

# HANDEL AND THE CHAPEL ROYAL

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IN 1976 a board was set up on the wall of the ante-chapel of the Chapel Royal, St James's Palace, commemorating some of the musicians associated with the Chapel. The names recorded there include William Byrd, Orlando Gibbons, Matthew Locke, Henry Purcell, John Blow, William Croft, Maurice Greene, William Boyce, Samuel Sebastian Wesley, and Arthur Sullivan – an illustrious company indeed. Among the company also appears the name of George Frederick Handel. I can claim some credit for the presence of Handel's name there by my discovery of the warrant, now in the Public Record Office, for his appointment as Composer of Musick for His Majesty's Chapel Royal on 25 February 1723. This discovery established beyond doubt Handel's formal institutional link with the Chapel Royal, but his occasional association could in any case have been recognised from the 30 or so contemporary references to the Chapel Royal reprinted in Otto Erich Deutsch's *Documentary Biography* of the composer. The full story of Handel's association with the Chapel is a fascinating one involving some matters which are primarily the concern of English court history and obviously cannot be dealt with here, though I hope to cover both historical and musical aspects of this topic in detail in a forthcoming book. For the present I want to concentrate on the repertory of his Chapel Royal music and its place in the historical context of English Church music.

One preliminary clarification is necessary. The term 'Chapel Royal' was used in Handel's time, and still is today, to denote two separate things: a building and an ecclesiastical/choral institution. The distinctions do not end there, for there were several Royal Chapel buildings, each one of them legitimately a Chapel Royal. In Purcell's time the principal London Royal Chapel was at Whitehall Palace. In 1703 Queen Anne moved the former Whitehall establishment to the small chapel at St James's Palace which has remained the principal central Royal Chapel ever since. During Handel's years in London the boys and men of the Chapel Royal were stationed in this chapel for most of each year but went to Kensington, Windsor, and Hampton Court as the monarch took up residence there. At full strength the Chapel singers numbered 26 men, 10 of whom were in Orders, and 10 boys. In practice the men served on a month-on/month-off basis and the boys, being boys, included a few raw recruits and 'breakers', so the effective numbers from day to day were probably about a dozen men and eight boys. As in Purcell's time, many of the Gentlemen doubled up Chapel Royal places with appointments at Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, and St George's Chapel, Windsor. A new development came in the 1730s when leading singers such as Francis Hughes and Bernard Gates took on two places at the Chapel and served all the year round. Hughes was an alto, Gates a bass: these were the characteristic voices of the Chapel's soloists. Many members of the choir probably had fine voices – there is certainly evidence that Richard Elford, one of the Chapel's principal altos in the first decade of the eighteenth-century, was an outstanding singer – but we can safely assume that all of the leading singers were intelligent musicians and efficient music-readers. Some years also saw capable soloists among the boys.

There is a sense in which all of Handel's English church music apart from his three settings of Charles Wesley's hymns and the ten anthems and two canticles that he composed for James Brydges, Marquis of Carnarvon and subsequently Duke of Chandos, can be regarded as Chapel Royal music. (Even in the Foundling Hospital Anthem, the item of Handel's non-Chandos church music which relied least on the Chapel Royal, the Chapel singers probably formed the basis of his chorus, and the soloists also probably included two Chapel boys.) The soloists named on Handel's autographs of the

'Utrecht' canticles (performed at St Paul's Cathedral) and the Coronation Anthems (first performed at Westminster Abbey) were all Chapel Royal Gentlemen. Their presence at state and royal occasions was part of their duty: the interesting thing for us is that musical leadership on these big occasions always fell to the Chapel men. We can assume the same sort of reciprocal influence between them and Handel as that between Handel and his theatre singers: he knew their styles, strengths and weaknesses, and wrote accordingly. The same is true if we look beyond the soloists to the choir as a whole. As well as Handel's music for big state occasions there are some smaller works written for services in the Chapel Royal at St James's, and here the reciprocal influence is at its strongest. These pieces are in the strictest sense Handel's most characteristic Chapel Royal music, and in my general review of his music involving the Chapel Royal I shall pay particular attention to the music performed by the Chapel in the Chapel.

