The Mad Scene from Handel’s *Orlando*: A New Attempt at Staging

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ABSTRACT

“There is an increasing interest in the operas of Georg Frideric Handel, both from a scholarly perspective, and that of the modern, professional opera company. Producers of Handelian opera have moved away from productions similar to those staged in Halle, Germany, in the 1920s, which featured vastly reduced recitative and stripped the da capo aria to a single statement of the ‘A’ section. Modern productions have restored Handel’s musical text, and in addition have attempted to recreate the original dramatic conditions and ethos of the work. The problem faced by the Halle producers still exists, however. How does the modern producer satisfy the expectations of the modern audience, while remaining faithful to the intention of the composer and the original production.

This paper will investigate a possible approach to staging Handelian opera, with specific reference to the ‘Mad Scene’ from Handel’s opera Orlando. Included in this examination will be a discussion of eighteenth-century British staging practices. These elements will be considered in the light of stage design and scenic practices of the period.”
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

In any artistic medium there are problems to be resolved when a modern scholar or interpreter approaches the work of an earlier time period. These problems are tied up with our own aesthetic sense, and are compounded as we attempt to understand the points of reference and departure of the original artist. In no area of endeavour is this more acute than in opera, a true polyglot of arts and artists. It is not only necessary that we deal with a musical idiom which is not of our time, but a style in both visual and performance arts which may well be in conflict with our current perceptions on the nature of "correct" style.

This paper will attempt, from a modern director's standpoint, to answer questions about the most appropriate staging of a scene from what is essentially a lost work, that being *Orlando*, George Frideric Handel's 1733 setting of a section of the epic poem *Orlando Furioso* by Ariosto. Not lost in the sense of no longer being available to us—quite the contrary, the work in question is acknowledged today as one of the masterpieces of the 18th century. But it is lost in that we no longer have access to the mind of the composer, or the traditions for which he wrote. In order to 'resurrect' this work we must come to terms, not only with the music, but also with the societal life which gave it birth, and then find a way to make that life current in our own theatrical tradition. It is not enough only to analyse the music in order to interpret the work as a whole. We need also to examine the choices that were made as the libretto was assembled, the physical space in which the
drama was enacted, and then translate that experience to our own time and place. The present thesis is a director's notebook on a Baroque opera that deserves to be made approachable.

The opera as a whole presented a challenge for both the audience and the performers of the time. It was a failure for Handel, in that the opening run was of disappointing length, to less than critical acclaim, closing after being unable to attract an audience. Sir John Clerk Penicuik was present at the final performance on May 5, and reported that, "... the audience was so very thin that I believe they get not enough to pay the Instruments of the Orchestra". It was also the opera that ended Handel's long association with the castrato Senesino, for whom the title role was written. Certainly there are issues here that need to be addressed by any director, problems which the composer and original production seem to have been unable to solve satisfactorily. Clearly the length of this paper will preclude a detailed examination of the work as a whole, and so I will focus on one problematic scene, the ultimate scene of the second act, centred in the madness of the title character. The scene represents Handel at his most innovative, and this paper will be my attempt, as a modern director, to address those problems for a modern audience.

The issue of the rift with Senesino, while not central to this discussion, points to some of the features of the opera that separate Orlando from the usual form of opera seria. As Anthony Hicks points out in the notes to the Hogwood recording, its many unusual and innovatory features could easily have been upsetting to a singer who had enjoyed twenty-five years of

2 Handel, Orlando, Christopher Hogwood and The Academy of Ancient Music, Editions de L'Oiseau-Lyre BA 928.
fame on the operatic stage and was thoroughly steeped in the conventions of the opera seria form. In the whole of the opera he had only three full length da capo arias, none of which appeared in the final act; his only duet with the leading soprano was short and highly irregular in form; and he was absent from the most substantial ensemble number, the trio at the end of Act One. True, he had the stage to himself for nearly ten minutes for the great ‘Mad Scene’ at the end of Act Two, but it gave him little opportunity for vocal embellishment and, here as elsewhere in the opera, he may well have been confused as to whether he was playing a role which was seriously heroic or subtly comic; if the latter, was it the singer or the character that was being mocked?

Indeed, I might extend that question to inquire whether or not the whole genre of opera seria is being subtly satired.

With the collapse, in 1728, of the Royal Academy of Music, Handel and the impresario, Heidegger, were left in a position of producing operas that were not necessarily tied to the rigid form of the opera seria, as had been previously dictated by Handel’s Academy patrons. This period of freedom culminated in the three operas based on episodes of Ludovico Ariosto’s epic poem Orlando Furioso, of which Orlando is the first. As Gary Schmidgall points out, “Handel’s age avoided the eccentric, idiosyncratic, and curious, and so in large part did Handel’s librettists in their choice of emotions for musical setting.” Yet the ‘Mad Scene’ is in some ways extravagant in the extreme. One needs only look at the rapidly shifting emotional state of Orlando as the Mad Scene progresses to realise that this is not a ‘normal’ type of opera seria protagonist. A case can easily be made that something new is happening here; but what, and perhaps more important as we approach this work with a staging in mind, why? Elise Jorgens poses the thesis that public taste by the 1730s forced a reassessment of what constituted suitable subject matter for an operatic libretto. The opera seria character, the god or hero who

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stands larger than life and sings of matters outside the realm of the common man, had become passé.

The acceptable subject matter for literature by the mid-1720s was not man as one might wish him to be, but man as he is: callous, corrupt, vain, selfish, too easily swayed from the reasonable, humane course by his passions.4

As we shall see, this characterisation seems almost a definition of Handel's treatment of Orlando. In spite of this, Jorgens maintains that the Orlando Furioso operas failed to address this change in public preference, and so were commercial failures, in marked contrast to the operas Handel wrote only a decade earlier.

In the 1730s, however [in comparison here to the success of Rinaldo], the choice of Ariosto's romance was less happy. Twenty-odd years had brought disillusionment and the stirrings of social conscience, encouraged in the arts by the satirists. Londoners had embraced the satires of Swift and Pope... The city had witnessed heated debates about the merits of opera, and an elite had been roundly scorned in Gay's Beggar's Opera for giving itself over to the shallow, sensual delights of opera seria when poverty, filth, and corruption were apparent in every walk of life.5

Yet something has changed, and changed drastically enough to cause most of Handel's company of singers to remove themselves to the newly formed Opera of the Nobility, and return to the very form of opera seria that Ms. Jorgens claims was no longer viable as an art form.

Schmidgall places the three Orlando operas at the "stylistic watershed separating Baroque and Classical opera conventions."6 As he notes:

In his operas we see the struggle between traditional formulas and the urgency of natural, truly dramatic expression—in other words, the struggle between artificial "neatness" and incisive,

5 Jorgens, 47.
6 Schmidgall, 32.
direct "rudeness." . . . He was among those who made use of new methods that later composers like Mozart and Gluck were to perfect—the brilliant scenas, the spectacular accompanied recitatives, the preparation for and the creation of musical-dramatic surprises, and the increasing concealment of musical formulas within theatrical contexts.7

This is the Handel I see represented in Orlando, and it is this premise of rudeness, so aptly described by Schmidgall, that will form the basis of my staging of this troublesome scene.

In order to achieve this goal, there is one more question that must be answered in this introduction, that of the 'style' of production that will be attempted here. There has been, in recent years, a backlash against performances of Baroque opera that strive for 'Authenticity', apparently in defiance of every other criterion. It should be pointed out that we can never know what all the aspects of the original staging with Senesino in the title role actually looked like, any more than we can with complete certainty identify all of the salient points of eighteenth-century acting style. Treatises from the eighteenth-century on acting technique are useful in establishing the look of the production, and we can examine the limited pictorial evidence. Or we can disparage and ignore the eighteenth-century tradition, as does the famed English director Peter Brook in his address to the members of the COS National Convention:

. . . with the help of conventions, dubious traditions, documents, paintings, and so on, we build up a completely bogus past in which everybody in the 18th century . . . happens to have the handkerchief THERE, and there is some expert who will have spent two years . . . (making) a thesis of it, he becomes an expert, he comes to this sort of gathering, he will lay down the law on that. You will find there are other documents that exist on faces, on the expressions that correspond to the angry man. . . actual books for actors that tell them the expressions, the way the body

7 Schmidgall, 45-6.
is held, the way the costumes are. And this is all false. (It) becomes a muddled memory of the past.8

This rationale is tempting to the modern director, because it means that we can throw out any attempt to understand the earlier tradition, and do whatever we like. It is further complicated by the simple fact that we would not likely want to remount Senesino’s performance, even if we believed we knew what it was, in spite of the fact that it represents for some scholars the ‘definitive’ version of the opera by virtue of being the original. In point of fact, Senesino seems to have been incapable of sustaining a believable performance, even for his own audience. A contemporary account by Zambeccari, from 1715, tells us that:

Senesino continues to comport himself badly enough; he stands like a statue, and when occasionally he does make a gesture, he makes one directly the opposite of what is wanted.9

This is not a twentieth-century opera however, and so to ignore the eighteenth-century traditions, such as we know of them, is to remove the opera from its intended form, in all likelihood to its detriment, and to ours. What we should be attempting is not what was, but what Handel would ideally like to see, were he to witness a remounting of his opera today. In so doing we must pay more than mere lip service to eighteenth-century conventions, even though we must take into account the advances made in staging and lighting techniques in our own time, and the expectations of the modern audience. Subsequent chapters of this paper will examine specific facets of the eighteenth-century stage: its physical properties that would affect

staging, contemporary and modern ideas about eighteenth-century acting technique, all with the intention of creating a modern synthesis of performance style that will do justice, both to our modern technical stagecraft, and to the opera itself. Along with Brook, I must confess that “I have come to (write) about style, and yet, my difficulty is that I’ve never seen style.”

Style, by definition, is form or manner of doing something, rather than the actual doing, and as such is not only a nebulous idea, but a highly subjective one. From the evidence of clothing ‘style’ at the local mall, to the various ‘styles’ of operatic production, it is small wonder that even Brook, whose productions are invariably labelled as “highly stylised” would balk at defining “Style”. I would not attempt the definition either. What I can do is allow Handel to speak through the score, and attempt a rendering of the scene which best does justice to the masterpiece. In this I will be guided by what we know, what we can surmise, and by my own impression of how this opera would work in its own time. This may strike the reader as rather less than a ‘scholarly’ approach, but in all artistic endeavours we must attempt to balance the artist and the scholar. In this document I will attempt such a balance.

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10 Brook, 16.
CHAPTER TWO
ANALYSIS

Much of any director's 'method', my own included, is based on the idea of "informed spontaneity". As the work progresses on stage we make choices based on previous analysis, but we also allow serendipity to take a hand in the final action. The action on stage must be a synthesis of the work itself, the director's ideas about that work, and the actor's realisation of both those things. If we are to avoid the falseness of which Brook complains, the movement on stage must come out of a detailed analysis of the text and music, but be tempered by those things which are not stated; that which the actor calls the 'sub-text'. It is here that we will find the line that connects all of the action of the opera into a seamless unit. After many productions much of this process becomes internal, second-nature, and largely intuitive. Otherwise directors would spend so much time analysing that nothing would appear on the stage. This chapter will attempt to detail the thought process involved in making choices about what appears on the stage, and like many such processes, it begins with "The Word."

