

THE BARITONE VOICE IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES:  
A BRIEF EXAMINATION OF ITS DEVELOPMENT AND ITS USE IN HANDEL'S  
*MESSIAH*

BY

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in The School of Music and the Graduate Faculty of  
the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts.

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Date Defended: 06/08/2016

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## Abstract

Musicians who want to perform Handel's oratorios in the twenty-first century are faced with several choices. One such choice is whether or not to use the baritone voice, and in what way is best to use him. In order to best answer that question, this study first examines the history of the baritone voice type, the historical context of Handel's life and compositional style, and performing practices from the baroque era. It then applies that information to a case study of a representative sample of Handel's solo oratorio literature. Using selections from *Messiah* this study charts the advantages and disadvantages of having a baritone sing the solo parts of *Messiah* rather than the voice part listed, i.e. tenor or bass, in both a modern performance and an historically-informed performance in an attempt to determine whether a baritone should sing the tenor roles or bass roles and in what context. Based on information gathered for the case study, such as the average ranges, tessituras, and vocal demands of the male solo roles in Handel's oratorios, in conjunction with what is known about voices in history as well as the performance practices, traditions, and musical styles established by the time Handel composed *Messiah*, it is my assessment that a twenty-first century baritone can effectively sing the tenor parts of Handel's oratorios when performing at baroque pitch, with dedication to historically accurate performance practices. However, with modern performing forces and pitch levels, the music would be better served if he sings the bass part. Regardless of what role baritones are cast to sing, the vocal demands Handel's music places on the singer in terms of the extensive range and his imaginative text painting, a baritone will likely find the music a challenge well worth pursuing.

There is no shortage of labels for singers in the twenty-first century. There are soprano, alto, tenor, and bass designations, and then numerous subdivisions of each category. This was not the case before the nineteenth century. For male singers who were not falsettists or castrati, composers would only label voice parts as either tenor or bass. This is not to say that before the nineteenth century the other voice types didn't exist; there are several "bass" roles in Handel's and Mozart's operas that better fit what we today call "baritones."<sup>1</sup> Thus, when one chooses to perform an oratorio by Handel he has the option to consider where the baritone voice could be most effective. In order to best answer that question, it is judicious to first examine the history of the baritone voice type, the historical context of Handel's life and compositional style, and performing practices from the baroque era, applying that information to a case study of a representative sample of Handel's solo oratorio literature.

When looking into its history, one will discover that the baritone voice was not a new concept to musicians before the nineteenth century. There are accounts of composers throughout Europe who used the term "baritone" long before it was ever a commonly labeled voice part in a score. In correspondence with Alessandro Striggio, Monteverdi uses the term "baritone" as a means of describing vocal qualities of singers.<sup>2</sup> For example, in the postscript of a letter dated 7 May 1627, Monteverdi gives a recommendation for a singer named Don Giacomo Rapallino who was a priest in the Milan Cathedral: "Here, for chamber music, we have nobody better than Rapallino the Mantuan, whose name is Don Giacomo; he is a priest, but a baritone not a bass. Nevertheless he lets his words be heard clearly, he has something of a trill, some graces, and he

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Miller, *Securing Baritone, Bass-baritone, and Bass Voices* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Alessandro Striggio, was a lutenist, poet, and the Grand Chancellor of Mantua. Claudio Monteverdi, trans. and ed. Denis Stevens, *The Letters of Claudio Monteverdi*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 315-16.

sings boldly. I shall however be on the lookout for a better one.”<sup>3</sup> A month later, in another letter to Striggio, Monteverdi recommends a different singer named Giovanni Battista Bisucci.

Striggio was looking for a new singer because Rapallino was too busy with his duties as a cleric, and therefore not able to sing as often. In letters from 13 and 20 June 1627, Monteverdi provides a recommendation for and a description of Bisucci:

Just now a certain young man [Bisucci] has arrived from Bologna. He is about twenty-four years old, wears long breeches, composes a little, and professes to sing ‘light bass’ parts in chamber music. I have heard him sing a motet of his in church, with a few short runs here and there, little ornaments, with a decent *trillo*: the voice is very pleasing but not too deep. He articulates the words very clearly, his voice goes up in the tenor range very smoothly indeed, and as a singer he is very reliable.<sup>4</sup>

On 20 June 1627 Monteverdi wrote:

He is not a priest: he is a young man of good stature, but dresses in long breeches; he sings with more charm of voice than Rapallino, and more reliably, since he composes a little. Not only does he pronounce his words extremely well, he sings with ornaments very nicely, and has something of a *trillo*. He does not go down too far, nevertheless for chamber and theatrical music he would not, I hope, displease His Highness [Vincenzo II, Seventh Duke of Mantua].<sup>5</sup>

In other correspondence Monteverdi highlighted the need for a singer to be able to blend the different registers of their voice and that it was indeed possible for singers to blend all registers together into one smooth sound if they had the proper training. Monteverdi even compared Bisucci, a “light bass,” to famous tenors of the time such as Francesco Rasi, and Giulio Caccini.<sup>6</sup> Rasi and Caccini, who were “both usually referred to as tenors, had the combined tenor and bass range[s].”<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that a singer who sang light bass was

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<sup>3</sup> Monteverdi and Stevens, *The Letters of Claudio Monteverdi*, 316.

<sup>4</sup> Monteverdi and Stevens, *The Letters of Claudio Monteverdi*, 328.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

<sup>7</sup> H. Wiley Hitchcock, "Caccini's "Other" "Nuove musiche"." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* Vol. 27, no. 3 (Autumn 1974), 452.

compared to self-professed tenors; albeit tenors that were reportedly able to sing both bass and tenor, thus suggesting that in the baroque era there were men with voices that we would call “baritones.”

There is evidence that the term “baritone” was not confined to Italy. In France, Sébastien de Brossard (1655-1730), a French lexicographer, theorist, and composer, published *Dictionnaire de Musique, Contenant une Explication des termes Grecs, Latins, Italiens et François et les plus utilisé dans la Musique*, in Paris in 1703.<sup>8</sup> Here, the term “baritone” is defined as the following: “It is what we call high bass, or Concordant, going up and down. Those who can sing this part can be used high and low as needed.”<sup>9</sup> This would seem to have described a singer who could maintain a smooth transition through the different registers.