Handel first arrived in England towards the end of 1710, and stayed until mid-1711. He performed before Queen Anne on her birthday and attained public fame with his opera *Rinaldo*, but we do not know that he took any particular interest in church music. Hawkins says of Handel's early years in London that he 'was used to frequent St Paul's church for the sake of hearing the service', and refers to Handel's association with a group of musicians that included Samuel Weeley, a bass singer from the Chapel Royal and St Paul's, who as a boy had served under John Blow. (John Hawkins, *A General History . . . of Music*, Book XIX, Chapter 182.) Perhaps it all seemed a little foreign to him on his first visit. He might have attended a service or two at the Chapel Royal and heard verse anthems or, on weekday mornings, full anthems. William Croft was the leading Chapel Royal Composer at the time; John Weldon was also on the books as a Composer, but seems to have been less active there. If Handel had arrived by 7 November 1710 (which I think is unlikely) he could have heard a *Te Deum*, probably composed by Croft, performed at the Chapel Royal with orchestral accompaniment on the last of the Thanksgiving Days for the continental successes in Marlborough's war. These thanksgivings had been large affairs at St Paul's Cathedral in earlier years, but by 1710 they were rather muted, for reasons too

complicated to go into here. The important thing for our purpose is that there was by 1710 a tradition of occasional celebratory services involving the Chapel Royal choir and orchestral accompaniment. Assuming that Handel missed this service, we can nevertheless presume that someone in London informed him about the thanksgivings, and if he wanted to know about the music, then the printed edition of the model work, Purcell's D major *Te Deum and Jubilate*, was readily available. I have no doubt that, if not on his first visit, then soon after his return to London in 1712, Handel came to know the professional singers who were at the heart of London's church music. Furthermore, some of the members of Handel's opera house orchestra had almost certainly performed at the Thanksgiving Services.

Although London was new to Handel, he was far from being an apprentice in the area of church music. The Latin psalms composed in Rome in 1707 are amazingly assured in style, and reveal that Handel knew even then how to deal resourcefully with soloists, chorus, and orchestra. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that these Latin works were built upon a foundation of experience of church music in Germany which is now hidden from us, since none of Handel's earlier church music survives. Whether or not Handel had composed concerted music for church performance in Germany, he would surely have heard some in Hamburg, and at both Halle and Hamburg he would have known motets or cantatas not too distant in character from the English anthem.

Handel may possibly have composed an English cantata, *Venus and Adonis*, in 1712 but the 'Utrecht' *Te Deum*, composed in January 1713 very soon after his return to England, remains a landmark as Handel's first known large-scale setting of words in English. The Peace of Utrecht was celebrated with the return to a large ceremonial Thanksgiving service in St Paul's. Handel's music for the service, which is interestingly more 'choral' than the Purcellian model, is well enough known today, and was regarded as outstanding then. Having said that, I have to express some doubt as to whether the 'Utrecht' music was Handel's first English church music, because I think that it had been preceded by a version of *As Pants the Hart*. Handel's first setting of *As Pants the Hart* is particularly interesting because it appears to be his attempt to come to terms with the English verse

anthem, a *genre* that he only essayed on one later occasion, and that to the same text. The text itself is rather a muddle of Authorised Version and Prayer Book forms of Psalm 42. It is difficult to see how Handel came by the text, except that something rather similar seems to have been composed by John Arbuthnot, the Queen's Physician, at much the same period – and Arbuthnot is one of the few people who can be identified as a friend (and possibly patron) of Handel in his first London years.

