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## What Is the Significance of Specialized Voice Technique in Handel's Cantatas?

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**Research Question:** “What is The Significance of Specialized Voice Technique in Handel's Cantatas?”

### **Abstract**

George Frideric Handel’s music is not performed as prominently as that of his peers of his time. This research project aims to achieve the following objectives: a. To analyze Handel's cantatas in terms of vocal range, ornamentation, and technical challenges. b. To identify the specialized vocal techniques in the Baroque era and skills needed for the interpretation of Handel's cantatas and why its subtle nature makes it inaccessible to singers and audiences.

### **Annotated Bibliography**

1. Wishart, Trevor. “The Composer’s View: Extended Vocal Technique.” *The Musical Times* 121, no. 1647 (1980): 313–14. <https://doi.org/10.2307/963728>.

“The Composer’s View: Extended Vocal Technique” by Trevor Wishart (*The Musical Times* 121). Wishart’s work delves into the importance of pitch and proper sound production in classical music. This journal gives an understanding of singing through an analysis of the functions of tongue movement, vowel placement, voiced consonants and clicks. His accessibility in his writing makes it a must read for anyone seeking a taste of appreciation for classical music singing. Wishart Trevor is an English composer, based in York. Wishart has contributed to composing with digital audio media, both fixed and interactive. He has also written extensively on the topic of what he terms “sonic art”, and contributed to the design and implementation of software tools used in the creation of digital music.

2. Uberti, Mauro, and Mark Lindley. “Vocal Techniques in Italy in the Second Half of the 16th Century.” *Early Music* 9, no. 4 (1981): 486–95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3126691>.

Uberti dives into the anatomical features of the voice in order to show how certain historical depictions of singing distinguish between early and modern (romantic) techniques. He discusses how the varied position of the larynx affects vibrato and registers in singing in a much detailed manner. This article will come in handy in understanding the technical work that goes into producing sound suitable for baroque music. Mark Lindley is a noted musicologist and, more recently, a historian of modern India, and a teacher of economics. Born in Washington, D.C, he studied at Harvard University (A.B.), the Juilliard School of Music (M.S.) and Columbia University (D. Phil.).

3. Elliott, Martha. “The Late Baroque.” In *Singing in Style: A Guide to Vocal Performance Practices*. Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006. 53–91. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32brkx.6>.

Elliot discusses the development of vocal music and singing styles in Germany, France, and England and considers how they were affected by the overwhelming popularity of Italian opera and the fame of Italian singers. It reviews how the relationship between words and music continued to develop, and it discusses different national approaches toward ornamentation. Elliot Martha is a soprano, writer and teacher at Princeton University, has performed a wide range of repertoire, including avant-garde contemporary music, opera, chamber music, and baroque music with period instruments.

4. Buelow, George J. "A Study in Baroque Performing Practice." *The Musical Times* 120, no. 1638 (1979): 625–39. <https://doi.org/10.2307/962464>.

Buelow pays much attention to the devotion to historical authenticity in performing old music as a development in musicology. He says that the subject of ornamentation as found in Baroque and post-Baroque music precludes simple statements, yet authors made a herculean effort to organize such music for clarity and so it is worth our attention and respect. This article will help give a better understanding of the change in style of old baroque ornamentations to new Western sacred music. George J. Buelow, Professor Emeritus of Musicology at Indiana University, is former President of the American Bach Society. His research and publications, including several articles in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, focus on the music of the Baroque and the history of opera.

5. Ford, Walter. "Handel's Cantatas." *Proceedings of the Musical Association* 58 (1931): 33–42, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/765646>.

Ford focuses on Handel's cantatas against those of Bach and how their reception framed the popularity of the composer's cantatas. He mentions that we now possess one hundred cantatas, most of which are for soprano and some for alto because of the stories Handel wanted to tell. He notes that recitative must be regarded as an integral part of the cantata as there is plenty of fine work in them for both orchestra and voice. The focus of this article gives a better understanding of why cantatas are not done a lot and how the accessibility to the music looks like to the artist.

6. Harris, Ellen T. "Cantate, Que Me Veux-Tu?" Or: Do Handel's Cantatas Matter?" In *Music as Social and Cultural Practice: Essays in Honour of Reinhard Strohm*, edited by Melania Bucciarelli and Berta Joncus, NED-New edition. 159–84. Rochester, New York: Boydell & Brewer Press, 2007. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt1f89rn0.19>.

Harris looks at context, text and music of Handel. She says that Handel's operas "Lucrezia and Agrippina" had much musical richness that she is convinced that they were important to Handel's life and musical development or, as Strohm put it, that 'the hundred and more cantatas da camera which Handel wrote in Italy are a kind of musical diary'. A comparison of works in this book will reveal the special touch of Handel's work in the research. Harris Ellen is a musicologist

whose work focuses on Handel, Baroque opera, and vocal performance practice. She is a regular Visiting Professor at The Juilliard School. Her most recent book, *George Frideric Handel: A Life with Friends* (W. W. Norton, 2014) won the Nicolas Slonimsky Award for Outstanding Musical Biography (ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award) in 2015.