In Germany as well, there were examples that validated the term “baritone” as a legitimate voice type. First, Johann Samuel Beyer published a didactic book on singing entitled *Primae lineae musicae vocalis*, where he defined “baritone” in the appendix as “A Bass who is softer than a Bass, clef on the third line.”<sup>10</sup> Figure 1 shows a comparison of male voice types including the tenor, baritone, and bass with their respective ranges.<sup>11</sup> Later, in his German, *Musicalisches Lexicon* (1732), Johann Gottfried Walther defined a “baritone” as, “[a] voice that

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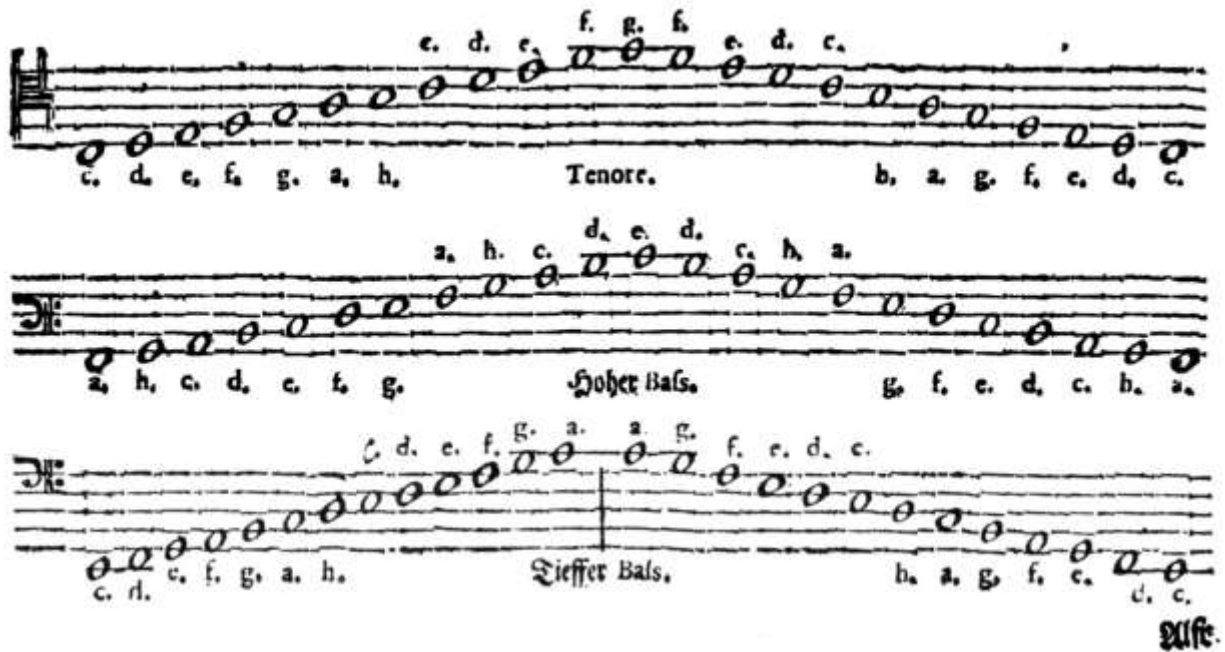
<sup>8</sup> Brossard published the first edition of *Dictionnaire de Musique, Contenant une Explication des termes Grecs, Latins, Italiens et François et les plus utilisé dans la Musique* in 1701. Denis Arnold and Lalage Cochrane. "Brossard, Sébastien de." *Oxford Music Online*. 2007-2016.  
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.www2.lib.ku.edu/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e989> (accessed March 01, 2016)

<sup>9</sup> (Translations provided by the author unless otherwise noted). “C'est ce que nous appelons Basse-Taille, ou Concordant, qui va haut et bas. Ceux qui peuvent chanter cette Partie, peuvent servir de Taille & de Basse en un besoin.” Sébastien de Brossard, *Bariton Dictionnaire de musique, Contenant une Explication des termes Grecs, Latins, Italiens et François et les plus utilisé dans la Musique* (Paris: Christophe Ballard, 1703) .

<sup>10</sup> “Ein Bass weicher das Bass. Zeichen auf der dritten Linea hat.” Johann Samuel Beyer, *Primae lineae musicae vocalis*. (Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1703.) Appendix.

<sup>11</sup> The term baritone is used here because in the aforementioned definition of a baritone in the *Primae lineae musicae vocalis* indicates that the baritone has the clef on the third line of the staff as is the case in the second example.

can sing well in the heights of the tenor, but also have some depths in the bass.”<sup>12</sup> This definition of a “baritone” as a voice with characteristics of both tenors and basses, is still valid in modern times.



**Figure 1** – An excerpt the *Prima lineae musicae vocalis* by Johann Samuel Beyer showing the ranges of a tenor (*Tenore*) from *c* to *g1*; a baritone (*Höher Bass*) from *A* to *e1* and a bass (*Tieffer Bass*) from *C1* to *a*.<sup>13</sup>

There is also evidence that the boundaries dividing the voice parts were not as firm as they are today. While there may not be unquestionable evidence to show that Handel used the term “baritone,” there is much that suggests he was at least familiar with it. Handel used many singers from Venice, as shown by employment records as well as data pertaining to pitch levels and

<sup>12</sup> “[ein] Stimme singen soll, so wohl die höhe des Tenors also auch einige tiefe im Bass haben muss.” Johann Gottfried Walther. *Musicalisches Lexicon* (Leipzig: Wolfgang Deer, 1732).

<sup>13</sup> Beyer, *Prima lineae musicae vocalis*, 6. For the purpose of this discussion middle *c* on the piano will be referred to as *c1*. The *c* one octave above middle *c* is *c2*. The so-called soprano high *c* is two octaves above middle *c* and is therefore *c3*. The *c* one octave below middle *c*, one octave to the left on the piano, will be referred to as a lowercase *c*. The low *c* for the bass, two octaves below middle *c* will be labeled as a uppercase *C*. The *c* three octaves below middle *c* is *C1* and so on. An example would be the dramatic soprano who needs to have a range of *c* to *c3*; or the *g* just below middle *c* up to the *c* two octaves above middle *c*.

tuning systems.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned above, the term “baritone” was common around Venice, and Monteverdi often used it to describe numerous singers from that area. It is possible singers of northern Italy would have likely shared that information with Handel. Additionally, Handel was well educated musically, and his travels brought him in contact with numerous cultures. He traveled as far south as Naples and as far north as Dublin, as well as to Venice, Innsbruck, Berlin, Aix-la-Chapelle, Dresden, and London, among other cities.<sup>15</sup> He was fluent in German, French, Italian and English, and had a working knowledge of Latin.<sup>16</sup> While details of his education in Halle remain meager, we do know that Halle was a “flourishing intellectual center” when Handel was young, and according to early biographers, Handel’s music teacher, Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow, “shewed him the different styles of different nations.”<sup>17</sup> With this kind of education and exposure to music from all over Europe, again it stands to reason that Handel would have been well versed in voice types and would likely have known some “baritones.” But the question remains: Why did he not label these parts “baritone?” The probable answer is that he did write for them, but labeled their parts tenor or bass as was the common practice of the time.<sup>18</sup> It is also likely that while the term “baritone” existed, singers classified themselves as either tenor or bass, since “baritone” was not used often in compositions. This leads to the conclusion that some of Handel’s singers may actually have been what we today would refer to as “baritones,” and not actually tenors or basses.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many European opera theaters use the *Fach* system as a basis for classifying singers. The word *Fach* translates to “category,” or “specialty.”

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<sup>14</sup> Bruce Haynes, *A History of Performing Pitch: The Story of "A"* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2002), 161.

<sup>15</sup> *The Cambridge Handel Encyclopedia*, ed. Annette Landgraf and David Vickers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), s.v. “Handel, George Frideric: 15. Journeys.”

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, “Handel, George Frideric: 14. Languages.”

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, “Handel, George Frideric: 13. Education.”

<sup>18</sup> Richard Miller, *Securing Baritone, Bass-baritone, and Bass Voices*, 5.



