

Introduction

This volume presents the two surviving versions of Handel's Sonata in G major for harpsichord HWV 579. The earlier version (Q2¹) has been identified as a Dutch copy of Handel's own record of the Allegro he improvised in his famous 'trial of skill' with Domenico Scarlatti (Rome, c.1708). The overwhelming display of virtuosity would have surely won the day had not Scarlatti responded with a brilliant parody of Handel's music, which became the Capriccio in G major K 63. His fantastic invention split the judges: 'some gave the preference to Scarlatti'.²

Handel soon after reworked his improvisation as the Sonata in G HWV 579, a more elaborate version for two manuals written out on four staves (Q1). This very novel setting was probably produced for his patron Cardinal Ottoboni who organised the trial of skill, presumably at the Palazzo della Cancelleria. Ottoboni owned several harpsichords with two manuals, which were then rare in Italy.

Handel too was impressed by Scarlatti's Capriccio - so much so that he produced his own riposte on the same subject. This was published as an anonymous 'Rondeau' in G. F. Witvogel's edition of *Pieces Choieses Pour le Clavecin de differents Auteurs...* (Amsterdam, c.1733).³ Handel follows Scarlatti's Capriccio until the beginning of the fourth bar and then ventures off in another improvisation, which cannot have been part of the formal contest: it was probably produced during the subsequent relationship of these two great masters.⁴

The attribution of the Rondeau to Handel is entirely confirmed by his adaptation of this melody in 'Un vostro sguardo', the first aria of *Giustino* (1736). The air eventually returned to its keyboard origins with W. H. Callcott's arrangement in *The Handel Album for the Piano Forte, Book 2* (London, 1859).

The significance of Handel's Sonata in G has long eluded admirers of Handel, who reworked the music to become the aria 'Vò far guerra' in his first London opera *Rinaldo* (1711): this was accompanied by the composer's improvisations at the harpsichord which he soon recast into the first great operatic transcription for keyboard. Handel's creation was plagiarised by William Babell who first published it in his edition of *Suits of Harpsicord and Spinnet, Lessons, Collected from The most Celebrated Masters Works To Which is Added A Great Variety of Passages by M^r. William Babell* (Richard Meares, London, c.1715). Long known as the 'Celebrated Grand Lesson', it remained in print until the end of the eighteenth century. Handel's final revision of this masterpiece (c.1721) was the climax and virtually the end of his career as a composer for the harpsichord.⁵

The 'Celebrated Grand Lesson' was the first representation in print of one of Handel's most significant contributions to the art of the keyboard: the extended use of hand-over-hand arpeggios, still *de rigueur* for the virtuoso concert soloist. Our presentation here enables the interested student and performer to study the forerunners of what became the longest-lived, and most often reprinted, composition for solo keyboard in the eighteenth century.

Balmain, New South Wales, Australia, November 2015
Graham Pont

¹ See below under "Our Edition".

² Graham Pont, 'Handel versus Domenico Scarlatti: Music of an Historic Encounter', *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge* IV (1991), pp. 232-247; *ibid.*, 'Handel versus Domenico Scarlatti: new light on the historic encounter', *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge* XIII (2010), pp. 114-124. For more on the subsequent history of Handel's improvisation, see Graham Pont, 'Reminiscences of *Rinaldo*: The Keyboard Transcriptions of "Vò far Guerra"', *Ad Parnassum* Volume 9, Issue 17 (April, 2011), pp. 7-35.

³ Premiere Recordings of the Rondeau in G major and the first version of HWV 579 have been published on compact disc, *Conversazione II: Duelling Cantatas* Avie AV2296, with Julian Perkins (harpsichord).

⁴ Graham Pont, 'Were Domenico Scarlatti and Handel Lovers – or Just Good Friends?' *Handel News* No 64. (October, 2015), pp. 7-10.

⁵ Graham Pont, 'Handel's Keyboard Sonatas', forthcoming in Rohan Stewart-MacDonald (ed.), *The Early Keyboard Sonata in Italy and Beyond* (Brepols, Turnhout).

Our Edition

Our edition is based on the following sources.

Q1 Print, Amsterdam, Chez Jeanne Roger N^o. 490 (ca. 1721): *Pieces à un & Deux Clavecins, Composées Par M^r. Hendel*, [RISM A/I H1441; HH1441]. This collection of 11 harpsichord pieces by Handel includes the *Sonata for a Harpsichord with double Keys* HWV 579 (pp. 60–68). The music is notated on four staves.

Q2 D-B Mus. Ms. 30078, manuscript, collection of 28 harpsichord pieces by various authors, mostly unidentified. The pieces include a *Sonata Par M^r. Hendel* (pp. 70–76), which appears to be an earlier version of HWV 579 for a harpsichord with one manual. Since its authenticity has been doubted, this movement has no HWV number.

Our edition is designed for easy comparison of the two versions in Q1 and Q2. This volume contains a transcription of Q1, while the supplement G288A contains a transcription of Q2. We have retained the rather unusual notation of Q1 on four staves. It shows clearly which hand has to play at what time on which keyboard, thus preserving an accurate (and probably unprecedented) representation of the frequent changes of keyboard as specified by Handel for a harpsichord with two manuals.

This is a practical edition for players of today. Nevertheless, we have transcribed the sources as accurately as possible. The soprano (C1) clef was replaced by the treble clef, which also means that the distribution of notes on the staves must be changed. Our goal was to concentrate the notes that are to be played by one hand on one staff. The accidentals have been printed in the modern manner, i.e. they are valid for the whole bar. Accidentals that we suggest in contrast to the model are set in parenthesis. Ties that we have added are dotted. Obvious errors have been corrected and are indicated in the Critical Report. Please note that it was not our intention to integrate what are clearly two distinct versions of the sonata.

I thank Graham Pont for his idea for this edition and for the introduction, and Dankwart von Zadow for his critical review of the transcription.

Heidelberg, November 2015
Günter von Zadow

Kritischer Bericht – Critical Report

Wir vermerken die Schreibweise des Originals, wenn diese von unserer Edition abweicht. G288 = 4 Systeme, G288A = 2 Systeme, T1 = Takt 1, S1 = System 1 (von oben nach unten gezählt), N1 = Note 1

We indicate the original reading, if this differs from our edition. G288 = 4 staves, G288A = 2 staves, T1 = 1st bar, S1 = 1st staff (counted from top to bottom), N1 = 1st note

G288 T10 S4 N1		G288 T14 S4		G288 T35 Q1 N13-15	
G288 T53 S3 N3-5		G288 T73 Q2		G288 T79 Q1	
G288 T90 S4 N1		G288 T96 S3 N1		G288 T119 Q2 N1-2	
G288A T27 Q1 N2		G288A T34 Q1 N9-12		G288A T53 Q2 N5-8	
G288A T55 Q1 N6 – T56 N1		G288A T65 Q2 N13-16		G288A T70 Q2 N1-2	
G288A T86 Q2 N3-4		G288A T88 Q2 N3		G288A T96 Q1 N1-6	
G288A T103 Q2 N1-4		G288A T114 Q2 N2			