7. Stevens, Denis. "Performance Practice in Baroque Vocal Music." *College Music Symposium* 18, no. 2 (1978): 9–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40373964>.

Stevens delves into technical ideologies of successfully singing baroque music. He asks the questions: How does one manage to impart an easy and natural flow to the music, so that the meter, structure, and phrasing of the poetry comes through clearly? Is it something to do with the tempo one chooses?" He believes that tempo has little to do with the matter: the secret (if such there be) lies in the accurate perception of verbal stresses and rhythms, the unequivocal disclosure of these in the preparation of a practical edition, and then the normal procedure of rehearsal and performance. Stevens Denis was a British musicologist specializing in early music, conductor, professor of music and radio producer. Among his many other works, Stevens completed the task of producing the Supplementary Volume to the 5th edition of Grove Dictionary of Music AND Musicians, which Eric Blom had not been able to complete by the time of Blom's death in 1959.

8. Ransome, Antony. "Towards an Authentic Vocal Style and Technique in Late Baroque Performance." *Early Music* 6, no. 3 (1978): 417–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3125812>.

Ransome acknowledges that far too little study has been done of the kind of voice suitable for authentic baroque performance. Ransome explains that if the words of any music, baroque or other, are to move their audience, they must clearly be sung with due attention to their stress and to their mood and meaning, and it follows that any vocal phrase must be performed in such a way as to allow the words naturally to convey that mood and meaning. This article is a true test of what we call 'art' and will provide an insight of the worthiness of Handel's music. Ransome Antony is an Australian baritone, music teacher, psychotherapist. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree with Honors from Melbourne University. He continued his studies in Geneva. Antony Ransome founded the Wren Consort for performances and recordings of Baroque cantatas and has sung over sixty roles in the operatic baritone repertory including Scarpia and Jochanaan in Budapest, world premieres in Munich and Bologna and many Verdi and *verismo* roles in northern Germany.

9. Lang, Paul Henry. "Performance Practice and the Voice." In *Musicology and Performance*, edited by Alfred Mann and George J. Buelow. Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1997. 185–98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bdfh.30>.

Lang draws our attention to realize that the art of singing is vague and complicated because it is closely bound to linguistics – that is speech patterns, rhythms, inflections and verbal articulation in general. Languages are constantly evolving and it is the duty of the singer to

understand the dual duty of the vocal cords - speaking and singing. This book draws attention to the details that make singing such music hard to attain and what it takes to perform it with meaning. Lang was a Hungarian-American musicologist and music critic. Born as "Pál Láng" in Budapest, Hungary and was educated in Catholic schools. In 1918, as World War I was coming to an end, he was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army though he had not completed school, and sent to the Italian front.

10. LaRue, C. Steven. 1997. "Handel and the Aria." Chapter. In *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*, edited by Donald Burrows, 109–21. Cambridge Companions to Music. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
<http://doi.org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521454254.010>.

LaRue marvels at Handel's work and says that Handel is one of the most accessible and elusive creative figures in Western music. LaRue notes however that Handel's style of music is rather preferred as background music for clientele because of its subtle nature when compared to Mozart and Beethoven. LaRue is a musicologist known for his work in the field of musicology and historical performance practice. He has made contributions to the study of Baroque music, particularly focusing on the violin and the performance practices of the Baroque era. LaRue has written extensively on topics related to historical performance, Baroque violin technique, and the music of the 17th and 18th centuries. His research often involves a deep exploration of primary sources and historical treatises to understand how music was performed during the Baroque period.

11. Burrows, Donald. "Review: Cantatas; sonatas by George Frideric Handel" *Early Music* 19, no. 3 (1991): 486–88. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3127798>.

Burrows praises Handel for being one of the miracles of musical history who was able to produce Latin church music and secular Italian cantatas as fluent and as characterful as any of the native composers of Italy. This article provides substantial information on Handel's work while in Italy. Donald Burrows is a leading authority on the life and music of George Frideric Handel. His book *Handel and the English Chapel Royal* has been recognised as the first full-scale study of Handel's English church music. His published editions of Handel's music include the oratorios *Messiah*, *Samson*, and *Belshazzar*; the operas *Imeneo* and *Ariodante*; the complete violin sonatas; and the suite for two harpsichords.

12. Giselbrecht, Elisabeth, "Finding the voice of the Italian Baroque," *Early Music*, no. 40, Issue 1, (2012): 142–145, <https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/em/cas002>

Giselbrecht dives into how enjoying the baroque repertoire requires some study and adaptability and adaptability and the plentiful possibilities it provides for performers. Giselbrecht lays out a few examples of works and how they are to be approached to showcase the abilities of both vocalists and instrumentalists of different backgrounds. Elisabeth has taught undergraduate courses at all levels, focusing on the music and sources of the early modern period up to Bach. She has also supervised a range of courses from Machaut to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and taught postgraduate level at the *Rare Books School*, University of London. Elisabeth's other musical passion is contemporary opera and she has worked with the Bregenz opera festival, writing and editing programme books, giving pre-performance lectures and organizing outreach events.