A singer's *Fach* not only refers to the vocal category such as soprano, alto, tenor, or bass but also to the subcategory or specific kind of voice. There are over twenty-five different *Fach* classifications.<sup>19</sup> Dr. Pearl Yeadon-McGinnis describes the *Fach* system in her book *The Opera Singer's Career Guide: Understanding the European Fach System*. According to Yeadon-McGinnis there are five tenor classifications, five baritones, and five bass classifications. Each classification has certain qualities that make a singer suitable for certain roles. Because the *Fach* system is more of a subjective art than an empirical science, there are roles that can be sung by multiple *Fachs*. For example, the role of Scarpia in Puccini's *Tosca* is often sung by *Charakterbaritons* (Character Baritones), who are men with "a focused flexible and powerful vocal instrument" capable of singing from *A* to *g1*, as well as *Heldenbaritons* (Dramatic Baritones), who are similar to the character baritones but have a heavier and darker timbre, and a somewhat lower range.<sup>20</sup> Another example of this overlap can be found in the "bass" roles from some of Mozart's operas. Yeadon-McGinnis lists the role of Figaro, in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, as a *Charakterbass* (Character Bass), a singer with "a huge, rich voice, able to sing long dramatic phrases easily over a range from *E* to *f1*."<sup>21</sup> She categorizes the role of Guglielmo in *Così fan Tutte* as a *Lyrischer Bariton* (Lyric Baritone). The lyric baritone has "a smooth, beautiful, [and] flexible voice with a bel canto line and effective top."<sup>22</sup> He is also capable of singing from *B* to *a#1*. Even though the character bass and the lyric baritone possess notably different vocal timbres, weight, and color, but Mozart composed both roles to be premiered by the same man, Francesco Benvenuti. Benvenuti was one of Mozart's favorite singers and has been described

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<sup>19</sup> Pearl Yeadon-McGinnis. *Understanding the European Fach System: The Opera Singer's Career Guide*. Edited by Marith McGinnis Willis (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010), 17-35.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 40-41.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 37-38.

as having “had a round, beautifully full voice, more bass than baritone.”<sup>23</sup> That said, the range of Guglielmo is actually lower and narrower today than it was when Mozart first conceived it. Originally Guglielmo sang the aria “Rivologete a lui lo sguardo,” which is an extended work with an extremely wide range from *G* to *f#1*. Without this aria the overall range for the role of Guglielmo is truncated to *B* to *e1*.<sup>24</sup> The overlap of *Fach* in the roles such as Scarpia as well as Guglielmo demonstrates that even with the twenty-first century drive for classification, there is still room for interpretation of who can sing which roles. There is further evidence that singers who were labeled as one classification sang roles designated as another classification. For example, the singer who premiered the role of Il Conte Almaviva in Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Stephano Mandini, was also known to sing tenor roles including the character of the same name in Paisiello’s *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, among others.<sup>25</sup> Yeadon-McGinnis classifies Mozart’s Il Conte as a Kavalierbariton (Cavalier Baritone), with a range spanning from *A* to *g1* and having “a brilliant voice with warm, beautiful color capable of singing coloratura passages, smooth lyric lines and dramatic passages without effort.”<sup>26</sup>

The fact that singers in the 1700s sang roles we would not expect them to today adds merit to the idea that voices we would consider “baritones” could have been considered tenors at that time. This notion is further supported by a comparison of ranges. Tenors were said to have a range of *c* to *g1* and baritones were able to sing from *A* to *e1*.<sup>27</sup> Modern baritones typically have a range of *B* to *a#1*, which is a semitone higher and lower than what was expected of tenors *circa*

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<sup>23</sup>Christopher Raeburn, "Benucci, Francesco." *Oxford Music Online*. 2007-2016. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/02732> (accessed March 15, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> Brown, Bruce Alan. *W.A. Mozart "Cosi fan tutte"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 36 and 157.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher Raeburn, and Dorothea Link "Mandini: (1) Stefano Mandini." *Oxford Music Online*. 2007-2016. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/17605pg1> (accessed March 16, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> Yeadon-McGinnis, *Understanding the European Fach System*, 38.

<sup>27</sup> Beyer, *Primae lineae musicae vocalis*, 6.

1700, and they typically have easy access to their top notes.<sup>28</sup> Considering these similarities, it should come as little surprise that scholars have stated “tenor in the seventeenth century covered the standard (modal) range of the adult male voice (equivalent to the modern baritone, and extending more or less from about our A to *f* or *g*l).”<sup>29</sup>

We see then, that the baritone of the twenty-first century has the capability of singing tenor roles in certain situations, but is that the best use of his skills? In an effort to explore the advantages and disadvantages of a modern baritone singing the tenor roles versus the bass roles in Handel’s oratorios, a case study is helpful. I have chosen to use Handel’s *Messiah* because it is his most widely known work. In order to better appreciate the context of said case study, a brief history of Handel himself and his *Messiah* will first be presented.

Georg Friedric Händel was born in the city of Halle on 23 February 1685. His father, also named Georg, was a middle class “barber-surgeon.”<sup>30</sup> Initially skeptical of a musical career for his son, Handel’s father was ultimately encouraged to recognize his son’s innate talent, but only after the Duke of Saxe-Weissenfels heard young Handel playing a church organ. Handel’s father arranged for young George Fredric to begin taking lessons in 1694 with Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow, from whom he learned keyboard, composition, and the beginnings of vocal technique.<sup>31</sup> In 1704 Handel joined the opera orchestra at the Gansemarkt Theater, playing violin and harpsichord. From 1707 to 1710 he traveled throughout Italy composing and learning about Italian opera. By 16 June 1710 Handel had returned to Germany and was appointed to the post of Kapellmeister to Georg Ludwig, Elector of Hanover. For the next several years Handel traveled

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<sup>28</sup> Yeadon-McGinnis. *Understanding the European Fach System*, 37 – 39.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Wistreich, "Vocal Performance in the Seventeenth Century." In *The Cambridge History of Musical Performance*, by Colin Lawsen, & Robin Stowell, 398 - 420 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 416.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Hogwood, *Handel: Revised Edition* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 11.

<sup>31</sup> Hogwood, *Handel*, 15.

to and from London continuing to compose. On 25 February 1723, Handel was appointed Composer of Music for His Majesty's Chapel Court, and was later naturalized as an English citizen. Handel lived in London, traveling occasionally, until he died on 14 April 1759. He was buried six days later in Westminster Abbey at a service that was said to have been attended by three thousand people.<sup>32</sup>

During his life in London, Handel introduced several styles and genres of music to the English people. For example, before Handel, the Italianate style of recitative was not common in English theaters, but through his operas and oratorios, Italianate recitatives became the model on which subsequent English composers based their compositions.<sup>33</sup> With his heritage, education, and extensive travels, it is therefore understandable that Handel developed an eclectic style that was uniquely his own.<sup>34</sup> Before Handel came to London, the English people were relatively unfamiliar with the genre of oratorio. The English oratorio was truly an original Handelian creation that drew from his extensive international background for inspiration that included the “Italian *opera seria* and *oratorio volgare*, the choral style exhibited in the Latin psalms composed during his Italian period, the German oratorio, the French classical drama, the English masque and English choral music,” thus creating a new genre that is markedly different from oratorio found in mainland Europe.<sup>35</sup>

Much of the information we have about the versions and revisions of *Messiah* comes from the two manuscript scores that Handel used, R.M.20.f.2 located in the British Museum in London, and the MSS 346-7 in the library of St. Michael's College, Tenbury Wells,

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<sup>32</sup> Hogwood, *Handel*, 286 – 303.

<sup>33</sup> Frederich Neumann, *Performance Practices of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1993), 34.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 319.