The Libretto

The original source of the libretto is the sixteenth-century epic poem *Orlando Furioso*, by Ludovico Ariosto. This work has inspired many operatic libretti, perhaps as many as fifty, although to the best of my knowledge no complete list has yet been compiled.11 The first operas based on writings of

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11 For the most complete listing of operas on the *Orlando Furioso*, see the article by Carter on Ariosto in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, v. 1, 191-2.
Ariosto belong to the earliest period of opera, with Marco da Gagliano and Jacopo Peri's *Lo sposalizio di Medoro et Angelica* (1619) and Francesca Caccini's *La liberazione di Ruggiero dall'isola d'Alcina* (1625), both operas written and performed in Florence. Important precursors to the Handel libretto outlining the story of Orlando's madness, caused by the love of Angelica for Medoro and their subsequent marriage are: *La pazzia d'Orlando*, libretto by Bonarelli for a set of intermedii by an unknown composer (c1635); the Quinault libretto *Roland*, for Lully (1685); Capece's *Orlando, ovvero La geloso pazzia*, set for Rome by D. Scarlatti (1711); and the Braccioli libretto, *Orlando*, set by Vivaldi in 1725, and by various other composers between 1722 and 1727 under the title *Orlando furioso*. Of all of these, most scholars now agree that the model for Handel's libretto is the 1711 Capece libretto, with elements of Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato*, the predecessor to the Ariosto poem, in some of Orlando's ravings. In identifying this particular work as the source of Handel's ravings, it is tempting to think that Handel might have had first-hand knowledge of the text, since Capece was the librettist for Handel's *La Resurrezione*, also for Rome in 1708, but no direct link has yet been established.

It is important for the director to be aware of these earlier libretti, in order to assess more clearly the changes that were made in the libretto from the original poem. Also, in a case like this where a source libretto has been identified, the director should be aware of changes that were made in adapting the libretto. Ideally this knowledge will give the director a window on the thoughts of the librettist and the composer. From the items that make

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12 See for instance: Strohm, *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*; Dean, *Essays on Opera*; and Hicks, "Orlando", *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. For reference to Boiardo, see the *New Grove article* by Hicks.
this adaptation unique we should be better able to judge what the creators of the opera saw as the most important components of the story, and this will help as we decide which direction to take with the staging. Included in Appendix A is a copy of the Handel libretto of the Mad Scene, as well as the Capece libretto that was its predecessor. A comparison of the two libretti provides an interesting insight into Handel’s opera.

The first thing that must be noted about the opera, as a whole, is that there are fewer characters in Handel’s version of the opera. While this has little bearing on the Mad Scene, since in both cases it is a solo scene, it does speak to a process of reduction of the libretto, and if we examine the two libretti through the course of the Mad Scene, we see that a reduction is apparent in this scene as well. Although the reasons for the character reduction overall in the libretto could simply be that Handel had access to fewer singers than did Scarlatti, the result is a valuable tightening of the dramatic action that cannot be denied. The characters of Isabella and Zerbino, who perform a significant function in the Capece libretto, are virtually removed. Isabella appears very briefly in Act One as a silent character, and Zerlino never appears. In their place we get Zoroasto, a figure of magic who directs much of the action of the opera, and who is responsible for the *deus ex machina* through which Orlando’s sanity is restored. This restoration is one of the few places where Handel’s libretto is of greater magnitude than the Capece version, the transformation in Capece being affected by the simple touch of a magic ring, while Handel’s version required a complicated stage business involving a flying cup of potion, born by an eagle and accompanied by four genii. This action aside, the tendency with the Handel libretto is a tightening of the action. With this in mind, we will look to the script of the mad scene.
itself, and here we must examine the Ariosto original as well as the Capece libretto.

One of the most intriguing factors to examine here is the characterisation of Orlando’s madness. In the Ariosto original, Orlando goes mad after discovering the irrefutable evidence of the marriage of Angelica and Medoro, and the realisation that the bed he has been about to sleep on is most likely the very place the couple spent their wedding night.

Ariosto . . . presents Orlando’s madness as brought on by an extraordinary succession of events driving home the inescapable fact of Angelica’s love for Medoro—events that would make most of us go at least temporarily berserk . . . Ariosto’s Orlando is clearly mad; he lashes out wildly, blindly, with no apparent knowledge that he is hurting anyone.13

Of course, in the poem he manages to hurt quite a lot of people; in fact, he goes on on a rampage of murder and looting of heroic proportion, killing literally hundreds of people unfortunate enough to cross his path, as well as such feats as uprooting trees with his bare hands, or swimming to Africa14. Clearly this man is a ‘Hero’, and that fact is driven home to us when Ariosto tells us15 that God had made him invincible to wounds as the protector of the holy faith. Moreover, we learn that the madness is a punishment, sent by God to Orlando, for forsaking his duty to the Crusade in favour of Love16.

The Orlando that Handel’s librettist presents is different in significant ways. He is no longer of a man of ‘heroic’ stature, duly punished by the gods for a crime like hubris, but a common man whose rage is born of jealousy.

The presentation of his rage is prefigured in Orlando’s relationship to

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13 Jorgens, 61-2.
15 Ariosto, canto XXIV.
16 Ariosto, canto XXXIV.
Angelica, who, unlike the character of the poem,

...seems to have made some sort of commitment to Orlando before the start of the opera's events and has therefore, in fact, been unfaithful to him.17

So, not God, but a faithless woman seems to be the spur that carries Orlando over the edge into madness.

If Orlando's madness here lacks the extreme provocation it has in Ariosto's account, it lacks as well the wildly exaggerated manifestation. The raving knight in the opera turns his jealous fury not against all mankind, but where we would more realistically expect it, against the offending lovers. Where do we draw the line between murderous rage and insanity?18

Where indeed? This will be one of the foremost questions we must answer as we consider a realisation of the scene in the theatre.

At this point we will give greater consideration to the cuts that Handel's librettist made to the Capece libretto. The first thing that will be noted in a side-by-side comparison is the extent of the cuts that were involved. The libretto that Handel works with, composed of just 34 taut lines of text, is literally half the size of the 69 lines of the Capece. Even more startling is the immediacy of the attack in Handel's libretto. Unlike Capece's version, there is no lingering of moribund hearts through which Love beats like a wind, no memories whose sadness robs the hero of life. Here is only rage: "Why do you not surrender the perfidious woman to my just fury?"19

This directness colours the entire madness of Orlando, as presented in the libretto. As Jorgens says, "...the Orlando of (Handel's) opera knows precisely whom he is after and what he wishes to do to them."20

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17 Jorgens, 60.
18 Jorgens, 62.
19 "... al mio giusto furor non la rendete?" Unless otherwise noted, translations used throughout this paper are those of the present author.
20 Jorgens, 62.
standpoint, this very directness, within the context of the libretto, presents us with problems in assessing Orlando as mad, unless we are to equate jealousy with a form of madness.

Indeed, the only *textual* indication of madness comes in the piling up of imagery within the text. Ellen Rosand, in analysing the elements of madness in this scene, has this to say of the libretto:

> The requisite instability is provided here by three major textual articulations. . . Conventionally irregular recitative poetry is interrupted twice by unusual metrical passages; unusual because, although their meter signals aria style, neither passage exhibits the da capo form that characterises virtually all of the other arias in the opera (and virtually all of the other operas of this period). The unconventionality of these two formal interruptions becomes especially striking when compared with Capeci's [sic] original libretto of 1711. There, both passages . . . were normal da capo arias. It is obvious, then, that in depriving both arias of their da capos and the first aria of its B section as well, Handel's poet deliberately rejected conventional form for this scene.21

The images that I refer to are of course images drawn from the underworld: a picturing of the river Styx and its deadly boatman; of Pluto surrounded by fire and smoke. It would be possible for an actor to play this text for madness, since the sane do not normally see visions of hell. But madness is not intrinsic to these images. Nor is madness evident in the transitions within the text itself. Indeed, the opening section of recitative and arioso breaks into two distinct emotional areas. The first four lines of text22 are indicative of rage, and lines five through nine, as an extension of that rage, could as easily be seen as an indication of the hell that awaits Orlando, not as a victim of madness, but of unrequited love. Thus it can be said that, as far the libretto is concerned, there is no compulsion to see Orlando as 'mad', or insane, at all.

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22 See Appendix A
To see fully the madness in Orlando, we must turn to Handel’s treatment of the libretto.

The Score

This entire scene is the closing action of the Second Act, a pivotal point in many of Handel’s operas, and so we are served notice by Handel, both in the placement of the scene and in its musical treatment, that something important is happening. To quote Rosand,

The musical setting capitalises on and intensifies the formal unconventionality of the text. The composer multiplies its discontinuities through musical means. Although he exploits the contrasts built into the libretto between recitative and formal poetry, setting both metrical sections in aria style, Handel imposes his own more frequent, more localised contrasts indiscriminately over the entire text, on recitative and aria alike. In his setting three changes of mood become eleven. His Orlando is far less stable than the librettist’s.\(^{23}\)

In examining Handel’s musical demonstration of Orlando’s madness, it will be necessary to consider the opening recitative in some detail.\(^{24}\) The first thing to strike the listener is that this opening section of the scene is not set in secco recitativo, but as an accompagnato. This technique is not unique to Handel, and is used throughout this period for areas where the moving forward of the plot, the usual function of recitative, has increased importance, or for the heightened presentation of some affect or conflict. Handel increasingly uses accompagnato as an escape from the rigidity of the da capo form, and it can be seen in that function in this scene.

The opening recitative, as already indicated, shows the composer’s use

\(^{23}\) Rosand, 268.