We know nothing of the circumstances of the first performance of this anthem, save that the soloists named on Handel's autograph are all Chapel Royal Gentlemen. I will not say that Handel had necessarily studied the current English repertory closely, but it is clear that he knew what was expected in a verse anthem. It may well be that we view English church music too much in isolation, for the situation suggested by the music of this anthem is not that Handel had to adapt to an alien *genre*, but that he was able to apply his European experience to the English language tradition. Take, for example, the first movement. This treats the text in smooth ecclesiastical counterpoint, with soloists and chorus alternating in the manner familiar from Croft's anthems and, indeed, from many earlier examples in the repertory of English church music.

[Recorded musical illustration – Movement 1 of 'As Pants the Hart', Anthem 6C.]

The subject and accompanying quaver-movement of that extract (EXAMPLE 1) is strikingly similar to the opening of Blow's anthem *My God, my God, look upon me* (EXAMPLE 2). You have, of course, to allow for changing fashions in dissonance treatment and false relations during the intervening years – the style of the Blow extract was already rather antiquated in terms of what Croft and Weldon were writing by 1710. By that date English church music was dealing in European musical currency, and there are equally convincing models for the movement from works by Zachow and Caldara.

The second movement of *As Pants the Hart* also provides a rather teasing commentary on the current relationship of English church music to foreign models (EXAMPLE 3). I think that any patriotic Englishman would look at the apparent ground-bass construction

and the catch of the breath on the word 'Tears' and say "Purcell". There were some senior men in the Chapel Royal choir, such as William Turner, who could have informed Handel all about Purcell and his music at first hand, but I question how much of Purcell's music came Handel's way. Few of us would try to re-write the history books to the extent of claiming repeated-bass techniques as exclusively English, and in any case by 1712 Handel had a happy knack with well-characterised word-setting. If there is a Purcellian feature about Handel's movement it surely lies in its quality as a composition, particularly in the cunning return of the bass at bar 41 – I cannot think of an example quite as ingenious from the works of Croft. If I had to pick out a particularly 'English' characteristic in the movement I would choose his idiomatic use of the male alto: Handel composed this music for Richard Elford, previously mentioned as one of the Chapel's most distinguished artists. In the recorded illustration I have also included the succeeding sections, which parallel some passages from anthems by Blow and Croft quite closely – but you could also, if you wished, see them as applications of Handel's operatic experience to the ambience of English Church music.

[Recorded musical illustration – Movement 2 of Anthem 6C.]

His music for the Utrecht thanksgiving lost Handel his post in Hanover, but it probably played a major part in gaining him an English pension from Queen Anne. The death of Queen Anne in 1714 did not affect Handel's association with the Chapel directly. King George I heard Handel's music at his first service in Chapel Royal after his arrival in London, and there was a further performance of a Te Deum by Handel in the Chapel soon afterwards, celebrating the arrival of the Princess of Wales, the future Queen Caroline. Handel had no part in George I's coronation, nor should this surprise us: by law he was still a foreigner, unlike the new king. The 'Utrecht' Te Deum and Jubilate, the 'Caroline' Te Deum, and Handel's first settings of *O sing unto the Lord* and *As Pants the Hart* are the complete repertory of this first period of Handel's Chapel Royal music. All but *As Pants the Hart* have orchestral accompaniment. For various reasons, probably mainly diplomatic, Handel's association with the

Chapel Royal ceased for a few years after 1714. Such English church music as he composed in the succeeding years was for James Brydges in 1717-8, the so-called 'Chandos' music.

A second period of association with the Chapel began in 1722. Since 1719 the practice of performing occasional orchestral-accompanied works at services in the Chapel had gradually been revived, initially to mark the first Sunday service attended by the King after his return from a trip to Hanover. Te Deum settings by Croft and Greene were performed during 1720-21, but Handel displaced them in 1722 at a service marking the King's return from Kensington to St James's, and for the remainder of the reign the Te Deum celebrating the King's safe return from Hanover fell to Handel. Once again, speculations as to the diplomatic reasons for Handel's re-emergence into the life of the Chapel are beyond the scope of the present paper. It was in this period, however, that Handel received his appointment as Composer for the Chapel, and with it a doubling of his pension. Croft and Weldon, it will be remembered, already held appointments as Chapel Royal Composers, but it was never intended that Handel would have to serve the daily offices as they did: Handel's appointment was largely to legitimise his occasional contributions to the more significant court celebrations. He was still however, at the time of his Chapel Royal appointment, an alien. I think that the relative timing of Handel's naturalisation and the King's death was completely fortuitous in 1727 – but had it not worked out as it did Handel could never have taken part in the coronation of George II, and we should have been deprived of *Zadok the Priest* and the other Coronation Anthems. Apart from these, the new Chapel Royal repertory from Handel during the 1720s consisted of a new verse anthem setting of *As Pants the Hart*, three orchestral-accompanied anthems and a new Te Deum with orchestra. He also revived the 'Caroline' Te Deum.