<sup>35</sup> Smither, *A History of the Oratorio*, 178.

Worcestershire. The first version of Handel's *Messiah* was composed in 1741 between 22 August and 14 September, but to say that it was completed at that time would be a fallacy as *Messiah* was continuously updated, edited, and rearranged until Handel's death in 1759.<sup>36</sup> Although *Messiah* was a success from its first performance in Dublin, Handel was leery of publishing its title in any publicity for fear of puritanical judgment. Instead, he referred to it as a "New Sacred Oratorio." The title *Messiah* was withheld from all advertisements in London until 1750 when he publicized it for a performance which took place in the Foundling Hospital Chapel. From the first performance on 13 April 1742 to Handel's death in 1759, *Messiah* was performed over thirty times, and for each performance Handel made adjustments to the recitatives and arias depending on the available soloists. Table 1, compiled by Chester L. Alwes in his book *Messiah: Solo Variants*, shows the dates and locations of performances known to have taken place under Handel's supervision.<sup>37</sup> In Handel's conducting score, the aforementioned MSS 346-7,<sup>38</sup> there are numerous names inscribed by Handel himself indicating who sang which arias and when. For his book *A Textual Companion to Handel's Messiah*, Watkins Shaw assembled a list of the *Messiah* singers which has been tabulated into Table 2.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 23-25.

<sup>37</sup> Chester L. Alwes, Christina Lalog, and George Frederic Handel. *Messiah: The Solo Variants* (Dayton, Ohio: Roger Dean Publishing Company, 2009), 1.

<sup>38</sup> Found in the library of St. Michaels's College, Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire

<sup>39</sup> Shaw, *A Textual Companion to Handel's Messiah*, 70-71.

**Table 1: A list of the dates and locations where Handel personally oversaw a *Messiah* production.**

1742	April 13, June 3	Fishamble Street, Dublin
1743	March 23,25,29	Covent Garden, London [CG]
1745	April 9,11	King's Theater, London
1749	March 23,25,29	CG
1750	April 12	CG
	May 1, 15	Foundling Hospital, London [FH]
1751	April 18, May 16	FH
1752	March 25, 26	CG
	April 9	FH
1753	April 13	CG
	May 1	FH
1754	April 5	CG
	May 15	FH
1755	March 19, 21	CG
	May 1	FH
1756	April 7, 9	CG
	May 19	FH
1757	March 30, April 1	CG
	May 19	FH
1758	March 10, 15, 17	CG
	April 27	FH
1759	March 30, April 4, 6	CG
	May 3 (Posthumous)	FH

**Table 2: Names of the singers known to have sung under Handel's direction in *Messiah*.**

(Those names marked with * appear only once)		
1742	Soprano	Sinora Avolio; Mrs. Maclaine
	Alto	Mrs. Cibber; William Lamb*; Joseph Ward
	Tenor	James Bailey*
	Bass	John Hill*; John Mason*
1743	Soprano	Sinora Avolio; Mrs. Edwards*; Mrs. Clive
	Alto	Mrs. Cibber
	Tenor	Thomas Lowe
	Bass	Thomas Reinhold; William Savage*

**Table 2: Names of the singers known to have sung under Handel's direction in *Messiah* cont.**

1745	Soprano	"La Francesca" [Elisabeth Duparc]*
	Alto	? [sic] Mrs. Cibber; Miss Robinson
	Tenor	John Beard
	Bass	Thomas Reinhold
1749	Soprano	Signora Frasi; an unnamed boy
	Alto	Signora Galli
	Tenor	Thomas Lowe
	Bass	Thomas Reinhold
1750	Soprano	Signora Frasi; an unnamed boy
	Alto	Signora Galli; Signor Guadagni
	Tenor	Thomas Lowe
	Bass	Thomas Reinhold
1751	Soprano	Signora Frasi; an unnamed boy
	Alto	Signora Galli; Signor Guadagni
	Tenor	Thomas Lowe
	Bass	Thomas Reinhold
1752	Soprano	Signora Frasi
	Alto	Signora Galli
	Tenor	John Beard
	Bass	Robert Wass
1753	Soprano	Signora Frasi
	Alto	Signor Guadagni
	Tenor	John Beard
	Bass	Robert Wass
1754 (FH)	Soprano	Signora Frasi; Signora Passerini*
	Alto	Signor Guadagni
	Tenor	John Beard
	Bass	Robert Wass
1758 (FH)	Soprano	Signora Frasi
	Alto	Miss Frederick*; Miss Young[Mrs. Scott]
	Tenor	John Beard
	Bass	Samuel Champness
1759 (FH)	Soprano	Signora Frasi
	Alto	Signor Ricciarelli; Mrs. Scott
	Tenor	John Beard
	Bass	Samuel Champness

Handel typically only used two male soloists per performance, not counting countertenors or castrati. John Beard and Thomas Lowe were the most often employed tenors, while basses Thomas (Theodore) Reinhold, Robert Wass, and Samuel Champness were used most often. It is clear by looking at the above list that Handel was shifting away from using Italian-born singers in his oratorios. Even when Handel's operas were being performed regularly, he still preferred to use native English speakers in the productions of his oratorios. Doing so provided Handel with singers who could present the English text more clearly albeit without the "vocal exuberance" of the Italians.<sup>40</sup> Jens Peter Larsen discusses Handel's transition to English singers in his book

*Handel's Messiah:*

The change-over from Italian to English soloists did not take place immediately, but was protracted and never absolutely complete. Indeed in later years there was a tendency to return to Italian soloists, though these were mostly singers who had been connected with oratorio performances for a long time and had succeeded in adjusting themselves to English traditions, unlike Handel's original Italian star singers.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to having better command of the language, English singers were also less likely to display the "prima donna" mentality that characterized many Italian performers. This resulted in a performance environment in which the singers "could not demand that the composer and the style of performance should be at the mercy of their whims."<sup>42</sup> Instead, Handel's opinions took precedent.

As stated above, Beard and Lowe were the singers whom Handel's cast most often in his oratorio tenor roles. John Beard was a very well-known English tenor with a reported range of *B* up to *a1*. He sang with Handel's opera company in Convent Garden in the 1730s, and Handel

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<sup>40</sup>John Potter. "Vocal Performance in the 'long eighteenth century'." In *The Cambridge History of Musical Performance* by Colin Lawson and Robin Stowell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.), 518.

<sup>41</sup>Larsen, *Handel's Messiah*, 35.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid, 37-38.



composed the tenor roles in numerous oratorios, including *Samson*, *Israel in Egypt*, and *Judas Maccabaeus*, with him in mind. Beard sang twenty-eight different Handel roles during his career, and it was Handel's music that brought him fame and popularity.<sup>43</sup> Thomas Lowe was an English tenor with a range of *c* to *a1*. Although not as famous as John Beard, he was still well accepted by audiences in the theaters of London. Critics from the time felt that Lowe had a fine voice when it came to singing ballads, but fell short when he sang more virtuosic passages.<sup>44</sup> As for the basses, little is known about Wass and Champness other than that they took turns as Handel's bass soloist after the death of Reinhold in 1751.<sup>45</sup> There is, however, a fair amount of information on Reinhold. With a range that spanned from *G* to *f1*, he was Handel's regular bass soloist, and sang roles in every oratorio from 1743 through 1750. He sang as the bass soloist for the first Foundling Hospital *Messiah* performance, but died before the second. Handel cast Reinhold as Harapha instead of Manoa in the oratorio *Samson*, which suggests that Reinhold most likely had a heavier and darker vocal timbre.<sup>46</sup> It is helpful to know whom Handel had in mind when he was composing and rearranging *Messiah* because it can give us insight to what he desired in a final product. For example, knowing that Thomas Lowe was not as well suited to highly virtuosic singing suggests that the music for the tenor was not expected to be as embellished. Since Reinhold was known to have had a heavy voice with a rather dark sound, and that he was Handel's preferred bass soloist, using a baritone as the bass soloist may not result in a performance that is as historically informed as using a low bass, especially at baroque pitch.

