Artist and Teacher

Alfred Mann

In his imaginative review of Paul Henry Lang's Handel biography (*The New York Times*, September 25, 1966), Gerald Abraham noted an interesting point of comparison between Handel's career and the author's own: they settled in the countries of their choice at exactly the same age. It is tempting to extend this thought despite the obvious pitfalls and limitations of analogy. In both cases, permanent residence in the new country followed upon an earlier foreign sojourn of four years. In both cases, this sojourn was decisive.

It was the world of French literary excellence from which Paul Henry Lang took the conviction that to write about art is in itself an art. Devoted to the example of Romain Rolland, supreme master of music and letters, the first American professor of musicology has invariably served his discipline as an artist. Nothing could be more typical of his attitude toward the finished scholarly essay than his delight at the alarmed question posed on one occasion by an editor to whom he delivered a manuscript: "*Wo sind die Fussnoten?*"

The standards of the artist have prevailed in his teaching. The students who enter his seminar enter the workshop of a practicing writer forever absorbed in the perfection of the scholarly craft. His instruction, by model rather than precept, reflects the scope and vision of his own work, and in discussing portions of Handel's teaching in the following pages, we do not hesitate to suggest the parallel between Handel and his biographer again.

Handel's teaching has received little attention; his interest in the didactic process and the role it played in his artistic career have been underestimated. Although earlier in his life Handel had resented teaching some of the young of Hamburg's aristocracy, later, as the Royal Music Master, he took a delight in Princess Anne's talent and progress. The autographs containing Handel's instruction in composition are associated with his most mature style and with portions of his best known works.[1]

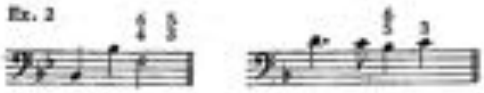
Unlike Bach, Haydn, and Beethoven, who copied or paraphrased extensive portions of composition manuals for their

students, Handel did not draw on the theoretical writings of his time. Nor does he seem to have taken an interest in theoretical formulations. The course of instruction which he prepared began with the study of bass realization, but nowhere is a chord discussed as separate entity or phenomenon. The figures of his thorough-bass examples delineate melodic rather than harmonic situations in such a pronounced manner that even the first two introduced (the 3 and the 6) serve immediately as starting points for chromatic progressions (Example 1).

Ex. 1

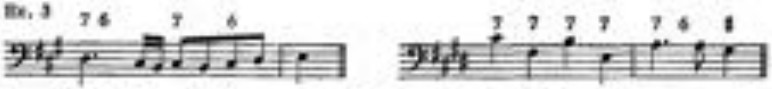
The order in which the familiar symbols are thus placed seems curiously inverted to the modern harmony teacher. $\frac{6}{5}$ and $\frac{6}{4}$ $\frac{}{2}$ are presented before 7; $\frac{6}{4}$ $\frac{}{3}$ is paired with $\frac{7}{4}$ $\frac{}{2}$ at the very end of the discussion, in examples of progressions below and above a pedal note. $\frac{6}{4}$ and $\frac{6}{5}$ appear together: both serve as illustrations for the melodic formula of the resolution into the third (Example 2). The use of the seventh is shown first in examples of the 7-6

Ex. 2



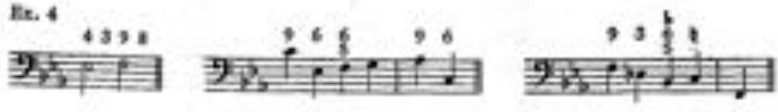
resolution, then in examples of seventh chord successions (Example 3). The ninth is followed by the octave, the sixth, or

Ex. 3



the third, depending upon the motions of the different voices involved (Example 4). But there is no such rule as, for instance, Bach gives for the use of the ninth: "With 9-8 one plays 3 and 5."[2]

Ex. 4



Nevertheless, Handel's presentation of the practice of figured bass is highly systematic. It is contained in 24 examples in which the components of the triad are subjected to all the principal situations of part writing. The examples are divided into groups of three, and a careful didactic design is evident at once from the sequence of examples in the first group. They are exercises for the combination of root positions, the first in C Major and written entirely in half notes, the second in G Major and written entirely in quarters, and the third in F Major and written entirely in eighth notes. All three are in common time, and the methodical progress continues with the following examples: the next two are in the minor mode and show combinations of various note values in triple meter.