\(^{24}\) My analysis of the entire scene has been strongly influenced by Ellen Rosand’s concise treatment of Orlando’s madness in the article cited above.
of localised contrasts. The two divisions in this recitative, those of rage and hellish vision that I have outlined from the text, are substantially expanded by Handel's musical treatment. In the first thirteen lines of text Orlando's mood changes five times, changes marked by significant alterations in tempo, meter, harmonic procedure, orchestral accompaniment, and vocal style. The rage is expressed in the first four lines of the text (mm 1 - 9), but even here the orchestra registers three distinct styles. The opening four measures utilises busy sixteenth note passage work in dotted rhythm under the first line of text, which serves the dual purpose of outlining the tonality in a fanfare, and combining it with a musical depiction of anger. This is contrasted with small sound bursts in the second two lines of text (mm 5 - 7), before returning to a more active accompaniment, but without the dotted rhythms in the final line, paving the way for the next section. Handel then moves to an andante over a chromatically descending bass line, a marked contrast to the rising bass line of the opening section. The harmonic instability of the passage is indicative of lament in the next four lines of text (mm 10 - 21). Here again there is a subdivision apparent as the strings move from an ostinato eighth note pattern to sustained whole notes in the second half of the four line section of text (mm 16 - 21). At this point we have an almost comic moment as Orlando imagines himself crossing the river Styx, and the rocking of the boat is mirrored in the highly unusual and affective 5/8 meter, a meter unique in Handelian operatic accompanied recitative. There are five significant changes, encompassing different levels of rage, despair, and even a moment of low comedy as our hero tries to keep his footing in a rocking boat. This alone would be indicative of instability, but Handel carries Orlando into madness by other means as well.
The harmonic instability already noted in m.10 - 21 is indicative of the musical means Handel employs to reinforce the emotional instability. The recitative begins in b-minor, passing through internal cadences on d-minor (m. 12), a-minor (m. 15), e-minor (m.19), and a return to d-minor at m. 21, the tonality which begins the andante at m. 22. Laid out in this fashion, the 'goal' of this short passage seems to be D-minor, arrived at in m. 12 but masked as a point of arrival by its appearance as a 6/4 chord. The balance of the passage brings us back to d-minor through a series of cadences, each one on the minor fifth degree of the previous cadence. We can reasonably question whether three measures of d-minor, incorporating the final recitative cadence and the opening of the andante, represents a point of stability, but an examination of the scene as a whole gives an indication of Handel's method of maintaining the instability I have alluded to over a larger form.

As we can see from the above chart, d-, alternating with its relative Major, F, seems to be a structural relationship in the scene as a whole. What makes this relationship unusual is that each repetition of d- is emotionally distinct. It would have been more customary in this time for a key, once stated, to display a single affect, at least throughout the scene. Here Handel confounds this expectation, with the appearances of d- in the Gavotte encompassing both rage and despair. Orlando, as Handel presents his character musically, is then at the very least inconsistent.

Let us look then at the preparation for the andante at measure 22. Here we have another example of Handel taking a standard device, and
confounding our expectations. The opening notes of the 5/8 measures outline a scalar descent in the bass, a standard pattern for this period. The obvious goal of this pattern is the dominant, A, but there are two problems that immediately become apparent. It is not until the second measure of this section, as the bass moves down to C, that we are aware the meter is the highly unusual 5/8, and Handel stresses this by breaking the vocal line at this point. Regardless of this disjointed meter, the pattern continues in a logical fashion, but the goal of the passage is denied, as we arrive on a unison G# in m. 25. The jarring effect of this change is again emphasised by Handel, this time in a change of orchestral accompaniment. At the beginning of the 5/8 section the orchestra has assumed a pattern that would suggest the beginning of an arioso, matching melody and specific rhythm to the vocal line. This is broken abruptly, after only three measures, at the G# unison, as the orchestra reverts back to accompanied recitative. The singer continues a line of text that has been broken off by the bars of 5/8, and does so an diminished 7th above the sounding unison, only to have a one-measure abortive attempt to reinstate the 5/8 be broken off once again by accompanied recitative. If we agree with Strohm that the 5/8 measures “depict the shaking of the boat”\(^\text{25}\), then we could say that Handel asks us to consider that the boat may in fact be sinking.

The arioso at measure 31 is equally troubling. The move to a 6/8 meter, combined with alternating patterns of sixteenth notes and eighth notes in the orchestra and the initial outlining of the C minor tonality, a disturbing flat-7 minor scale degree from d-, our last point of reference, indicates for us graphically the agitation of Orlando as his mind confronts the hounds of hell.

\(^{25}\) Strohm, 261.
What is not made clear, either in the text or in the music, is whether we should interpret this agitation as a signal of fear, or of exultation. Certainly the rapid shift back to rage as the recitative reasserts itself at measure 49 calls into question just how fearful Orlando could be. It could be that Orlando, in his madness, sees himself as following his flown lover even to Hell, and rejoices that his arrival in the Underworld places him one step closer to his ultimate revenge on those who have hurt him. The agitation of the score could then be indicative of excitement. It could equally be that terror giving way to rage is one more manifestation of the degree of Orlando’s madness. Here neither librettist nor composer point the direction clearly, leaving the final judgment to the singer who must interpret the character. For me, the choice is the one which gives the greatest emotive contrast. Thus, my choice for this staging of the scene will be that of terror. It is indicative of Handel’s genius that in either case, we have been presented with an interesting choice.

As we continue to examine the anomalies by which Handel musically defines the character of Orlando, we move to the final aria of the scene. As Rosand tells us,

This final aria, rather than representing the conventional point of arrival, culmination, or stability of a typical opera seria scene, actually intensifies the instability that precedes it. In altering the original da capo form of this text, Handel’s librettist constructed a bipartite aria whose form matches and maintains the rather schizoid dichotomy of its meaning: the opposition between “Non piangete, no” in the first line of the A section\(^2\)\(^6\), and “Si, piangete, si,” in the first line of the B, a dichotomy that the poet emphasised by repeating each of the opposing lines at the end of its own section\(^2\)\(^7\)

\(^{26}\) Rosand proposes, in this argument, that lines 26 - 29 of the text (see Appendix A) constitute the ‘A’ section of the aria, bounded by the repeated text in lines 26 and 29, and that the ‘B’ section, bounded in a similar fashion, is made up of lines 30 - 34.

\(^{27}\) Rosand, 285.
Of course, as has been the case throughout this scene, Handel takes the process at least one step further than the libretto in his musical treatment of the material. The bipartite form of the libretto, in Handel's hands, becomes a rondo, and carries the disorientation of the character to a new level. The last seven measures (mm 56 - 62) of the preceding recitativo accompagnato have been an adagio lament, and finish in a full close in D minor. The aria proper begins, without the customary ritornello, with, as Rosand says, "a hallucinatory Gavotte in F major."  

The Gavotte is a couples' dance of the French Court, and Handel himself set danced Gavottes in the operas Amadigi and Il pastor fido. In the particular circumstances of these two operas a dance is entirely appropriate, but what is this dance doing in this scene from Orlando for a solo character, and in the context of a text that says, "Lovely eyes, don't cry"? Gary Schmidgall, in summarising the Ariosto poem, says;  

If there is any "moral" in the poem, it is to be found not in the life hereafter, but in the silly, devious lives mortals—especially mortals tangled in love affairs—lead on earth. It ultimately concludes that our life is, as Ariosto called the whole epic, a "dance of folly."  

For me, the 'folly' nature of this dance clearly indicates Handel's perception of the character of Orlando. It is madness demonstrated by incongruity. In fact, the Gavotte is just barely established before the lament reasserts itself in d- at measure 75, but it is a lament that is very different from the previous d-lament, mm. 10 - 21. Here we are, for the first time in this extended scene, in simple triple meter, with phrases that overlap between the voice and the orchestra, and the basso ostinato in a descending chromatic pattern, a well-

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28 Rosand, 285.
29 "Vaghe pupille, non piangete, no."
30 Schmidgall, 50.
established Baroque lament procedure. There has been another dramatic change in the tempo, along with the return to the minor mode. Then, just as suddenly, we are back in the Gavotte, to complete the text of the A section as laid out by the librettist. This alternation between dance and lament, or dirge, appropriate enough in Hell, is one of the 'rudest' shocks in the scene thus far, particularly if the singer and director conspire to have Orlando dance a Gavotte with the creatures of his own imagination. While Hicks has indicated that there is "little opportunity for vocal embellishment"\textsuperscript{31} in the course of the rondo, we will of course ornament, and the repeated sections of the Gavotte give the singer the opportunity to vary the affect of the repeats in the context of the material which is to follow.

The B section of the text, lines 30 - 34, is set by Handel as a typical rage aria of the period, and it is almost the only point in the scene where four lines of the libretto are allowed to go by without an emotional shift. It is as though Handel had decided to allow Orlando to give full vent to his fury at last. This rage is every bit as intense as the melancholy that it rises out of, and, as already indicated, it is in the same key as the lament, reinforcing the schizophrenic nature of Orlando's nature. It seems to be the final culmination of Orlando's madness.

But Handel adds a final, dramatic touch. Instead of maintaining the momentum of rage to the end, he introduces one further, unexpected contrast, setting the final line of B ("yes") to the music of the opening line of A ("no"), which then lends its thematic material to the closing ritornello. The mad Orlando evidently cannot distinguish between yes and no. The result, in spite of the form and meaning of the text, is a kind of musical da capo (or rondo).\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{31} Handel, \textit{Orlando}, Christopher Hogwood and The Academy of Ancient Music, Editions de L'Oiseau-Lyre BA 928.

\textsuperscript{32} Rosand, 286.
As a director, I find this final twist is indicative of the genius with which Handel has musically outlined Orlando’s character.

It is now necessary to make some decisions, based on the analysis. Jorgens, it will be remembered, asked, “Where do we draw the line between murderous rage and insanity?” Is Orlando insane? From the preceding pages it will be obvious that I believe that Handel has provided an answer, and that answer is a resounding, “Yes.” Is he the ‘Hero/Warrior’ of the Ariosto original, or simply an insanely jealous man? The answer to that question must obviously be the latter. Yet within madness there are degrees, and before we can proceed we must decide on the degree of madness that we will attempt to portray. Does Orlando clearly see himself in hell; does he fear the approach of Cerbero; does he dance his Gavotte with his hallucinogenic companions? I think Handel has presented us with all the resources we need to say “Yes” to all of these questions, and so I cast my lot, as I believe Handel did, with madness of the first order. Small wonder then that Senesino balked at the challenge. For a singer with, apparently, limited talent as an actor, the task of portraying this character, and in particular, this scene, must have seemed insurmountable. If our modern production is to be more successful than the original we must now move on to examine the resources that the Eighteenth-century singers had at their disposal to portray this depth of emotion.

33 Jorgens, 62.
CHAPTER THREE

ACTING TECHNIQUE

Fear, violent and sudden, opens very wide the eyes and mouth; shortens the nose; draws down the eyebrows; gives the countenance an air of wildness; covers it with deadly paleness; draws back the elbows parallel with the sides; lifts up the open hands, the fingers together, to the height of the breast, so that the palms face the dreadful objects as shields opposed against it. One foot is drawn back behind the other, so that the body seems shrinking from the danger, and putting itself in the best posture for flight.34

These are the words of an anonymous author of an Eighteenth-century pamphlet called The Art of Speaking.35 Since through analysis of the score I have decided that Orlando’s reaction on stepping from Charon’s boat will be one of fear, and I have further decided that we should observe eighteenth-century practice, is this the picture we are to have in our minds of the staged action? It is all too easy to protest that the description rendered here—and it comes from a pamphlet published in 1784, after the celebrated reforms introduced by Garrick to ‘naturalise’ action on stage—is indicative of nothing less, to a twentieth-century audience, than caricature. Colley Cibber’s picture of Senesino’s predecessor in London, the castrato Nicolini, who was considered by his contemporaries to have a convincing stage presence, complicates our understanding of eighteenth-century acting:

There is scarce a beautiful Posture, in an old Statue, which he does not plant himself in, as the different Circumstances of the

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35 Barnett (51) holds that the author of this passage may be the English actor John Walker.
story give occasion for it.36

It is small wonder that scholars as eminent as Winton Dean and Peter Kivy maintain that operatic acting at this time must surely have been a static affair, as those statues on stage ‘pose, and sing’. Clearly we need to reexamine what seems a popular misconception of the limitations of operatic acting in this period, in the light of eighteenth-century evidence, if we are to successfully stage Orlando’s ‘Mad Scene’.