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<sup>43</sup> Berta Joncus, "Beard, John." In *The Cambridge Handel Encyclopedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 84-86.

<sup>44</sup> David Vickers, "Lowe, Thomas." In *The Cambridge Handel Encyclopedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 401-402.

<sup>45</sup> Shaw, *A Textual Companion to Handel's Messiah*, 62.

<sup>46</sup> Donald Burrows, "Reinhold, Henry (Theodore)." In *The Cambridge Handel Encyclopedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 535.

With specific regard to the baritone voice and its relation to Handel's *Messiah*, there is a great deal of information that we can access to determine its best use. There are several topics to consider: the approximate pitch levels at which the music was intended to be performed, as well as the singing style, including the use of registration, text declamation, and ornamentation. In the introduction to his book *A History of Performing Pitch: The Story of A*, Bruce Haynes asserts that when performing music from the past, we as modern musicians should strive to reproduce the music as close to the original pitches as possible, to avoid vocal issues:

One of the most important and fundamental objects of reproducing historical pitches is to put voice at the level they were originally conceived. Changing the pitch changes the tessitura of a voice, which affects the generally quality of the sound. Besides that, when the pitch is changed the breaks between the registers are shifted, and may fall at awkward places in the vocal line.<sup>47</sup>

Today, there is a somewhat arbitrarily agreed upon pitch standard stating that the pitch *a1* is equivalent to 440Hz.<sup>48</sup> It was not until the year 1975, however, that the International Standardizing Organization (ISO) itself officially ratified their recommendation with the International Standard titled ISO 16:1975.<sup>49</sup> International consensus was not always the case. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries pitch levels varied from region to region and even from city to city and even church to church. Additionally, there were different standards of pitch

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<sup>47</sup> Haynes, *A History of Performing Pitch*. xxxvii.

<sup>48</sup> The first time *a=440* was proposed was at the 1834 congress of physicists in Stuttgart, but it was not ratified at that time. The American Federation of Musicians eventually settled on *a=440* in 1917, but the pitch still widely varied on the European continent. At this time the European pitch standard of *a = 440* was recommended, but the change was not made official as the official standard on the European continent was still set *a=435*. Many recordings made during this time period show that not all regions abided by the recommendation or the set standard. For example, in Holland the pitch standard was as high as *a=450* and in France the pitch standard was as low as *a=430*. The ISO's recommendation of *a=440* was reintroduced by the acoustical committee of the International Organization for Normalization at their meeting in London in the year 1953. *a=440* has been the global common pitch standard. This information from – International Standardizing Organization. "The founding of ISO." In *Recollections from ISO's First Fifty Years.*, (Geneve, Switzerland: ISO Online <http://www.iso.ch/>, 1997) 13-15). Haynes, *A History of Performing Pitch*, 361-362.

<sup>49</sup> "ISO 16:1975(en): Acoustics — Standard tuning frequency (Standard musical pitch)." International Organization for Standardization. <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#iso:std:iso:16:ed-1:v1:en> (accessed March 20, 2016).

depending on the instruments used and social contexts.<sup>50</sup> Understandably, this created problems when it came to singing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as noted by various authors from the time. Friedrich Agricola, a German organist and highly-regarded singing master in Berlin in the mid-1700s, discussed the difficulties pitch levels caused for singers in his book *Anleitung zur Singkunst*:

Roman arias are difficult for most every singer to perform in Venice and the Venetian are equally difficult in Rome. In one place they are too high, in the other too low... Singers who like to sing high are fond of low pitch, and those who enjoy bouncing around the low notes prefer the higher pitch. This of course appears to give each respectively an extra tone. One would think that it could not make such a difference to the singer whether an aria had to be sung a tone or minor third higher or lower, but experience proved the reverse is true with many arias. Besides the consideration of the notes divided between the head voice and natural voice, many breaks and many sustained notes, as well as many notes sung on a single word, are much more comfortable, or quite uncomfortable, depending on the pitch.<sup>51</sup>

There is evidence to suggest there were efforts to equalize the pitch centers. In the early 1700s, the primary pitch center in Lombardia (specifically Venice) was at about a=464.<sup>52</sup> The Queen's Theater Orchestra in London during the same time was performing at approximately a=403. The difference between these two pitches is nearly a minor third. By the 1720s, Handel had become well established in London and was importing singers from Italy, particularly Venice, to perform in his productions. Around the same year, the pitch center of Venice was

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<sup>50</sup> David Ponsford. "Instrumental Performance in the Seventeenth Century." In *The Cambridge History of Musical Performance*, by Colin Lawson, & Robin Stowell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 443.

<sup>51</sup> "Die Römischen Arien können von einerley Sängern schwerlich in Venedig, und die venetianischen schwerlich in Rom gesungen werden. Jene sind dort zu hoch, und diese hier zu tief... Denen Sängern, welche gern sehr hoch singen, ist die tiefe Stimmung lieb: und denen, welche mit viel Tönen in der singen, ist der tiefe Stimmung Tiefe pralen wollen, ist die hohe Stimmung angenehmer. Denn beyde mal scheinen sie, jene in der Höhe, und diese in der Tiefe, einen Ton mehr gewonnen zu haben. Man sollte zwar glauben, daß es eben nicht viel Unterschied für einen Sänger ausmachen könnte, ob er eine Arie einen oder anderthalben Ton höher oder tiefer sänge: allein, bey vielen Arien beweiset die Erfahrung das Gegentheil: absonderlich in Ansehung derer Töne, wo sich das Falsett von der natürlichen Stimme scheidet. Denn hier kann manche Passagie oder manche Aushaltung, oder manche mit einem Worte versehene Note, vielen Sängern in einer Stimmung sehr bequem, in einer andern aber sehr unbequem seyn." Johann Friedrich Agricola, *Anleitung zur Singkunst, Volume 1* (Berlin: G. L. Winter, 1757), 45-46.

<sup>52</sup> Haynes, *A History of Performing Pitch*, lii and 160.

lowered to approximately a=413. At the same time the Queens Theater raised its pitch level also to a=413.<sup>53</sup> The reasons for these shifts notwithstanding, the outcome was certainly more convenient for all parties involved when Venetian musicians ended up in London, or *vive versa*.<sup>54</sup>

On average, the pitch centers in the baroque era were lower than that of the twenty-first century. In recent decades a =415 has become popular with historically-minded ensembles because it is nearly one half step lower than a=440, using the equal temperament tuning system of today. As a result, this pitch setting makes it relatively easy for a harpsichord to play at both pitch levels by shifting the keyboard laterally under the jacks, thereby avoiding the need for a complete re-tune.<sup>55</sup> The task of determining the original pitch level at which a work was conceived is often difficult if not impossible, but when it comes to performing Handel's *Messiah*, modern musicians are fortunate because after the 1751 *Messiah* performance, Handel gave the tuning fork he used for *Messiah* to the Foundling Hospital where it remains to this day. After studying that tuning fork, we know for at least that performance, Handel tuned his orchestra at a=423, which is more than we can say about most other works from the baroque era.<sup>56</sup> Because a=415 is considerably closer to a=423 than a=440 is, it makes sense for performers to use a=415 to achieve a more historically informed performance. Given that a person's range is a major factor in determining voice type, the pitch level plays a vital role in deciding whether a baritone could sing the bass or the tenor parts.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, lii and 378.

