the British Library may have been written by George III or by “someone in close touch with the king” who recorded the sovereign’s views. George III was born in 1738 and would only have remembered Handel personally from the end of the composer’s life.

<sup>xxix</sup> Jonathan Keates, *Handel: The Man and his Music* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), p.22.

<sup>xxx</sup> Paul Henry Lang, *George Frideric Handel* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), p. 543-4.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Percy Young, *Handel* (New York: Pellegrini and Cudaby Inc., 1949 [first printing London: J.M. Dent and New York: E.P. Dutton, 1947]), p. 234.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Burrows, *Handel*, p. 9.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Burrows, *Handel*, p. 374, n51.

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<sup>xxxiv</sup> Described in *Private Eye*, no. 1040 (2-15 November 2001), p. 9.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Philip Brett addressed this question by asking, “How can a minor third be gay?” in “Britten’s Dream,” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p 259.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> These include: Richard Wigmore, “Behind Orpheus’s Mask” (*BBC Music Magazine*: May 2002, p. 106); J. Girdham (*Choice*: June 2002); John W. Barker (*American Record Guide*: July/August 2002, p. 235); Philip Brett (*Notes*: March 2003, pp. 642-644); and Sarah Mc Cleave (*Eighteenth-century Music 2* [September 2004], pp. 305-307).

<sup>xxxvii</sup> James Saslow, “ ‘For I would sing of boys loved by the gods: The Orphic Impulse in Cultural History,” address presented to the American Handel Society (The University of Iowa: February, 2003).

<sup>xxxviii</sup> See above, quotation from Burrows, *Handel*, p. 374, n51.

<sup>xxxix</sup> See above, quotation from Keates, *Handel*, p. 22.

<sup>xl</sup> Boynton, “Lord Burlington at Home,” in *Belov’d by Ev’ry Muse* (London: The Georgian Group, 1994), p. 21.

<sup>xli</sup> Boynton, “Lord Burlington at Home,” p. 52 n7.

<sup>xlii</sup> *Handel as Orpheus*, p. 19.

<sup>xliii</sup> I was honored to be asked to speak as part of the Presidential Forum on “Anonymity and Identity” at the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society (Columbus, Ohio: November 2002), by then president Jessie Ann Owens, which gave me another opportunity to explore issues raised by the reaction to *Handel as Orpheus* (Ellen T. Harris, “Author and Subject: Anonymity and Identity in Music(ology),” *AMS Newsletter* 23, no. 1, pp. 18-20).

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<sup>xliv</sup> Ursula Kirkendale, “Handel with Ruspoli: New Documents from the Archivio Segreto Vaticano, December 1706 to December 1708,” *Studi Musicali* 32 (2003), 301-348;

translated into German and somewhat revised in *Händel Jahrbuch* 50 (2004), 309-374.

<sup>xlv</sup> She regularly refers to errors and “lapses.” In one footnote alone she accuses one scholar of plagiarism and says of another’s judgment that “the vituperative propaganda of the German Democratic Republic, as motivated by communist ideology, is lowered even further here”: “Handel with Ruspoli,” p. 334n182.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Kirkendale, “Handel with Ruspoli,” p. 354n183.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Kirkendale, “Handel with Ruspoli,” p. 319n110; Harris, *Orpheus*, p. 37.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Kirkendale, “Handel with Ruspoli,” p. 326n143; Harris, *Orpheus*, p. 117; Keiichiro Watanabe, “The Music-Paper used by Handel and his Copyists in Italy 1706-1710,” in ed. Terence Best, *Handel Collections and their History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 225n. ‘e’ —the specific nature of the musical handwriting given on p. 213.

<sup>xlix</sup> Kirkendale, “Handel with Ruspoli,” p. 329n152; Harris, *Handel as Orpheus*, pp. 145 and 280.

<sup>l</sup> Kirkendale, “Handel with Ruspoli,” p. 329n152.

<sup>li</sup> Kirkendale, “Handel with Ruspoli,” p. 306 and n. 34.

<sup>lii</sup> Kirkendale, “Handel with Ruspoli,” p. 306 and n. 35.

<sup>liii</sup> Handel, of course, is named in “Hendel, non può mia musa.”

<sup>liv</sup> Kirkendale, “Handel with Ruspoli,” pp. 306-307.

<sup>lv</sup> Ruth Smith, *Handel’s Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

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<sup>lvi</sup> For a survey of possible political allegory in Handel's operas, see Reinhard Strohm, "Handel and His Italian Opera Texts," in *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1985, pp. 34-79.