I would offer the following analogy as a starting point for this reconsideration. The last baseball game I attended featured a ball returned rather forcibly to the pitcher, and that man’s reaction bears examination. He leaned back out of the way, weight on the back foot, hands up to defend himself from the ball, his face a picture of apprehension and anticipated pain, adrenalin pumping to run, but with no time to do so. This description closely parallels the Eighteenth-century picture of ‘fear’, and yet there was no hint of caricature in this pose, I suppose because it did not last very long. The ball hit him, and all the reasons for the posture were fulfilled. So it is with the description by our unknown author at the beginning of this chapter. If taken and held, it becomes a caricature, as would the depiction of any strong emotional state which is rendered static. If assumed for a purpose, and abandoned when that purpose has been served, as part of a fluid unity, it has the potential to become as truthful as the pitcher’s reaction to his real-life circumstances. Of course there were static moments on the stage of Handel’s operas. There are whole treatises in the eighteenth-century dedicated to adopting an attitude, or assuming a beautiful posture and allowing the hands,

36 Schmidgall, 58.
and the arms to speak the text in gesture. As well, most directors would agree that moments of introspection suffer badly from extraneous motion, regardless of time period, but with this scene Handel has moved away from both quietude, and long sections of da capo arias containing only one affect. Gary Schmidgall states it concisely:

It would play too easily into the hands of anti-Handelians to say that his finest arias represent “stop” motion, or that his operas betray that staid inertness of a picture gallery. Handel’s pictures are emphatically speaking and moving ones. When the plot becomes stationary in a Handel opera, the characters begin to move or be moved in their own emotional spheres. It is excessively literal-minded to consider Handel’s arias—where everything but the plot moves—merely as static episodes.

This emotional movement is the crucial issue, and it speaks to the necessity of joining of the interior monologue to the exterior action.

If we are to make true sense of this ‘art’ of operatic acting, we must examine, not only what it seems to be, based on the wordy and somewhat cryptic eighteenth-century descriptions, but also what it can ideally become. Of course it is going to be larger than life. Since the characters sing everything, the operatic actor’s art is removed from everyday life. In our own day, operatic acting features gesture on a grand scale because of the need to reach to the back of a house that can seat two to three thousand people. In Handel’s day the house might not be that large—Covent Garden, in it’s original form, was a ‘modest’ sized 1300-1400 seats. As well, it was lit by candles, and the ‘house lights’, also candles, were left lit so that the audience would be able to read the libretto. Here too, in the smoke and the dim light,

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38 Schmidgall, 43.
the gesture must perforce be larger than life. However, rather than assume caricature, we must expect the action to fit the circumstances, every bit as much as Peter Brook must tailor his direction to the venue in which his performers are trying to communicate his ideas to the audience. Once again we are faced with the task, not of resurrecting the original performance, but of striving for the best performance of a Baroque opera. In fitting our staging to the space that we will use, it becomes necessary to adapt the staging practice to that space. The danger is stopping the flow of action, and thereby turning that which is perhaps large of necessity, into something that is caricature out of lack of skill. As I have already intimated, it may have been lack of skill that limited Senesino’s performance, rather than limits imposed by the opera, and this brings to another salient issue.

Today, as in the eighteenth-century, it is important to be wary of the assumption that he who has the best voice has the acting talent as well. One thinks of Clive Barnes’ review of Luciano Pavarotti, in which, to paraphrase, he stated that Mr. Pavarotti never once stepped out of character, largely because he never stepped into it. The difference here is that no one is holding Pavarotti up as the paragon of operatic acting, while Senesino’s performance, as the original, has been seen as the ‘proper’ performance to emulate. Further, neither Senesino’s ‘bad posturing’, nor Nicolini’s ‘beautiful posturing’ will hold up in a scene as dynamic and fluid as that which Handel has presented at the end of Act II. As I have stated above, Handel has moved well beyond the static scene, and we must move with him if we are to succeed where the original performance apparently failed. If we are to elevate that

40 This story may be apocryphal, but it has certainly become part of popular opera lore. Mr. Barnes is alleged to have made the comment about Mr. Pavarotti in the role of Radames in a Met production of Aida.
original performance we will need to examine the foundation of eighteenth-century acting technique.

Dene Barnett, in his exhaustive work on eighteenth-century acting technique says, in his introduction:

The detailed picture of 18th century acting which emerges from the descriptions by actors, teachers and dramaturges of the time, reveals an art of gesture which was highly articulate and capable of both Baroque intensity and grandeur, and the legendary subtleties of body language. . . The 18th century art of gesture used a vocabulary of basic gestures, each with an individual meaning known to all in advance, and all performed in accordance with given techniques and precepts of style.41

If we assume this to be true, and I believe that the evidence assembled, not only by Mr. Barnett, indicates that it is true, then we have a powerful tool at our disposal. We also have a responsibility to observe the use of gesture in our modern production, since it is presumably a part of the tradition for which Handel wrote. Barnett asserts:

To act with the verse of Racine or the music of Rameau (or Handel) without these qualities (of gesture) would have resulted in a violent dissonance in a work of art which was seen on stage as well as heard.42

From a purely practical standpoint, such gesture gave the eighteenth-century actor a means of showing his audience the sub-text at the same time as the spoken word. We are all familiar with the art of the film actor today, whose mouth may say one thing, while the eyes, huge on the screen

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42 Barnett, 7.
43 The actor’s ‘sub-text’ is his thought process within the scene. The famous ‘balcony scene’ from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* will be remarkably different in emotional content if, for instance, the actress plays only the obvious sub-text of “Romeo, I love you”, as compared to the riskier, but infinitely more interesting, “Romeo, you idiot! How could you be born with that name? Do you have any IDEA how upset my father is going to be when he finds out about this?” For the actor, the sub-text, as much as the text, defines the scene.
before us, clearly say something else. The eighteenth-century actor was very aware of the power of the eyes as an expressive medium, but must equally have been aware that the eyes could not have been seen well in the dim light and smoke of the theatre. To be able to say one thing and indicate another, or to colour a gesture by allowing the right hand to reflect the text, while the left subtly denies it, is a power not to be taken lightly. There is, embodied here, a related issue of some interest. If the art of gesture was as universal as Mr. Barnett proposes, then the eighteenth-century audience had at its disposal a non-verbal source of communication that could clarify the action of a foreign language stage work almost as much as the ubiquitous surtitles of the modern operatic stage. The question that we must answer is whether this presumably forgotten art can have any validity in the modern theatre.

It will come as no surprise at this juncture that I believe there to be a fundamental purpose in adhering to some form of eighteenth-century gesture in the performance of these works. Since we are concerned with what it essentially historic performance practice, the ‘style’ of delivery must be tied to the ‘style’ of the music. It is for us to decide only on the nature and the degree of gesture that we will apply to our staging of the Mad Scene. Barnett delineates three broad types of gesture in his book, the gestures of indication, imitation, and expression. Of these, the first two categories have changed little since the eighteenth-century. We still point to indicate things on stage, or the direction of an action. We still gesture with our hands and arms to indicate how big or small an object might be, or to imitate an action that has taken place. In this, art imitates life, for the conversation of the street holds countless examples of these types of gestures. What will be foreign to us is

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44 Barnett, 26-37.
the notion of a set of codified postures expressive of emotion. Here Barnett describes in some detail ten basic gestures, those of grief, surprise, terror, anger, contempt, jealousy, aversion of refusal, disparagement, shame, and welcome, gestures that are specific, not only to the body as a whole, but carry through to very specific positions of the fingers. These gestures will be fully described later in this paper, but what is clear from this list is that the emotional states that Orlando must pass through in the performance of the Mad Scene are well represented here. What is perhaps not so clear is how we move from a series of pictures found in Lebrun or Jelgerhuis\textsuperscript{45} to a living action.

The key will be found in Handel’s treatment of a musical language of madness. It will be remembered that I have postulated that, while the libretto itself might suggest madness as a possibility, Handel’s rapid alteration of emotional states in the music, and the non-sequitur nature of those states combine to make ‘madness’ our primary objective as director and actor. It is the irrational that disturbs, and as soon as we remove the connections between the emotive states, exactly as Handel has with the music, we define the action of madness. It will also be remembered that Barnett specified that the gestures were “all performed in accordance with given techniques and precepts of style”.\textsuperscript{46}

Along with the descriptions of the basic gestures and their meanings, the contemporary sources gave techniques for their performance which ensured that they were always elegant—ceremonious or simple, epic or plain, and performed with Baroque grandeur or subtle delicacy, to match the text which they

\textsuperscript{45} Charles Lebrun was a court painter to Louis XIV, whose drawings representing facial and bodily characteristics of the various passions served as a point of reference for many Eighteenth-century acting treatises. Johannes Jelgerhuis was an eminent Dutch tragedian and teacher in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. See Barnett.

\textsuperscript{46} Barnett, 7.
complimented.47

Remove the elegance, the sense of rightness of a pairing of gesture and text, and you further destroy sense, thereby enforcing a perception of madness. To give one specific example, Jelgerhuis says:

Grief, weeping, the shedding of tears, are for the stage actor a matter of consideration, of importance, because weeping is a compassionate and serious mood; as against that, crying, howling are ridiculous. We must keep these two apart.48

If we add ‘ridiculous’ howling to this character, the primo uomo of the opera, who would normally be a character of noble sentiment, we have destroyed the natural order. It is small wonder that Senesino, who had spent a theatrical lifetime with these conventions, would find the portrayal of their opposites so difficult. It is also easy to see why he might think that he was, along with his entire art, being mocked.

We are left, then, with the task of assigning emotive states, as Barnett describes them by gesture, to the various sections of the scene. In this we will strive, not for transition between states, but for the greatest contrast between them. A detailed description of the gestural action will be saved for the fifth chapter of this document, where the action to be realised on the stage will be discussed in all of its aspects, as a unity of music, gesture and stagecraft. For the moment I would like simply to lay out a plan for the scene, using only the ‘basic gestures’ outlined by Barnett. It is here that directorial choices come into play, and my subjective interpretation of the scene begins. As the director I begin by looking for shadings that will enhance or increase those things that I see as the intent of the composer. The opening of the recitative begins for me then, not with anger, but with disdain and disparagement. The

47 Barnett, 19.
48 Barnett, 39.
disdain, in this case in measures 1 - 4, is directed against the spirits who have fled Orlando's anger, bearing Angelica with them. The anger comes very quickly, however, with the change of orchestral accompaniment at measure 5, and leaves, just as suddenly, to collapse into grief in the *andante* of measure 10. A relatively subtle shift to shame occurs as Orlando reflects on his own state—"Sono lo spirto mio da me diviso"—with a return to grief to complete the text of line 9, "Varcar là giù ne'regni del cordoglio."