<sup>54</sup> Haynes, *A History of Performing Pitch*. 161-162.

<sup>55</sup> Ponsford, "Instrumental Performance in the Seventeenth Century" In *The Cambridge History of Musical Performance*, 443.

<sup>56</sup> Haynes, *A History of Performing Pitch*, 337.

Beyond pitch level, singers performing Handel's music must keep in mind that text declamation was of utmost importance to baroque singers and audiences. In many respects singers were much like orators, for both must have total command of the language being used. This had been the understanding since the early 1600s.<sup>57</sup> By 1723, Pier Francesco Tosi noted in his *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni* that singers should be concerned with the clarity of their vowel sounds so as to be understood, since if they are not, they could "confuse two vowels and make it impossible to understand whether they have said sea [Mare] or love ['More]."<sup>58</sup> Tosi goes on to say singers "should be so distinctly understood as to not lose any syllable and not deprive the listeners of a great pleasure... and [when singers do not sing clearly] they eventually are heard undistinguishable from a cornet or a Hautbois."<sup>59</sup> In England, Charles Butler noted in his *Principles of Musik* that singers should sing "as plainly as they woolde[sic] speak: pronouncing every Syllable and letter (specially the Vouels [sic]) distinctly."<sup>60</sup> A twenty-first century singer would no doubt find these sentiments familiar.

From a technical standpoint, a tenor will be able to sing purer vowels more comfortably at higher pitches than a baritone, but if the vocal line descends too low, a tenor will not be able to sing the text with the same level of clarity as a baritone. Conversely, if an aria goes too high, a bass might have to excessively modify the vowels he sings to the point that he is harder to understand than would be a baritone. Thus, selecting the voice type with the greatest aptitude for

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<sup>57</sup> Sally Sanford, "National Singing Styles." In *A Performers Guide to Seventeenth-Century Music*, by Jeffery Kite-Powell, 3 - 30 (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012), 5.

<sup>58</sup> "Alcuni poi,... confondono quelle due vocali e allora non é possibile di capire, sé abbiano detto Mare, o More." Pier Francesco Tosi. *Opinioni De' Cantori Antichi, e Moderni* (Bologna, 1723), 14.

<sup>59</sup>"Sieno così distintamente intese, che non sé ne perda sillaba, poiché sé non si sentono, chi canta priva gli ascoltanti d'una gran parte di quel diletto... E [quando i cantanti non cantano in modo chiaro] sé finalmente non si sentono non si distingue la voce umana da quella d'un Cornetto, o d'un Haut-bois." Ibid, 35.

<sup>60</sup> Charles Butler, *The Principles of Music in Singing and Setting, with the Twofold Use Thereof Ecclesiastical and Civil* (London: John Haviland, 1636), 98.

a clear and meaningful presentation of the text is necessary to creating an historically-informed performance.

Terminology abounds surrounding the topic of vocal registration, i.e. head voice, chest voice, etc. These terms attempt to describe the location of resonating sensations felt by singers while singing ascending and/or descending passages.<sup>61</sup> Today there is much debate whether there are two registers, more than two, or just one. Head and chest are the two most common terms and concepts of registration. Chest voice is considered to be the stronger, heavier, and louder of the two, with a darker timbre, and head voice, often called falsetto, is considered to be weaker, lighter and softer with a brighter timbre.<sup>62</sup> Regardless of the number of individual registers, today most male singers are instructed to unify however many registers there may be into one seamless vocal line so that there are no major shifts in timbre.<sup>63</sup>

During the baroque era, “singers were encouraged to sing high notes lightly, rather than blasting them out of the chest register.”<sup>64</sup> The most common perspective on registration was from Italy where singers were taught that they have two registers: the *voce di testa* and *voce di petto*, head voice and chest voice respectively. According to Tosi, singers should sing with a smooth connection between the two registers but still maintain the essential qualities of each.<sup>65</sup> In England, however, evidence suggests that singers were taught to sing with a more equal and balanced sound, and deemphasize the registration differences. Charles Butler felt that singers

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<sup>61</sup> Miller, *Securing Baritone, Bass, and Bass-Baritone Voices*, 5.

<sup>62</sup> William Vennard, *Singing: the Mechanism and the Technic* (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 66-76.

<sup>63</sup> Miller, *Securing Baritone, Bass, and Bass-Baritone Voices*, 106.

<sup>64</sup> Julianne Baird, "The Bel Canto Singing Style." In *A Performers Guide to Seventeenth-Century Music*, by Jeffery Kite-Powell (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012), 39.

<sup>65</sup> “Fra le maggiori diligenze dei Maestro una ne richiede la voce dello Scolaro, la quale, ò sia di petto, ò di testa deve uscir limpida, e chiara senza che palli pel naso, né in gola si affoghi, che sono due dischetti i più orribili d'un Cantore, e senza rimedio, quando han preso possesso... che canti fra l'angustie di poche corde non solamente procura d'acquistarglielo, ma non lascia modo intentato acciò lo unisca alla voce di petto in forma, che non si distingua l'uno dall'altra, che sé l'unione non è perfetta, la voce sarà di più registri, e conseguentemente perderà la sua bellezza.” Tosi, *Opinioni De' Cantori Antichi, e Moderni*, 13-14.

with “their great variety of tones, [should endeavor] to keep still an equal sound.”<sup>66</sup> Based on this information, the balanced unification approach to registers that was taught in England is similar to what vocalists are taught today.

Regarding ornamentation, Handel followed the common practice of expecting singers to devise their own embellishments: typically in the Italian style. While the final choice of ornamentation was left to the singer, it has been noted by early Handel historians such as Charles Burney, that when it came to his oratorios, Handel was said to have “personally rehearsed his singers, and preferred moderation in the adding of diminutions.”<sup>67</sup> In general Handel never wanted the ornaments to obscure the music to the point that it is no longer recognizable.<sup>68</sup>

Creating an historically-informed performance would ideally begin with the most authentic version of *Messiah*. However, due to the number of revisions that *Messiah* underwent, a truly historically authentic version of *Messiah* is impossible to find, as detailed in Larsen’s book *Handel’s Messiah*.

The basic question is whether we can talk at all correctly of an “authentic” form of *Messiah*, understood in our later sense as a final version which as a whole and in detail presents the composer’s ultimate view of the form in which he wished to hand down work posterity. Strictly speaking, there is no such version. Handel did not settle on a single, definitive form of *Messiah*. But, on the basis of very ample, but at times undeniably very confusing material available, we may use try to find out what role the different versions of the various [musical] numbers played in the history of work, in order to assess more surely both the individual numbers and the work as a whole.<sup>69</sup>

That said, it *is* possible to have an historically-informed performance. Through the course of this discussion, evidence has been presented that suggests that singers whom today we call

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<sup>66</sup> Butler, *The Principles of Music in Singing and Setting, with the Twofold Use Thereof Ecclesiastical and Civil*, 98.