While the pedagogical pace is deliberate, the course of these studies is remarkably free from limitation. The problem of the passing and turning dissonance is introduced in the passages from the root of one chord to that of another, and the discussion of the third opens a spectrum of new problems: the alteration and inversion of the consonance and the resolution of the tied dissonance. Thus, the second group of three examples is devoted to the exchange of major and minor chords and to the modulation between major and minor modes. The third group deals with the sixth chord, with its alterations, and with a wider scope of diatonic modulation. The fourth group deals, in more extensive examples, with the unaccompanied and accompanied suspension of the third; the fifth group similarly with the unaccompanied and accompanied suspension of the inverted third.

The fifth of the chord does not lend itself to a treatment comparable to that of the third; the octave lends itself only to suspension. But in conjunction with the discussion of resolutions into the octave, which Handel takes up next, he shows a greatly increased range of problems in part writing; this section is made up of six examples reviewing all suspensions and double suspensions and illustrating the resolution from one dissonant chord to another. A concluding group of three examples consists of basses for complete sonata movements, and the figured bass exercises are followed by a set of meticulously copied sonatas from Handel's Opus 1.

We have pointed out the virtual absence of a distinction between the disciplines of harmony and counterpoint. An intensification of the thorough-bass fabric through use of

imitation is suggested in the earliest examples, and a later systematic exposition of the technique of imitation and fugue, in turn, presents the unmistakable appearance of a continuation of examples for bass realization. Similarly, a distinction between studies in the "old" and "new" style—the essence of Fux's teaching—is absent; Handel's instruction embraces both with natural ease. The examples for stretto exercises, some of which reappear in the final chorus from *Messiah*, so perfectly reflect the *stile antico* that Chrysander assumed they were responds written by an anonymous Renaissance master which Handel copied without the text. Yet the fact that Handel wrote, not copied, them is evident from corrections which give unquestionable proof of the act of composition. The most elaborate of these is at the same time connected with a striking demonstration of the transition from one style to another.

Handel begins the example as shown in Example 5; in order

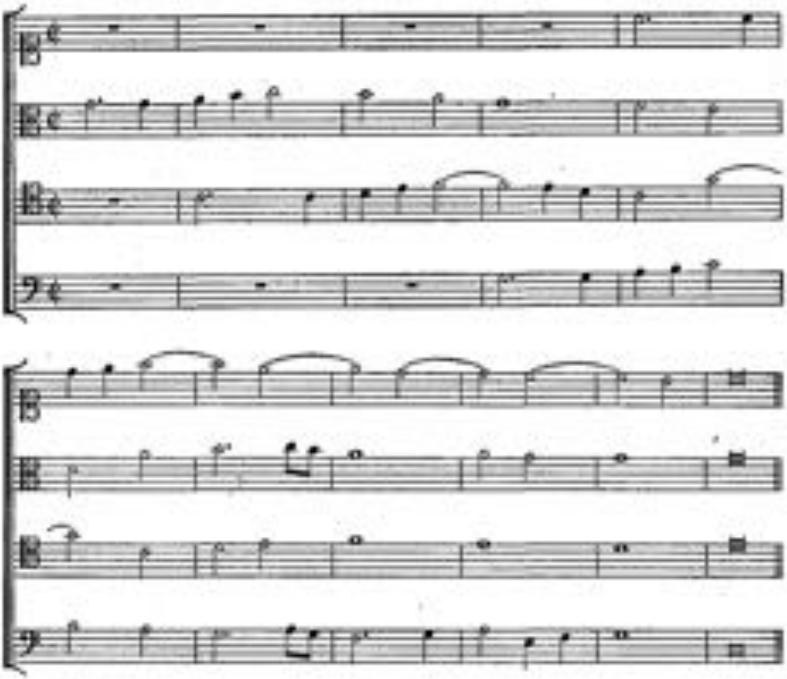
Ex. 5

to avoid the fourth in the second measure, he changes the upper part, as shown in Example 6. The change produces the