To this point, while the shifts in emotive state have been rapid, there is little that would cause discomfort to our eighteenth-century actor/singer. This changes with the next section of music. I would have Orlando in a welcoming posture for the appearance of Charon's boat, giving way to surprise in the second measure of 5/8 to emphasise the broken text as the boat rocks under him. This is also a directorial choice. The surprise of measure 23 is shown in the stage action, which prefigures the musical surprise of an abrupt switch in the orchestra at measure 25, allowing both stage and musical actions to reinforce each other. Orlando returns to the posture of welcome at the sight of Pluto's smoking countenance. The reason is quite simple. In no case, of all the crossings of the Styx in mythology, even those willingly undertaken, as say, by Orpheus, can I think of any that were undertaken with joy. To put a welcoming smile on Orlando's face at this juncture is to confuse the natural order. Combined with the low comedy of the crossing, the contrast to terror for the beginning of the *andante* of measure 31 is made all the more evident. The *andante* goes by quickly, with music that stays uniform in style, and I propose to leave terror as the operative stance throughout these five lines of text. The object will be to make that terror ever bigger through each repetition of text and music, to the point that Orlando is
literally grovelling on the floor by the end of the arioso. The abrupt shift to anger as the recitative reasserts itself is made all the more jarring by this action, particularly as it will last only two lines of text before Orlando lapses into a petulant jealousy at the sight of Medoro in Proserpina’s arms. The adagio signals a return to grief at the sight of Proserpina’s tears, grief which is mingled with resignation over the last lines of the text, “Vien meno il mio furore...”.

The opening lines of the rondo provide us with another opportunity to jar the audience’s senses, and since sharp contrast is the aim of the staging, I believe the lines should be used for that effect. If we allow Orlando to sink to his knees in the final pose of grief before the Gavotte begins, we can have him jump up, in the appearance of a court jester, and dance a gavotte to ‘cheer up’ his beloved Proserpina. The inappropriate nature of the action, devoid of text, serves to confirm Orlando’s madness. When the text is taken into account, the madness is all the more apparent. The lapse back into grief for the next two lines of text merely corroborate the impression of madness, as does the return to the dance at measure 108. This dance will need a more manic quality because, for once in this scene, it is desirable that the transition to the rage that is the action of the second four lines of the text of the rondo be established, beginning at measure 120. This rage begins strongly, and builds to a fever pitch, emphasising the ridiculous ‘howling’ that Jelgerhuis commented on, as the final text, “Ne calma il mio furor,” is approached. Once again Handel returns to the dance, but the director can effect another change in mood. Where the first gavotte was jolly, and the second built energy toward rage, the last appearance of the gavotte in this staging will require the actor to portray something akin to a broken doll. The last section
of the rage has spent Orlando, and this dance, which leads to his attack on the grotto, would seem to require a sense of the pathetic. The assault on the grotto might be analogous to a child at the end of a tantrum, lending a cathartic release for the audience as the figure of Zoroastro suddenly appears to envelop Orlando and take him away.

In this staging plan it will be noticed that I have coloured the gestural emotions with descriptive qualifiers\(^49\). This is necessary for two reasons. The first is so that the reader may get a feel for the director’s underlying emotional plan for the scene. It is important too, so that we have the sense that these gestures are not merely postures, but that they arise out of an emotional truth. As I have stated earlier in the paper, it is my feeling that the difference between between ‘pose and sing’ and true acting is founded in this emotional reality. It is necessary then to ask whether there was any foundation in eighteenth-century acting for such emotional realism, and the answer to that question is very definitely in the affirmative. We must remember that the foundation for gestural acting is rhetoric, and of all the sources quoted in treatises on acting at this time the ultimate authority is Classical Greco-Roman oratory. Charles Gildon, ostensibly quoting conversations with Thomas Betterton, says, regarding grief,

> For if the Grief of another touches you with a real Compassion, Tears will flow from your Eyes, whether you will or not. And this Art of Weeping, as I have read, was study’d with great Application by the Ancient Players.\(^50\)

Gildon develops this move toward emotional reality, a process the modern

\(^{49}\) This is a difficult issue in what should be a paper in formal language. The fact is, directing a production is highly subjective. The dichotomy between the directing and the needs of formality within this structure is one which has troubled me from the outset. I can only hope that I have achieved some sort of balance between the two.

\(^{50}\) Charles Gildon, *The Life of Mr. Charles Betterton, the Late Eminent Tragedian*, (London: Frank Cass; 1st Ed., 1710, reprint, 1970), 68.
method actor would describe as 'emotion memory', as he describes\textsuperscript{51} a
Roman actor who carried the urn with his dead son's ashes on stage in place of a prop urn supposedly containing the ashes of Orestes, in order to better experience the emotion of grief in the scene. It should be remembered here that Betterton was the last of the great, 'heroic' style actors of the turn of the century, an actor described in the following terms.

Betterton's relatively still and upright style had combined with expressive emphasis to create an image of the Restoration hero as reasoning, dignified, and self-possessed.\textsuperscript{52}

Yet this same Betterton is given to have maintained, through his biographer Gildon, that:

The Player therefore, nay, and the Orator too, ought to form in his Mind a very strong Idea of the Subject of his Passion, and then the Passion it self will not fail to follow, rise into the Eyes, and affect both the Sense and Understanding of the Spectators with the same Tenderness.\textsuperscript{53}

This instruction, in somewhat more modern speech, could just as well have been issued in Lee Strasburg's Actor's Studio\textsuperscript{54}. It must be allowed then that, regardless of the ultimate appearance of the action on stage, on this level the eighteenth-century actor's technique parallels that of the modern actor.

It would appear that this style of acting has great potential for us in the staging of Baroque opera in general, and of this scene from Orlando in particular. Rather than seeing eighteenth-century gesture as a limiting force, something external and rigid imposed on the actor, we should recognise it as

\textsuperscript{51} Gildon, 69.
\textsuperscript{52} Leigh Woods, Garrick claims the stage: Acting as Social Emblem in Eighteenth-Century England, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984), 42.
\textsuperscript{53} Gildon, 70.
\textsuperscript{54} Lee Strasburg was the guru of the American style of 'Method Acting', whose pupils included such legendary screen actors as Paul Newman, Marlon Brando and Anthony Quinn. In Strasburg's terminology, Gildon is describing the technique of "Emotion Memory", already mentioned, one of the foundations of the method.
adding an extra dimension to the performance. We have seen in this chapter something of the wealth of detail gesture can bring to a performance. When the actor no longer need to worry about what to do with his hands, the most common complaint of many performers both young and old, that same actor can actually be freed to investigate the emotional truth of the character. At that point the combination of codified form, in gesture, and feeling, in emotional reality, can combine on the operatic stage in a powerful and original performance. The following chapter will examine those elements of Handel's theatre, in the sense of the physical space, which we can bring to our modern production.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE PHYSICAL SPACE

In an examination of 'Physical Space' we will look, not only at the theatre and technical resources of the eighteenth-century English theatre, but at how that might translate in a modern theatre. In so doing, the first thing we must consider is an aspect of Handelian opera that is often overlooked by modern scholars, that of the unique nature of the English theatre building at this time. In most publications the model for the stage is that of the European theatre. Even in the most recent revision of Dean and Knapp's highly regarded volume on Handel's operas, the plates feature one ground plan and one perspective scene55 from the King's Opera House in the Haymarket, while the majority of the settings are taken from Dresden or Venice. Even the perspective setting Dean shows us is a rendering of the scene alone, without reference to its position relative to the stage as a whole. This leads to some erroneous conclusions about the staging of opera in England in Handel's time. Dean says that,

The aim of the entire production was not to create realistic illusion, which would have been impossible when the singers entered between the wings and stood near them, but excite wonder and delight.56

This statement is based on the nature of perspective scene painting, an art form that had been universal in operatic scene painting since the seventeenth-century, and which was certainly active in England in Handel's

56 Dean and Knapp, 25.
time. In moving into the 'scene', or more exactly, the part of the scenery painted in perspective, the actor would destroy the illusion by appearing, within a very short distance on moving upstage, to be as large as the houses. What this presupposes is that the actor entered the scene on a regular basis, something which I do not believe happened in the English theatre, as I shall demonstrate.

In order to understand the distinction between the English and the European stages, let us examine the floor plans of two theatres, shown in Figures 1a and 1b.

Figure 1a (left) Stage plan of SS. Giovanni e Paolo

Figure 1b (above) Theatre elevation of Queen’s Theatre, Haymarket

The floor plan in Figure 1b is that of Queen’s, later King’s Opera House,
while the plan in Figure 1a is that of SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice. I have chosen the Venetian theatre as a point of comparison because in many of the dimensions it is similar to King’s Opera House. At 106’ interior depth and 53’ interior width, King’s is quite close to the 128’5” by 61’4” of the Venetian house. With a width at the proscenium arch of 38’, King’s stage is actually wider by approximately 3 feet, while the Venetian stage, at 72’ is 12’ deeper than that in the English theatre. So we have a shorter, slightly wider stage in London, when contrasted to the Venetian theatre.

What is most interesting to contemplate, however, are the dimensions of the two stages. As we can see, the apron, or area downstage of the proscenium arch is quite narrow in the Venetian house, and the greatest depth of the stage is back of the proscenium arch. This is in marked contrast to the English stage, where there is a full 13’ of apron before the proscenium, an area referred to in England as the ‘platform’. There are of course individual differences in all theatres, but an examination of theatre ground plans from the period will confirm these general differences between English and European stages.57 This would leave us with a depth of perhaps 30’ for the perspective scene, with an area, shown at the back of the floor tracks for scenery flats in the floor plan, for scenes to be ‘revealed’. It must be remembered that in King’s Opera House we are dealing with an English stage that was dedicated to opera production at this time. On stages where opera was offered in repertory with other theatrical forms, the dimensions are even more in favour of the platform. Drury Lane, a reconstruction of which is shown in Figure 2, with a stage depth only slightly larger than King’s

57 For ground plans of theatres, see: William Weaver, The Golden Century of Italian Opera from Rossini to Puccini, (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1980), particularly Plate 5, 17; and François Lesure, L’Opera Classique Français, (Genève: Editions Minkoff, 1972.)
SS. Giovanni e Poalo, in contrast, has a much deeper stage; almost 25% deeper than the English version, and therefore a greater area of perspective, which was used in a very different way from the English theatre. The European model in fact allowed for two different areas of perspective, as can be seen in Figure 3, the scene drawings from Act III of *Il Bellerofonte*, an opera staged in Venice in 1642. The front section of the scene is the acting area, while the rear section is the ‘scene’, and which, even in the artist’s drawing, shows a greater degree of perspective fore-shortening. This places the actors, in a European theatre, up-stage of the proscenium arch, within the
first area of the perspective scene, a perspective deliberately kept more 'life­like' because of the proximity of the actors. The 'acting area' of the English stage, by contrast, is the platform, and this is extended into the 'house', or audience seating area, by virtue of the on-stage boxes, clearly shown in Figure 2, creating what is in fact a version of the thrust stage.