Croft died just before George II's coronation and Maurice Greene took his place as the principal regular Chapel Royal composer. For various reasons, again probably partly diplomatic, Handel withdrew from the Chapel in the early years of George II's reign and Greene took over the music for special Chapel Royal services, including those celebrating the King's return from Hanover.



Handel's third period of association with the Chapel, falling in the 1730's, was on rather different terms. The part played by the Chapel Royal choristers in the accidental creation of Handel's English theatre oratorios with their performance of *Esther* in 1732 is well known. In terms of church music composed for the Chapel, Handel's contributions were for occasions directly concerning the royal family — weddings in 1734, 1736 and 1740, and Queen Caroline's funeral in 1737. The first wedding took place in the building known today as the Queen's Chapel at St James's Palace, and the Funeral Anthem was, of course, performed in King Henry VII's Chapel at Westminster Abbey, but the other two celebrations were in the regular Royal Chapel at St James's.

Handel's final period of association with the Chapel, in the 1740s, was directly connected with events of the War of the Austrian Succession. He composed a *Te Deum* and an anthem celebrating the victory at Dettingen in 1743, and an anthem to accompany yet another revival of the 'Caroline' *Te Deum* in celebration of the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1749. The 'Dettingen' *Te Deum* was first performed in the Chapel Royal, and very noisy it must have sounded, for the scoring is much heavier than in any of Handel's previous compositions for that building. I feel certain that Handel composed this music expecting a large thanksgiving in St Paul's, and quite reasonably too: it was not every day that the King of Britain in person led a victory on the battlefields of Europe. The thanksgiving never happened, and Handel's music was performed instead at a Chapel Royal service marking the King's return. In 1749 Handel was more circumspect, and wrote the *Peace Anthem* to a moderate scoring somewhere between his 'normal' Chapel Royal ensemble and the grandiose ceremonial turn-outs. He was right to do so: the large-scale event commemorating the peace in 1749 was the Royal Fireworks, and the King celebrated the Peace Thanksgiving Service more privately in his Chapel Royal.

I have just mentioned Handel's 'normal' Chapel Royal ensemble, and I had better explain myself. For occasions such as the 1736 wedding in the Chapel Royal, the building was adapted with extra galleries, partly to accommodate all of the guests, but partly also to accommodate a somewhat enlarged performing group of singers and players. At the other extreme, Handel's verse anthem

settings of *As Pants the Hart* needed no special facilities and no additional performers, but were written to fit into the Chapel's normal routine. (For reasons that remain speculative, they did not enter the Chapel's permanent repertory.) However, these continuo-accompanied verse anthems are exceptional: the occasions for which Handel composed music for performance in the Chapel were usually sufficiently significant to warrant the attendance of an orchestra.