<sup>67</sup> Ronald Jackson, *Performance Practice: A Dictionary-Guide for Musicians* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 125.

<sup>68</sup> Neumann, *Performance Practices of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, 523.

<sup>69</sup> Larsen, *Handel’s Messiah*, 186.

“baritones” might actually have sung tenor roles in the baroque era, but that may or may not be the case in the twenty-first century.

In order to better determine the role of the twenty-first century baritone in Handel’s oratorios, it is beneficial to explore some examples of the arias and recitatives. In the following discussion I will chart the advantages and disadvantages of having a baritone sing the selection rather than the voice part listed, i.e. tenor or bass, in both a modern performance and an historically-informed performance. For the sake of brevity, I will examine a representative sample of arias and recitatives only from *Messiah*. For each of the six selections the range, tessitura, and unique features of the number will be provided. With that information in conjunction with the data presented above regarding baritones and the general baroque performance practices, I will attempt to determine whether a baritone should sing the tenor roles or bass roles and in what context. The score being used this case study will be the *Novello Handel Edition* edited by Watkins Shaw.<sup>70</sup>

## No. 2 - Comfort Ye

- **Type:** Tenor - Accompanied Recitative
- **Range:** *f#* - *g#1*
- **Tessitura:** Med/High approximately *c1* - *e1*
- **Text:** *Isaiah 40:1-3* “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”
- **Features:** There are numerous long sustained notes on *e1*. The melodic content is mostly stepwise; what few leaps there are consist of arpeggios of the underlying harmonies. The highest pitches are sixteenth notes and on vowels that naturally accommodate high notes.

The baritone is more limited at modern pitch levels in terms of virtuosic options. The first *g#1* comes within the first few bars of the voice line, and at the end of a long phrase with a

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<sup>70</sup> George Frederic Handel, *Messiah: Vocal Score*. Edited by Watkins Shaw (London: Novello and Company Limited, 1992)



sustained *e1*. While it is true that the melody line approaches the *g#1* in such a way that aids the voice, the singer must be able to maintain the vocal energy required to perform the phrase without blasting the high note from out of the chest voice. A tenor will likely have the advantage of greater flexibility in upper ranges at the modern pitch standard of  $a=440$ , but a baritone should be able to sing the higher pitches with much less difficulty when sung at the baroque standard of  $a=415$ . Baritones should still maintain the vocal energy required to perform the long phrases with control, but because of the lower sounding baroque standard he will gain greater flexibility because the written *g#1* will actually feel to him like *g1*. Baritones would likely have more options available in terms of vocal color and timbre in the lower sections of the recitative. For example in measures 12 and 13 there is a fanfare-like setting of the text "saith your God" (see Example 1). Up to this point in the recitative the accompaniment has maintained a fairly consistent pulse of eight notes. With the words "saith your God" the accompaniment shifts and becomes homorhythmic to set the text apart from the rest of the sentence. The shift here is to remind the listeners that while the previous words are intended to bring comfort they are nonetheless the words of God. Thus, it makes sense that they should have a full and powerful

12

The musical score for measures 12 and 13 is presented in three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, with lyrics "saith your God, saith your God." The middle and bottom staves are the accompaniment, showing a fanfare-like setting with homorhythmic patterns. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The music is in G major.

**Example 1:** Measures 12 and 13 of "Comfort Ye" showing the fanfare setting of "saith your God."

sound. Because this phrase is in a comfortable part of a baritone's voice, he has an advantage over a tenor when it comes to conveying the text in this manner.

### No. 3 - Every Valley Shall Be Exalted

- **Type:** Tenor - Aria
- **Range:** *d# - g#1*
- **Tessitura:** Medium/High approximately *c1 - e1*
- **Text:** *Isaiah 40:1-3* "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain."
- **Features:** There are many long melismatic passages. Some of these melismatic passages span the entire vocal range of the aria, yet there are others that accentuate the higher areas of the range such as *e1*. Numerous wide leaps of octaves and sevenths and sixths.
- 

This aria has some of the best examples of text-painting in the baroque and classical music repertory. There are many coloratura passages on the word "exalted" which elevate the word above the others in the phrase. One such example occurs in measures 24 and 25. The words "mountain" and "hill" are both accentuated, but the former is highlighted by an arpeggio that spans an entire octave followed by a descending octave leap, whereas the latter is set with a little vocal turn (see Example 2). Whoever sings this aria needs to have the ability to portray the text as clearly as Handel has set it. The highest notes in the aria all pass rapidly and do not require a great deal of sustaining power; however, the tenor might find it a bit easier to negotiate the higher coloratura episodes at modern pitch as there are numerous times when the vocal line requires the singer to sing in and out of the *passaggio* for an extended time. Also, the wide descending leaps require a singer to have control of his lower range so that he can sing them accurately and in tune. At baroque pitch, a tenor will likely struggle with phrases similar to measure 34 (Example 3). Here the singer must sing a descending phrase from *g#1* down an octave and a fifth to *d#*, all while maintaining a smooth, free tone. At modern pitch, descending

phrases like this are challenging enough but they are even more difficult for tenors at baroque pitch.

24

- ted, and ev' ry moun-tain and hill made low,

*f* *f* *p* *p*

This musical score shows measures 24 through 26. It features a vocal line in the upper staff and a piano accompaniment in the lower two staves. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is common time. The vocal line includes wide leaps, particularly in the phrase 'hill made low'. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with various dynamics, including fortissimo (f) and piano (p).

**Example 2:** Measures 24 through 26 of “Every Valley Shall Be Exalted” showing the setting of the words “mountain” and “hill” as well as the wide leaps found in the voice line.

34

straight, the croo - ked straight, and the rough pla - ces plain,

*p* *p*

This musical score shows measures 34 through 36. It features a vocal line in the upper staff and a piano accompaniment in the lower two staves. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is common time. The vocal line includes wide leaps and lower notes, particularly in the phrase 'straight, the crooked straight, and the rough places plain'. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with various dynamics, including piano (p).

**Example 3:** Measures 34 through 36 of “Every Valley Shall Be Exalted” showing the wide range and lower notes in this aria.

## No. 11 - The People That Walketh in Darkness

- **Type:** Bass - Aria
- **Range:** *F# - e1*
- **Tessitura:** Low approximately *b - d*
- **Text:** *Isaiah 9:2* “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.”
- **Features:** Chromatic phrases pervade this aria in such a way as to portray a person stumbling in darkness. The text is divided into two sections. The text about darkness is set in a minor key while the text about the light is set in major. Additionally the accompaniment for the dark section is much simpler and in unison with the voice line, whereas when the light appears the accompaniment becomes fuller and more complex.

A wide range is required for this bass aria. The opening voice line that begins on the pickup to measure five sets the tone for the entire aria with its winding, chromatic melody that plummets to a low *F#* (Example 4). For low notes like those in measure eight to have the proper effect, they need to have substantial power. This is the lowest note the bass is expected to sing in the entire oratorio. It is difficult for a baritone to sing these lower notes at the higher modern pitch, let alone the lower baroque pitch. This aria descends below the staff at the beginning, but there are numerous times when the melody line reaches *G* and *A*. Often, when a baritone attempts to sing below the bass staff, the result is a breathy, weak sound whereas a true bass is more likely to be able to project the lower notes without as much trouble. The few high notes are not sustained for a long period of time because they quickly pass as a part of a melisma. Also, they are set to vowels that accommodate a bass's need to cover or make vocal adjustments in that range.