... the English tradition tends to emphasise the extension of the 'house' onto the platform, while at the same time that platform is deliberately kept distinct from the setting... The 'house', the 'platform' and the 'scene' have to be held as distinct in our minds... only so can we aim at an imaginative understanding of what the actors sought to provide and what the audiences received.58

This is a significant difference, and required much greater attention to acting skill on the part of the English singer, and even more so on the part of the European singer transplanted to the English stage. Magical effects are certainly possible on the stage of King's Opera House, and they occur in Orlando, but they must perforce happen in an area behind the singer. In addition, the acoustics of King's were, by all accounts, terrible—barn-like with a long reverberation time,59 virtually forcing the singer to the fore-stage in order to be clearly heard. Further, it was not until the 1790s that Garrick introduced Continental lighting innovations that would permit movement upstage into the scene. As Colin Visser says, these improvements,

... both encouraged and confirmed the retreat behind the proscenium. The entire stage scenic area, not merely the the wings and the forestage, could now be adequately lit... A theatre that had held it's players captive within the circle of the footlights and had set them against, rather than within, the scene was now superseded by one in which the actor or actress could appear within a three-dimensional and practicable setting.60

58 Nicoll, 34.
59 Nicoll, 58.
These improvements, however, did not happen in the English theatre until
60 years after the opening night of *Orlando*. The sketches from *Bellerofonte*, and the opulence they suggest, predates *Orlando* by almost 100 years. Clearly we are dealing with two very different aesthetics.

Greater attention to acting skills is also necessary simply because of what is not explicitly said by these authors. It seems from the available evidence that the platform was kept bare. Winton Dean laments the fact that there is relatively little pictorial evidence of opera staging in England at this time, but what evidence there is points to this conclusion. If we examine the pictures of Covent Garden and King's Opera House, Haymarket that form Figure 4, we can see that the actors are working on an empty stage in front of the proscenium arch. This is not to say that, had a bench been required for a singer to sit on, it would not have been placed on the platform for that purpose. But the sumptuous settings of the European stage were not the English experience. Winton Dean quotes the now famous story of a French traveller's reaction to English opera,

A French traveller, Pierre Jacques Fougeroux, who visited London in the spring of 1728 and saw three operas at the King's Theatre, was not at all impressed by their visual aspect and thought they ought to have been billed as concerts in costume.

Dean deduces from this evidence that the Royal Academy must have been on hard times. What I think is just as likely is that the presentation was not what a French operagoer was accustomed to seeing at an opera house, regardless of the state of the Royal Academy coffers at the time.

This is not to say that technical effects were not available in the English opera theatre. Accounts of court masques staged by Inigo Jones 50 years

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61 Dean, 23.
62 Dean, 26.
63 Visser, 122.
prior to Orlando show a significant level of sophistication in scenic and lighting effects, with a clear indication of lighting through coloured silks to tinge a dawn sky red, complicated reveals, and the use of transparencies, something the modern designer would call scrim-cloths, which appeared opaque when lit from the front and transparent when lit from behind. As well the English stage separation of the scene and platform would be advantageous in separating the action of the 'Gods' from those of 'mortals', when the simple act of lowering 'God' halfway up the scene would make the actor portraying the character appear twice life-size. It is also possible to utilise flies just behind the proscenium arch when a distortion of perspective is not desirable, as for instance the curing of Orlando's madness at the end of this opera. It will be recalled that this action is made possible through a cup of potion carried down from the heavens by an eagle surrounded by four genii. Machinery existed, and was in use, which could fly this assembly in from the side of the stage, the eagle perhaps backed by clouds which opened to reveal the genii as the cup descended in the eagle's beak. Whether the assembly flew straight down or came in from the side top, the actors would be able to assume their positions just before the fly, mounting either from a catwalk behind the proscenium arch or from the fly loft, rather than having to be in position from the top of the act. The cave in which Zoroastro appears at the end of the Mad Scene could feature a transparency, split to allow passage of a body, and the change of lighting that reveals the actor in the cave mouth could have be masked by the simple expedient of a pinch of sulphur thrown onto the candles. Thus we get, not only the smoke, but the stench of the supernatural, all in one simple action by a stagehand.

I do not believe that the modern director need limit himself to the
technical resources of the eighteenth-century, any more than I believe we should light the stage with candles in order to achieve historical accuracy. Failing all else, the Fire Marshall would close the theatre if we were to try to light the scene in that manner, unless we should happen to be staging our production at the Drottningholm Court Theatre. The bare platform, on the other hand, offers us a real benefit in the staging of the Mad Scene. The action of this scene, after all, happens in Orlando’s mind, not in reality. If we wish to bow to modern expectation and place a few rocks and bushes on the platform to compliment the scene behind the acting area, we should feel at liberty to do so, just as modern theatre lighting will substitute for the unnatural effect of the footlights of the eighteenth-century practice, but it is not strictly necessary. In this scene it is merely necessary for the singer/actor to see quite clearly something the audience knows is not there. The eighteenth-century scenic designer had at his disposal all of the tools necessary to effect the multiple changes of scene required in this opera, and had as well, in the nature of the English theatre, a wonderful metaphor for the bleakness in which Orlando's madness takes place. I believe we would be wise to make use of the eighteenth-century English stage for all of the things that it can give us as we move to the next chapter, the realisation on stage today of the Mad Scene from Handel's Orlando.
CHAPTER FIVE
REALISATION

We have now reached the point in this paper where it is necessary to tie together the ideas generated by musical and textual analysis, consideration of acting technique and stagecraft, and present a possible version of the Mad Scene from Handel's Orlando. Clearly this will represent only one of a multitude of possibilities in a modern staging of this scene, even were we to consider only our operating premise that historical performance practice is an important facet of the production. But before we can proceed there are still some questions that a modern director must ask before the first rehearsal.

The first issue that must be dealt with is the casting of Orlando. Obviously one would not have a castrated male singer with a mezzo-soprano voice to cast into the title role, but there exists some direction from Handel as to the logical choice of substitute. For the modern director, one of the choices is to cast a male singer, a baritone, and have the role sung down an octave from the original pitch. This was the prevalent practice in the Halle productions of Handel operas earlier in this century\(^\text{64}\), but never a practice that Handel would have adopted. We could also cast a female singer in a pants role and maintain the pitch as written. The modern director has the option of the counter-tenor, but the tessitura of this part as written makes

\(^{64}\) Halle, Handel's birth place, instituted a festival to revive his works in the early years of this century. The opera productions actually took place at Göttingen, directed by Oskar Hagen. Hagen's productions did not, however, seek to 'restore' Handel's works, which had not been performed since 1745. He sought rather to 'update' Handel, in order to make him more acceptable to the tastes of an audience more comfortable with post-Wagnerian Romanticism. In order to do this, Hagan cut vast quantities of recitative, eliminated the 'B' sections and da capos of the arias, put tenors and baritones in the roles previously sung by castrati, and rescored much of the orchestration. As might be imagined, little of Handel's original conception remained.
that a less than optimal alternative. Again, it was not an option exercised by Handel in any case, for the obvious reason that the castrato voice was available to him. The choice of substituting a woman for a castrato was, however, an option available to Handel, and one he used at various times, including April of 1720, casting Margherita Durastanti in the role of Radamisto as he awaited the arrival of Senesino as a member of the Royal Academy company. If further evidence is required, the role of Medoro in the original production of Orlando was taken by Francesca Bertolli, confirming Handel's use of female singers in travesty roles. It would appear that the clear choice for the role of Orlando would be a mezzo-soprano.

The next question the director must answer is that of the character of Orlando. Is Orlando to be presented as a tragic madman, or does this role contain elements of both tragedy and comedy? The question has been asked earlier in this paper whether the entire opera might be seen as a satire on the Italian opera seria, and other authors quoted here have questioned whether Senesino himself might have been lampooned by Handel. What is to be our attitude to these questions, and how might that affect the staging of the Mad Scene? The evidence for the entire work being a satire of the operatic genre can be found in the opera itself, and we need look no further than the 'healing' of Orlando's madness to find it. As already mentioned, the healing takes an extended form in the version by Handel and his librettist, involving a fairly complicated stage business, and new music to accompany it. Furthermore, it is accomplished by a character unique to Handel's version of the opera, Zoroastro. Zoroastro does appear in the Ariosto original, but in the negative sense of being a myth, rather than a living character. In Canto XXXI we read the following:
A wicked, poisonous wound is jealousy, against which lotions, poultices, incantations, wizard’s symbols are unavailing; useless, too, the constant study of benignant stars or all the magic learnt by its inventor, Zoroaster.65

Aside from this reference, Zoroastro does not appear in the original poem. In the Handel opera, however, this character has a major role to play, and he does so through the use of magic, magic that saves Angelica and Medoro from Orlando’s fury, and which saves Orlando from madness. As Strohm points out, referring to the quote cited above,

It is Zoroastro who does exactly this [heals Orlando of his madness] (and with magic liquor at that), saving Orlando from ‘death in desperation’. Whoever introduced Zoroastro into the libretto did this on purpose and after a careful reading of the cited stanza.66

Why would it have been necessary to step outside of the sense of the original poem? Is there the necessity of a bass role because of the makeup of the company? If so, why remove the character of Zerlino? Surely this could be the bass role, and in so doing remain within the bounds of the Ariosto original. Is the magic element necessary for the salvation of Angelica and Medoro? In the Capece libretto the salvation is accomplished without a Deus ex machina of the magnitude involved in the Handel opera, and in the original poem Angelica and Medoro have long since exited the scene and are uninvolved, either in Orlando’s madness, or in its cure. Of all the possible explanations, when the manifestation of the madness of Orlando is taken into account, satire, the use of ridicule in exposing folly, is the one which comes consistently to the fore, to this writer at least.

If we then examine the character of Orlando as he moves through the

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66 Strohm, 264.
action of the opera, we find ample reason to play the character as an 'anti-hero', to use Dean's term. Our first encounter with Orlando shows him, in marked contrast to Zoroastro's contemplation of the heavens, trying to decide between duty and sensuality, and clearly, from Zoroastro's attempts to influence the decision, making the wrong choice. From the moment of his first appearance on stage then, Orlando is portrayed as something less than an heroic character. As we have seen, his madness is brought on, not by the judgment of the gods as in the original poem, but by jealousy, that all too frail human ailment, and his actions in madness have been given moments which most resemble low comedy. Even after he is healed of his madness, Orlando's response to the outcome of his actions is to kill himself rather than shoulder his responsibilities in a truly heroic fashion. It is only when he is made aware that Zoroastro's magical intervention has saved Medoro that Orlando can proclaim some sort of victory over his own emotions.