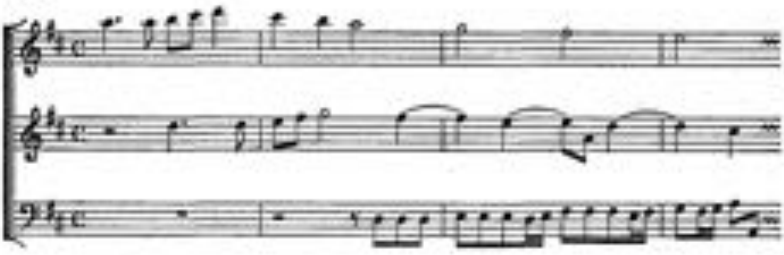
Ex. 6

intended beginning of a stretto passage, but the melodic line now sketched out would lead in imitation to successive sevenths. Thus, a further change is required, and rather than giving up this melodic line, Handel decides to alter the spacing of entrances, which enables him to complete the example (Example 7). The same extended opening, however, serves on another page for a different example in which the closely woven motet texture of the stretto exercise is transformed, through the introduction of a second theme, to a sprightly trio sonata setting (Example 8).

Ex. 7

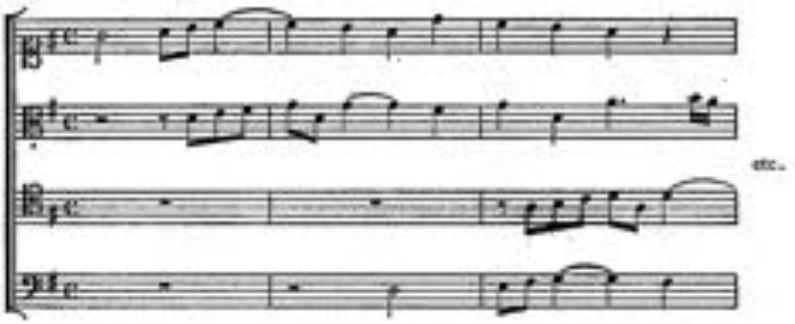


Ex. 8



The use of two themes leads us into the most advanced phase of Handel's instruction. In the examples and assignments for the composition of double fugues, the second theme is in several cases derived from the first, as, for instance, in a fugue whose thematic material is related to that of the examples just quoted (see Example 9). A final example, in which two themes are related to each other by augmentation and diminution, links Handel's fugal teaching again to *Messiah* (the chorus "Let all the angels rejoice"; the thematic material returns in *Samson* and the *Foundling Hospital Anthem*).

Ex. 9



The plan of Handel's instruction unfolds with magnificent logic and clarity. While it always demands a broad perspective, there is never any doubt about Handel's specific directions. In a four-part fugue he writes out the first three thematic entrances; beginning with the fourth, he continues merely the bass line but indicates by figures the contrapuntal texture to be realized. It is followed by a four-part fugue which Handel begins with the bass entrance and in which he marks at the second, third, and fourth measures of the bass part in ascending order the entrances for tenor, alto, and cantus: T $\bar{d}$, A $\bar{g}$, C $\bar{d}$. In the larger fugue assignments, all of which are again written in thorough-bass manner, Handel outlines all expositions by means of similar entries. For the exposition of double fugues he indicates the choice of *Subj.* and *Contrasubj.*

But beyond this there are no comments, no verbal explanations. In his role as teacher, Handel remains at all times the active composer. Here, too, what Paul Henry Lang writes in the introduction to his Handel biography applies: "All we can do is to endeavor to follow the development of thought and technique, placing them in their proper environment, so that the image of the artist will appear before us."

NOTES

[1] The autographs are preserved in volumes 260, 263, and 264 of the manuscript collection in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. A survey of their contents was given by the present writer in *Händel-Jahrbuch* 1964/65, pp. 35–57.

[2] See H. T. David and A. Mendel, *The Bach Reader*, New York, 1966, p. 393.