Whoever sings this aria must also be sure not to let the text inspire a tone so dark that it effects the intonation.

4

The peo - ple that walk - ed in

dark - - ness, that walk - ed in dark - - ness, *mf*

6

**Example 4:** Measures 4 through 8 of “The People that Walked in Darkness” showing the low range as well as the pervasive chromaticism.

### No. 30 - Behold and See

- **Type:** Tenor - Arioso
- **Range:** *d# - g1*
- **Tessitura:** Medium/High *c1 - e1*
- **Text:** *Lamentations 1:12* “Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow.”
- **Features:** The vocal line is rather disjointed compared to other numbers. There are numerous leaps to and from *f#1* and *g1* thus adding to the difficulty of the aria.

This arioso is slow and should be sung with a soft and sorrowful tone. Even though the high notes are on very comfortable vowels, they are not always approached easily (see Figure 5). So, at modern pitch, a baritone will likely not be able to sing in the upper ranges of this arioso as easily as a tenor. However, with the anguish that is evident in the text and the musical setting in a minor key, it is appropriate for the singer to sing the high notes with a bit more power and full

voice in order to create the effect of crying out in despair. By doing so the baritone can find success at either pitch level, modern or baroque. At the end of the arioso the voice line descends to its lowest point and repeats an *e* on the words "unto His sorrow." This should mirror the heaviness of spirit Christ must have felt as he anticipated his crucifixion. At baroque pitch, a baritone will have more vocal colors and overall weight to create the desired effect than a modern tenor.

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is the vocal line in G major, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: "like un-to his sor-row! Be - hold and\_ see, if there be a - ny sor - row". The middle staff is the right-hand accompaniment, and the bottom staff is the left-hand accompaniment. The music features wide intervals and leaps, particularly in the vocal line, illustrating the range and dramatic effect mentioned in the text.

**Example 5:** Measures 9 through 11 of “Behold, and See if There Be Any Sorrow” showing the range and wide leaps to and from high notes.

#### No. 47 - Behold I Tell You a Mystery

- **Type:** Bass - Accompanied Recitative
- **Range:** *A - dl*
- **Tessitura:** Medium *f# - b*
- **Text:** *I Corinthians 15:51-52* “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.”
- **Features:** The text suggests a lyrical and mysterious tone in the beginning, then on the words "we shall all be changed" the accompaniment changes and encourages a more powerful sound. There are also wide leaps of an octave, minor seventh, and major sixth.

In the second measure of this recitative the singer must sing “mystery” on *dl*. In order to portray the text effectively, the singer must be able to sing this passage with a light ethereal tone as though telling a secret, but still have enough vocal support to energize his sound while leaping down an octave (see Example 6). Later there is a descending minor seventh to a low A on the word “changed” that can present a challenge for a baritone if he does not have control of his low range, especially if the performance is at baroque pitch. A bass, however, will likely find negotiating the lower ranges easier when singing at the lower pitch.

The image shows a musical score for two measures. The top staff is a vocal line in bass clef, with the lyrics "Be- hold, I tell you a my-ste- ry!". The second measure shows a descending octave leap on the word "mystery!". The bottom two staves are piano accompaniment, with the left hand in bass clef and the right hand in treble clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

**Example 6:** Measures 1 and 2 of “Behold I Tell You a Mystery” showing the descending octave leap.

## No. 48 - The Trumpet Shall Sound

- **Type:** Bass - Aria
- **Range:** *A – e1*
- **Tessitura:** Medium/High approximately *c1 - e1*
- **Text:** *I Corinthians 15:52-53* “The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”
- **Features:** This is a long da capo aria that requires a singer who can sustain the high tessitura *dl* and *e1* for an extended period of time. The voice line is littered with fanfare-like melodic phrases that require the singer to be able to sing with power yet remain vocally agile enough to sing the many melismas which often accentuate the top of the range. There are numerous leaps to and from the top of the range. The highest section of the aria is the A section, and because this is a da capo aria, the A section is repeated, typically with vocal ornamentation.

The tessitura of this aria makes it dreaded amongst many basses. In the A section alone, the voice line climbs to *e1* fourteen times and *d1* over forty times! That, combined with the long melismas, requires the singer to have a great deal of stamina to be able to sing the aria effectively. A bass's aversion to this aria comes from the high tessitura, but at baroque pitch the tessitura would be lower and therefore easier to handle. At modern pitch, baritones will likely find the tessitura much more manageable (and some would possibly even enjoy singing it). As stated above, there are many melismas that exploit the higher part of the range and contain wide leaps. The excerpt in Example 7 is one such melismatic passage and it demonstrates the need for control. One specific challenge comes on the word "Shall" in measure 67. The issue a bass would have with this measure is that on the pitch *e1* the vowel sound [æ] has a tendency to sound spread and thin. In order to maintain a good tone, a bass will need to modify this vowel from a pure [æ] to an [a] or even [e]. The more the bass must modify this vowel the less he is understood. A similar issue facing a bass is shown in Example 8, measures 48 through 50. The text in these three measures contains vowels that are all fairly bright in color such as [æ], [i], and [e]. Given the high tessiture of this section, most basses will tend either to sing these vowels with an overly bright and piercing tone, or overly modify them. The consonants word "raised" presents a challenge as well. The initial [ɹ] sound of raised requires the singer's tongue to be slightly elevated, pulled back, and spread to where it touches his back teeth. In this position there is slight tension felt in the tongue and lower jaw. Because the word must be sung on *e1*, a bass will find this more troublesome than would a baritone. At baroque pitch, a bass would find the challenges of vowel modification and troublesome consonants much more manageable.



58

and we shall be changed,

63

and we shall be changed. *f*

**Example 7:** Measures 58 through 68 of “The Trumpet Shall Sound” showing an extended melisma that highlights the higher part of the aria’s range as well as some wide leaps.

48

and the dead shall be raised

*p*

**Example 8:** Measures 48 through 50 of “The Trumpet Shall Sound” showing a potentially difficult phrase of text due to the tessitura.

In conclusion, musicians who want to perform Handel’s oratorios in the twenty-first century are faced with several choices. Numerous ensembles performing today, either by choice or necessity, perform baroque music at modern pitch. Based on information gathered for the case study, such as the average ranges, tessituras, and vocal demands in general for the solo parts of Handel’s oratorios, in conjunction with what is known about voices in history and performance

practices, it is my assessment that a twenty-first century baritone can effectively sing the tenor parts of Handel's oratorios when performing at baroque pitch with dedication to historically accurate performance practices. This should come as little surprise, considering that it is possible that a modern day baritone would have been considered a tenor if he had been alive during the early 1700s. It is entirely possible for the baritone to sing the tenor parts at modern pitch; however, he will likely not find doing so as enjoyable and effective. With modern performing forces and pitch levels, the music would be better served if he sings the bass part. Regardless of what role baritones are cast to sing, the vocal demands Handel's music places on the singer in terms of the extensive range and Handel's imaginative text painting, a baritone will likely find the music a challenge well worth pursuing.

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