This capsule comment on the character of Orlando may seem severe, but it can be demonstrated throughout the score. From the languid and sensual opening arioso, "Stimulato dalla gloria" through the almost bravura rejection of Mars for Eros in "Non fu gia men forte Alcide", Handel presents us with a non-heroic 'Hero'. In the final scene of the opera each of the characters must plead with Orlando before he retreats from the edge of the precipice, and his acknowledgement of Mars, "Vince in canti", sounds almost apologetic in Handel's hands. The very dichotomy between text and music in this aria would trouble even a seasoned character actor. How an actor of Senesino's apparently limited ability would approach the aria is beyond comprehension. It is not until the release into the final, relatively short ensemble that Handel gives over to heroic music. This permits significant
licence in the treatment of the character on stage. We are able to portray the man, not the hero, and as with most men whose lives mix the foolish with the tragic, the presentation will show a character with feet, if not of clay, than at least firmly fixed in the clay.

The Mad Scene is the pinnacle of Ariosto's "dance of folly"^{67}, and we must take the opportunity to carry Orlando over the top of his own folly. It is exactly here that the tragedy and the comedy that combine to define Orlando's character most clearly mix. For this staging the mixture can best be shown by emphasising a dichotomy evident in Orlando, the struggle between the child and the man. The satire and ridicule is directed toward the 'Hero', and in a manner far more subtle then that found in Gay's *Beggar's Opera*. This points to a change in the entire process of Handel's operatic writing. Not Senesino, but the tradition he represented is called into question, and the calling is effected by the simple expedient of moving past the limits imposed by the *opera seria* form. If we see this as the satire that seems to lie at the heart of the drama, we will be better able to carry forward our perceptions of the composer and librettist's intentions.

Let us move then to the physical action on the stage. We will assume, based on our examination of the stage in Handel's time, that Angelica has been carried off to the heavens upstage of the acting area, and for the sake of expedience, we will say centrestage. This is simply to give a neutral, upstage centre starting point for the Mad Scene. As the music of the scene begins Orlando will still be facing upstage, the direction of the last action of the previous scene. It will be recalled that I had specified disparagement as the opening gestural stance for the first line of text. This creates a problem with

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^{67} Schmidgall, 50.
the opening, since the gestural stance that Barnett describes is subtle, at least to a modern audience.

To gesture towards a person, place or object with the left hand was for many centuries a mark of disparagement or obloquy. This strict rule made such use of the left hand one of the least ambiguous and most readily intelligible of all the expressive gestures.68

Clearly the practice of many centuries has no real meaning today, and yet, if we combine a dismissive left hand gesture with a physical action that moves us through the stances shown in the illustrations of Figure 5 for Contempt and Scorn we will pay due respect to the conventions of the eighteenth century. If the modern director exercises his prerogative to embellish and

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68 Barnett, 62.
instructs the actor to assume the mental image of a ten year old boy on the school playground yelling, "You and whose army?!?", our modern audience will be left in no doubt of the character's intentions. The instruction to evoke a young boy is quite deliberate on my part, given my feeling about the dichotomy of Orlando's character, that being a struggle between childishness and duty. Even were this not the case, the emotions of the young seem much stronger and far quicker to change than those of the mature adult. Since Handel has given us strong, quick emotions, and since childish behaviour is inappropriate for a grown man, we will exploit this childishness in Orlando to further suggest his madness.

Our next gestural stance is to be anger, and here we will modify the stance to that suggested for jealous rage, as seen to Figure 6. Throughout this

![Jealous Rage](image1)

![Painful Recollection](image2)

Figure 6: Jealous Rage  Figure 7: Painful Recollection
realisation I will attempt to use postures that have come to us from period sources in ways that seem appropriate to me, in order to demonstrate their continuing validity on the stage today. Since Angelica has ascended with the genii, it makes sense for our gesture to be toward the heavens where she was last seen. We have another aid to the actor in Barnett, quoting a period source:

There is the wrath, that horrible passion which taints man, makes him walk up and down, stamping his feet, his hair rising upwards, and with clenched fists and craned neck, looking for revenge, thus wrath is the birth of vengeance.

By blending the restless energy described by Barnett with the pose indicated in the illustration, we can give the actor a visual and a kinesthetic image of the action required on stage. There is a further benefit to this modification of stance, in that it is very much a forthright, adult sort of posture, and the contrast between it and the childishness we have elected to portray in the first four measures immediately sets for the audience the irrationality of Orlando's behaviour.

Up to this point the action has all been straight up and into the house, delivered forcefully downstage centre. With the change to the andante of measure 10 we have the opportunity to alter the picture completely, and we will do so by allowing the posture to drop, and the actor to wander, rather than move with purpose, to stage left, and somewhat upstage in a diagonal cross away from the audience. As any actor or director can attest, this movement, away from the house and with lack of focus, robs an actor of energy on stage, and this breaking of the focus is exactly the desired attitude at

69 These sketches show actors of both genders, in a variety of costumes and differing ages. Obviously these details are unimportant, and impossible to duplicate with one actor in one scene. It is merely the stance that will be utilised.

70 Barnett, 54.
this point. The posture now assumes that of ‘Painful recollection’ in Figure 7, the face sags in the classic image of grief, also shown in Figure 7, and the emotional attitude returns to the child. In fact, if the actor can convincingly kick an imaginary stone across the stage as she wanders, the image of the child who failed to get his own way becomes almost palpable. As we move into shame the wandering stops, with the actor on mid-stage left, and the posture sinks even lower into itself, the face held somewhat away from the audience, toward the left side of the house. The sustained chords of the orchestra will become pianissimo so that the singer’s line can remain clear, and at the end of the phase the head can come around to face the audience, setting up one of the greatest emotional contrasts in the opening recitative.

Suddenly Orlando sees Charon’s boat, and his entire face and form

Figure 8: Hearty Welcome and Joy
change. Just as a wandering motion to stage left is a weak action, so a forceful stride from stage left to right (audience right to left) is one of the strongest actions available to the director. Since a Western audience reads the printed page from left to right, an action the moves against this left-right orientation is very strong in the theatre, as it confronts our eye. I have specified a welcoming gesture for the approach to hell, as an emotional stance that counters our usual perception of death as something to be avoided. As the actor’s head comes around to centre at the end of measure 18 and she sees Charon’s boat approaching, the face lifts into a smile, the body straightens into a posture that contains aspects of ‘Joy’ and ‘Hearty welcome’, as shown in Figure 8, and the actor crosses eagerly to down-right of centre. This open welcoming posture is maintained through to measure 30, although facial elements of surprise and a body struggling to hold to this posture will be the elements used by the actor to suggest the rocking of the boat. This fight against the rocking action will also serve to move the actor back to centre stage for the abrupt shift to terror at measure 31.

This moment will one of the greatest tests for our actor, since the postures for ‘Horror’ and ‘Terror’ shown in Figure 9 are for us the gestures of melodrama, in its least flattering sense, and the actor must strive to work against the audience’s preconceived notion about these poses. It is only through careful attention to a realistic emotional response to Orlando’s vision that this can be achieved, and here the actor will need to summon up her own vision of hell in order to make this passage work. The physical action is relatively simple: a gradual retreat, backing up stage with the face forward, horror giving way to terror, and terror increasing until the actor falls back to a seated position, somewhat like of the portrait of Kemble as Richard
III in Figure 10. The actor's work will rest in making this action an emotional reality. As John Hill wrote,

Would the tragedian strongly impress the illusion of his performance upon us, he must first impress it as strongly upon himself; he must feel every thing strongly, that he would have his audience feel: in order to his utmost success, it is necessary that he imagine himself to be, nay that he for the first time really is, the person he represents.71

Figure 9: Horror and Terror

Needless to say, our actor must find a way to accomplish the action in a manner that permits a continuation of song, but if this change to terror can be effectively managed, then the subsequent move to childish anger, using the posture of 'Anger' in Figure 11, will once again point to the instability of

Orlando's mind. Anger then progresses to the jealous rage we have already seen, and changes just as quickly to grief in the *adagio* of measure 56. Just before the full cadence of measure 62, we will have the actor sink to her knees in an abject position of grief, a grief much more mature than the stone-kicking child of measure 13, or the angry child of the immediately previous section.

At this point in the score, Handel has presented an extreme form of contrast, and if the actor is agile enough, the ideal action here would be a leap directly from knees to feet\(^7\) to begin the Gavotte in measure 63. If this is not possible then the actor must struggle to her feet during the rests of measure

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\(^7\) I must confess at this point that, while there was a time not too many years ago when I would not have thought twice about attempting such an action myself, I would be loath to try it today. Nor frankly would most of the singers I might engage to undertake the role be thrilled about the direction. Discretion will likely, and sadly, force the use of the second option.
62, and the orchestra must wait for this action to be complete before proceeding. In any event, the change of tempo, the change of attitude from penitent to clown, and the dance must begin in one motion, taking the audience completely by surprise. The complete incongruity of this action will convince the audience that the character is mad, if there was any doubt left up to this point. I have already described (see pages 30-31 above) the through line of this aria, from dance to grief, to manic dance, to anger, to the final 'broken-doll' dance that completes the action of the scene. As previously discussed, the singers' embellishments of the vocal line can be used to excellent effect to vary the emotional content of the repeats of the gavotte, and the particular affect, be it grief or rage, will direct the singer the most appropriate type of ornament within the context of the scene. 73 The demands of the music, especially beginning at measure 129, will dictate that the actor assume an attitude and restrict the action to hands, limiting even the amount of full arm gesture. Here the graceful turn of the wrist in a gesture of grief, contrasted with the fist in anger, can speak with as much force as the full body. What is most important as this point, particularly from the singer's point of view, is that the action does not encroach on the ability to sustain the breath in support of the musical line. There remains only the closing measures of the orchestra to discuss, and for this we must address for a moment the physical stage setting.

While I have not drawn specific attention to this point, it will be noticed that there has been no discussion of stage furniture, nor of properties.

73 I have not dealt extensively in this paper with ornamentation. The scene itself makes ornamentation difficult, and, with the exception of standard techniques of added appogiaturas in the recitative, almost unnecessary. As well, ornamentation is very much case specific, and would vary, not only production to production, but singer to singer. For this reason the application of ornamentation is left to the imagination and disgression of the individual performer.
that the actor has been using in this scene. Simply stated, there are none. Our actor has been left alone, on the bare platform already discussed, with nothing but her body and her mind to draw on for this portrait of madness. I believe I have shown that it is possible to achieve this goal through use of the resources available to the eighteenth-century actor. But now we reach the moment of exit, and the means by which we effect this exit should also be those of Handel’s stage. Fortunately this is not a problem. I have already discussed the possibility of lighting effects and the use of transparencies, and it is with the aid of these tools that we will complete the scene. In the extreme foreground of the scenic area, immediately behind our bare platform, we will have the grotto referred to in Handel’s stage directions in the score. This grotto’s mouth will be constructed with a transparency, a black scrim covering the entire mouth of the cave, and painted to represent its interior. Further, the scrim will be in two overlapping pieces, allowing for passage through the scrim.