The appropriate orchestra to accompany the regular Chapel Royal choir for services such as those celebrating the King's return to London was quite small and could apparently be fitted into the Chapel without any additional stage-works. This orchestra consisted of perhaps as many as a dozen string players, Royal Musicians serving there as part of their court duty, supplemented by a few extra players for double bass, oboe, bassoon, and sometimes a couple of trumpets. The Chapel choir plus this orchestra formed what I have called the 'normal' Chapel Royal ensemble — it was a logical extension of the Chapel's resources, but was not in the same league as the serried ranks that were assembled for really showy occasions. I would argue that in Handel's works from the 1710s and the 1720s composed for performance in the Chapel at St James's Palace we see Handel's association with the Chapel at its most creative. His forces were larger than the chamber ensemble of the Chandos anthems, yet the circumstances of performance were still relatively intimate. The vocal traditions and capacities of the Chapel singers, and in particular the choir's leading soloists, were Handel's musical starting-point, though the expected presence of a few outstanding instrumentalists such as the oboe player John Kyitch was also an agreeable stimulant.

It is obviously appropriate to conclude with a brief look at one of Handel's pieces for this 'normal' Chapel Royal ensemble, and what better than the anthem *I will magnify Thee* recently published by the Church Music Society in anticipation of Handel's anniversary. *I will magnify Thee* is one of those Chapel Royal anthems that has bloomed unseen in the past because a cursory examination of the score suggests that it is only a variant of a Chandos anthem. In Chrysander's *Händelgesellschaft* edition — as yet, still the most comprehensive publication of Handel's church music, though inevitably out of date — the Chandos anthem *I will magnify Thee*

appears as Anthem 5A, and the Chapel Royal anthem beginning with the same text appears *after* it as Anthem 5B. If you look at the first bars of the two anthems you would notice the absence of violas in the Chandos anthem, perhaps, but also that both anthems begin with the same music – and you might jump to conclusions about what follows. Now, it is true that Handel drew on Chandos material for his Chapel Royal anthem. The first point to make, however, is that he only kept the outer musical structure from the Chandos version of *I will magnify Thee*: the inner four movements are related, to a greater or lesser extent, to music from three other Chandos anthems. Here we are faced with a most remarkable situation. The Chandos version was almost entirely based on a text from Psalm 145. By drawing on so many different previous sources, the Chapel Royal anthem includes texts from Psalms 89 and 96 in the middle of the anthem. (Incidentally, this must be taken as conclusive evidence that Handel was allowed to choose his own texts for the Chapel Royal services.) The remarkable thing is that the result works so splendidly both as an anthem text-anthology and as a musical composition.

Looking at the text first, this has a flow and a shape which could hardly have been bettered by any literary theologian. The ideas in the text form an arch pattern with movement 4 as the central climax:

- Nos 1 and 2:* Call to praise (No 1) and worship (No 2).
- No 3:* Four attributes of the Almighty, in pairs (Glory & Worship/Power & Honour).
- No 4:* The faithful are enjoined to tell the heathen about the power of the Almighty.
- No 5:* Four attributes of the Almighty, in pairs (Righteousness & Equity/Mercy and Truth).
- No 6:* Praise and Thanksgiving. Expressed, like No 1, in the first person.

It will be seen that, within the general intention of a laudatory text, the emphasis is subtly varied from movement to movement.

Handel's music is well matched to the structure. There is a cumulative plan to the first half of the anthem. The opening solo movement with its first-person text leads into a duet for the invitation to 'worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness'; the building-up process continues in No 3, with its arrangement in 7 voice parts, but

this is deliberately less powerful in effect than No 4, where the chorus voices come together to assert that 'the Lord is King' and that 'He made the world so fast it cannot be moved'. The divine attributes of justice and mercy demand the quieter, more serious treatment that Handel then provides in a minor-key movement for solo alto (No 5); in the last movement the chorus supports the soloists' words 'let all flesh give thanks' with cries of 'Amen'.

Every movement of the anthem was subjected to a different type of revision by Handel in the process of adaptation from Chandos music. His revision techniques included re-arrangement to suit different forces and the simple reduction of (over-)lengthy movements by cutting, but also detailed recomposition, the improvement of individual passages and the composition of completely new movements from thematic material supplied by earlier versions. More clearly than usual, the anthem demonstrates one of the anomalies of Handel's compositional processes: the amount of work involved was surely greater than that which would have resulted from beginning the composition again from scratch. Beyond that, and this is purely a personal view, I can think of no work which has a stronger internal sense that Handel was actually welcoming the chance to re-work some quite good stuff into an even better shape.