The action of the final Gavotte will find the actor downstage centre, and at the final repeats of the text, “Si, piangete, si”, (m 186) she will sink to her knees, so that the rondo ends with Orlando in the same position as he was just before the rondo began. We have two measures to continue in the collapse, measures 179 and 180, followed by two measures, beginning in measure 181, for Orlando to struggle to feet his feet, resuming a semblance of his earlier rage. This is the orchestral reprise of the music of “non calma il mio furore”, and this is a particularly appropriate musical moment from Orlando’s rage to attempt a resurgence. The staging indication in the score is that he rushes to the cave mouth, and this action takes place at the orchestral reprise of the rage music of the rondo at measure 183. Now comes the
moment of theatre magic, as the light changes, the forestage darkens, the light behind the scrim comes up to reveal Zoroastro, who reaches through the scrim, takes Orlando in his arms, and drags him through the scrim. A little sulphur on the candles inside the cave to create a flash and smoke will mask the movement of the scrim curtain, and we have achieved magic. This entire action takes place in just 4 measures. The lighting reverts to normal, the cave is once again a painted flat, and the orchestra finishes the scene with the Gavotte. In the original production the sound of the full orchestra would have masked the sound of the stage machinery lifting Zoroastro and Orlando, in the former’s “carro”, up into the flies. I have of course no way of knowing exactly how the scene ended in 1733, but I am certain that it would have been in a manner similar to this, given the stage directions of the autograph score. Even if our sophisticated lighting plots and magnesium flash-pots can give us more control over the effect, the operation of the magic has not changed very little from the days of Inigo Jones. It is here that the past and the present merge in our modern theatre setting. An actor, alone on a stage with a mission, and a bit of theatre magic that has not changed in 300 years.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

There are of course many options in dealing with this repertoire. At one end of the spectrum are the Halle productions early in this century which ignored any sense of performance practice, altered the vocal ranges of the characters, cut recitative and da capos, all in the interest of making this music somehow 'accessible' to a modern audience. At the other end of the spectrum are the productions which will allow nothing that cannot be justified in an historical treatise, and for which historical accuracy, such as it understood by the director, is the sole guiding principle. I am the last person to suggest that a specific approach is wrong, since it the very diversity of approach allowed and supported by Handelian opera that is, for me, the measure of its ultimate and timeless genius. I believe, however, that there is a middle ground between these extremes, and it is this line that I have attempted to demonstrate.

This is the process of the Director, and it begins with the music. As we have seen by comparing the Capece and Handel librettos, Handel has already done all the trimming necessary to keep the recitative to a minimum. By a careful examination of the relationships that Handel has given us in the score, we are guided toward an optimum interpretation of both the text and the music. If we can join with that knowledge an appreciation for the operatic medium, as Handel understood it, we will enrich our experience, and so enrich the experience of the audience. In order to do that we do not need to ignore the advances of the modern theatre. Indeed, although not
specifically stated to this point, I would prefer the modern tradition of a dark house and surtitles to the Handelian tradition of a house that is left in light, and an audience noisily flipping through a libretto. As well, my own final design for a full production of Orlando would almost certainly avoid flats painted in perspective, and a cast that always performed in front of the scene. For me this is an unnecessary affectation of a style in which a technical inadequacy, the control of light, limited the ability to use the stage to its full potential. These are issues, however, which are specific to a particular production, and they do not stop here. I have not, for instance, dealt with costume at all in the course of this document, and certainly the choice of costume could drastically affect even the type of gesture the actor would employ in interpreting the scene. It has been my intent to deal with those areas which are not production specific, in order that the comments made here have as wide an application as possible in the mounting of operatic works of the eighteenth-century. The benefits of the bare stage as an actor’s medium, however, is a notion which strikes a responsive chord in me for much of this repertoire, and opens that repertoire to such a wide variety of scenic designs, from three dimensional plastic reality, to geometric levels shaped by light in the style of Adolphe Appia\(^74\), that the repertoire assumes almost limitless potential.

I also believe that we should, within whatever physical style of production we choose to mount, make an effort to revive the language of

\(^74\) Adolphe Appia (1862-1928) was one of the primary shapers of theories of modern nonillusionistic theatrical practice. He was deeply influenced by Richard Wagner’s writings, and outlined, in treatises in 1895 and 1899, his own form of artistic unity, based in his belief that Wagner’s music dramas were not being staged in a manner consistent with Wagner’s theories. His settings made use of multi-functional, three-dimensional units, ramps and platforms, and sought to unify the dramatic concept through strict control of light. In many ways, his use of light is the foundation of modern stage lighting techniques. His legendary settings of the Ring were never understood by Cosima Wagner, and as a result were never used in actual production.
gesture as practised for nearly 300 years. By doing so, we will provide our operatic actors with a resource uniquely suited to period opera production, as well as with a new language of expression. As is the case in acquiring any new language, time must be spent with this language of gesture before any degree of fluency will be achieved, but the potential to enrich our ability to communicate makes all the effort worthwhile. This approach might be called the 'layering' of two widely divergent styles, and its effectiveness questioned on that basis by some directors. However, I believe that such a combination is not only possible, but a deeply enriching method of approach to the staging of the operas of the late Baroque, or indeed of any period. The synthesis of the best of the old, when combined with the potential of the new, has been the guiding principle in this staging of the Mad Scene from Handel's Orlando.


Handel, George Frideric. Orlando, Christopher Hogwood and The Academy of Ancient Music, Editions de L’Oiseau-Lyre BA 928.


APPENDIX A

The Score


Ecco di nuovo le sue foglie, e furioso letto!

Già tra Cer. be.re, già tra Cer. be.re, e già dell'E. re.bo

ogni ter. ri. hi. le quali da su ri. a sent. iene a me, sent. iene a me, sent. iene a me!

già tra Cer. be.re, e già dell'E. re.bo o.gni ter. ri. hi. le aqu. li. da su ri. a
d'ud. da. man-te, nè col.

...ma il mio furor. nò, nò, nò, nò.

col...ma il mio furor. Ma sì, pu. pil-te, sì, sì, pia. ge-te, sì, sì, sì, pu. pil-te, sì,

sì, pia. ge-te, sì, pia. ge-te, sì.

Si getta furiosamente dentro alla grotta che scoppi, vedendosi il mago nel suo carro, che tiene fra le braccia Orlando, e fugge per aria.
Fine dell' Atto Secondo.
APPENDIX B

Capece Libretto

1 La Memoria scolpita; e in me rinovo
2 Quel dolor, che levar mi de la vita.
3 Non ti trovo, e t'ho forse qui vicino
4 Col tuo Drudo novello vai scherzando,
5 E del tradito Orlando
6 Alle lagrime ridi, & a i sospiri;
7 Ma lagrime non son quelle que miri;
8 Del mio vitale humore
9 Sono l'ultime stille,
10 Che mandi agl'occhi il moribondo core:
11 Non Son sospiri, no, questi che il seno
12 Par che lanquendo esali;
13 Amor battendo l'ali
14 Intorno al fuoco suo as questo vento,
15 Perche viva l'ardor nel sen gia spento,
16 Et io piu non son'l/o
17 Poiche l'ingrata di sua man m'ha ucciso;
18 Sono lo spirto mio da me diviso,
19 Non l'ombra, che n'avanza,
20 E sempio a chi in amor pone speranza.
21 Di cambiari con i miei li suoi tormenti.
22 Or sù la stigia barca
23 Di Caronte a dispetto,
24 Gia solco l'onde nere; ecco di Pluto
25 Le affumicate soglie, e l'aro tetto.
26 Già l'ultra Cerbero
27 E già dell'Erebo
28 Ogni terribile
29 Squadra furia
30 Sen viene a me
31 Ma la Fura, che sol mi diè martoro
32 Dov'è? Questa è Medoro.
33 A Proserpina in braccio
34 Vedò che fugge. Or a strapparla io corro.
35 Ah! Proserpina piange!
36 Viem meno il mio furor,
37 Se si piange all'inferno anco d'amore.
38 Vaghe pupille, non piangete, no,
39 Che del pianto ancor nel regno
40 Può in ogn'un destar pietà;
41 Vaghe pupille, non piangete, no,
42 Ma si, pupille, si piangete, si,
43 Che sordo al vosro incanto
44 Ho un core d'adamanto,
45 Ne calma il mio furor.
46 Ma si, pupille, si piangete, si.

Handel's Libretto

1 Ah Stigie larva! Ah scelerati spettri,
2 Che la perfida donna ora ascondete,
3 Perché al mio amor ofese
4 Al mio giusto furor non la rendete?
5 Ah misero e schernito!
6 L'ingrata già m'ha ucciso;
7 Sono lo spirto mio da me diviso;
8 Sono un ombra, e qual ombra adesso io voglio
9 Varcar là giù ne' regni del cordoglio
10 Ecco la Stigia barca.
11 Di Caronte a dispetto
12 Già solco l'onde nere: ecco di Pluto
13 Le affumicate soglie, e l'arso tetto.
14 Già làtra Cerbero
15 E già dell'Erebo
16 Ogni terribile
17 Squadra furia
18 Sen viene a me
19 Ma la Fura, che sol mi diè martoro
20 Dov'è? Questa è Medoro.
21 A Proserpina in braccio
22 Vedò che fugge. Or a strapparla io corro.
23 Ah! Proserpina piange!
24 Viem meno il mio furor,
25 Se si piange all'inferno anco d'amore.
26 Vaghe pupille, non piangete, no,
27 Che del pianto ancor nel regno
28 Può in ogn'un destar pietà;
29 Vaghe pupille, non piangete, no,
30 Ma si, pupille, si piangete, si,
31 Che sordo al vosro incanto
32 Ho un core d'adamanto,
33 Ne calma il mio furor.
34 Ma si, pupille, si piangete, si.

1 Rosand, 269.
2 Handel, 64-72.
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APPENDIX C

Translation of Handel Libretto

1 Ah Stygian worms! Ah impure spectres,
2 Who hide the faithless woman from my sight
3 Why, to my offended love,
4 To my just fury do you not give her up?
5 Ah, miserable and betrayed!
6 The ungrateful one has killed me;
7 I am a spirit divided against myself;
8 I am a shadow, and as a shadow I determine to go
9 Now into the realm of shadow.
10 Here is the Stygian barge.
11 In spite of Charon
12 There I sail the black waves. Here is Pluto's
realm.
13 The smoking steps, the burning head.
14 There howls Cerbero
15 And there the furies,
16 All terrible
17 Squalling furies
18 Surround me.
19 But the fury, which alone torments me
20 Where is it? This is Medoro.
21 With Proserpina in his arms
22 He flees. I would tear his heart apart.
23 Ah! Proserpina weeps.
24 My fury becomes less
25 Since all Hell cries for love.
26 Lovely eyes, no weeping, no.
27 For even in this realm
28 Weeping envokes pity.
29 Lovely eyes, no weeping, no.
30 But yes, eyes, weep, yes.
31 That against all of your incantations
32 I have a heart of adamite
33 Which will not allow my fury to be calmed
34 But yes, eyes, weep, yes.\(^7\)

\(^67\) Translation by current author.