There is not time now to play the music of the complete anthem and in any case I probably ought to encourage you to rush out and perform it yourselves. If you do so, I'm sure that you will find, as I did in my own performance, that you'll want to treat the first four movements almost as one unit. It seems a pity to break this unit up, but I want to return to that matter of the anthem's opening bars, so I will concentrate on the first movement. I said that if you looked at the anthem's first bars you might not expect the music to be much different from the preceding Chandos anthem. In fact the continuation is very different. The Chandos anthem begins with a two-movement Symphony, the theme of the first movement coming from Handel's *Sonata a Cinque* for violin and orchestra from his Italian period. (EXAMPLES 4 and 5.)

[Recorded illustration – opening of 'Sonata a Cinque', movement 1; opening of *Sinfonia*, movement 1, from Anthem 5A.]

This then leads into the first 'chorus', the text being rendered to a theme derived from Handel's Latin psalm *Dixit Dominus*. (EXAMPLE 6.)

[Recorded illustrations – first chorus entries from Anthem 5A and 'Dixit Dominus'.]

To my mind the music is rather brash and thumpy for this particular text, and perhaps Handel thought so too. For the Chapel Royal anthem he craftily used the opening theme from the Sinfonia of the Chandos anthem as the orchestral ritornello to a more suave and elevated aria setting of the text. (EXAMPLE 7.) It was composed for Francis Hughes, the Chapel's leading alto in the 1720s. This movement is an entirely appropriate musical tribute to Handel's association with the Chapel Royal with which to conclude this paper, and I make no apology for ending on the dominant.

[Recorded illustration – 'I will magnify Thee', Anthem 5B, movement 1, in making which the lecturer acknowledges the kind co-operation of Richard Popplewell and John Halsey.]

FOR MUSICAL EXAMPLES, SEE PAGES 15-19.

Ex. 1

Canto solo

HANDEL: Anthem 6c etc.

Alto 2 Mr. Eilfurt As pants the Hart for cool - ing etc.

Continuo As pants the Hart for cool - ing streams, for cool - ing etc.

Ex. 2

J. BLOW, 1697 etc.

S. My God, my God, look - etc.

A. My God, my God, look - up - on etc.

T. My God, my God, look - up - on me, why hast thou for - etc.

B. My God, my God, look up - on me, why hast thou for - sa - ren me?

Ex. 3 [Andante]

HANDEL: Anthem 6c

Continuo

Alto

Tears, — tears, — tears, —

Adagio

tears are my dai - ly food, are my dai - ly food,

Andante

tears, tears, are my dai - - - ly food, are

— my dai - - - ly food, when thus they say, when thus they say:

where, where, where is now thy God? where, (etc.)

(4)

Ex. 4 Andante

HANDEL: Sonata a cinque

Vln. solo

Vln. & Oboe, 1 and 2

Vla.

Cembalo

Tutti Bassi

Ex. 5 Andante

HANDEL: Anthem 5A

Oboe

Vln. 1 and 2

Tutti Bassi

ending thus:

followed by an Allegro  $\frac{3}{4}$  movement and then by Ex. 6.

Ob.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Bassi

Adagio



Ex. 6 Allegro

HANDEL: Anthem SA

Oboe etc.

Vlrs. 1 and 2 etc.

CANTO etc.

TENOR etc.

BASS etc.

Bassi etc.

I will mag-ni-fy thee, O God my King, I

I will mag-ni-fy thee, O God my King, I will mag-ni-fy

I will mag-ni-fy thee, O God my King, I

Ex. 7 Andante

HANDEL: Anthem SB

Oboe

Vlrs. 1 and 2

Vla.

Bassi

(Ex. 7, continuing from middle of bar 9)

ALTO

I will mag - ni - fy thee, O

etc.

etc.

etc.

God my King, I will mag - ni - fy

etc.

W.S. scripsit