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Darkness and Light: Handel's Rhetorical Vocal Writing in the English Oratorio *Samson*

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This study examines the composer's rhetorical response to emotive and evocative elements of the text within the English oratorio *Samson* (HWV 57) contextualised through contemporary scholarship pertaining to George Frideric Handel (1650–1759), rhetorical ideology established by ancient Greek and Roman intellectuals and the aesthetic notion of the affections that emerged in the Baroque period. Given the significance of rhetorical doctrine and the affections for eighteenth-century theorists, composers and performers, and an established body of work in the broader context of late-Baroque performance practice, scant evidence investigating Handel's adaptation of rhetorical principles has emerged. Through examination of the composer's manuscripts, this study assesses Handel's rhetorical attitudes. It reflects upon tangible avenues to rhetorically based vocal interpretation informed by historical sources, in such a way that expressive, eloquent performance may come to light.

In a celebrated study of Handel's dramatic oratorios, Winton Dean alludes to darkness and light as spiritual and poetical elements pervading the narrative within *Samson* ([Dean 1959: 333](#)). References to darkness become apparent in Act One: Samson's aria 'Torments alas!' reveals the physical agony of blindness and incarceration. The latter's mental anguish is evident in the *recitativo semplice* 'Whom have I to complain of?', as loss of sight, a fate crueler than vagrancy, frailty or detention, condemns Samson to transcendent gloom.

Two potent arias sung by the title character in Acts One and Three establish pillars bolstering the oratorio's spiritual trajectory from darkness to light: the shadows of despair cast by Samson's blindness in the first act's 'Total eclipse!' are dispelled by the sun's lustrous purity in the former's contemplative solo 'Thus when the sun'. As a line of fiery Seraphims offers boundless incandescence, the work's closing aria and chorus heighten the sense of spiritual radiance affected by the redemption of Samson's honour through death at the hands of the Philistines, while the concluding refrain 'Let their celestial concerts all unite' resonates with the Act One chorus 'O first created beam' and Micah's *recitativo accompagnato* 'Since light so necessary is to life'.

Handel underpins earthly darkness and the light of heavenly redemption within the plot through realisation of rhetorical principles offered by Aristotle (384–322BC),



Cicero (106–43BC) and Quintilian (AD c35–c96). In the centuries prior to Handel's birth, scholars deliberated on the links between rhetorical doctrine and music ([Treitler 1998: 352–57](#); [Mace 1966: 1](#)), and the aesthetic notion of the affections ([Mei 1989: 56–75](#); [Treitler 1998: 468–71](#)). Handel's contemporaries Jacob ([1970: 3–4](#)) and Spiess ([1745: 161](#)) discussed the rhetorical union of text and music as a heightened expressive form intended to move the emotions of the listener. Thus, such doctrines reinforced the presentation of an affection arousing and manipulating the emotions of the listener as the principal objective of composers in the Baroque period. Treatises by authors contemporaneous of Handel, including Geminiani ([Boyden 1952: 1](#)), Quantz ([Reilly 1966: 119–20, 124–6](#)), Bach ([Mitchell 1949: 150–3, 161–3](#)) and Mancini ([Treitler 1998: 866–75](#)) present broad-based observations on the affective interpretation of eighteenth-century music.

While the secondary literature offers contextual commentary on historical aspects of vocal style ([Wistreich 2000: 183–90](#); [Potter 2012: 507–15](#)), exploring the nexus between theoretical and practical elements of period performance ([McMahon 2013: 204–8](#); [McMahon 2014: 272–9](#)), while offering lucid observations on Handel's vocal works ([Dean and Knapp 1995](#); [Dean 2006](#)) and his compositional processes ([Hurley 1997](#), [LaRue 1997](#)), limited discussion of the composer's rhetorical approaches is evident. Given the literature underscores rhetoric's philosophical currency as a corner-stone of compositional technique and vocal convention in the eighteenth century, this study intensifies the expressive frontiers of current performance practice by assessing Handel's integration of rhetorical theories through performative perspectives.

Ancient Greek and Roman philosophers acknowledged the eloquent decoration of declamatory speech through the five foundations of classical rhetoric: *inventio*, the development and refinement of the argument, message or idea; *dispositio*, the arrangement of the arguments in an appropriate sequence, determining how the form of the speech should be organised for greatest effect; *elocutio*, once the content of the speech is known and the structure is determined, the arguments should be expressed in correct and pleasing language; *memoria* comes into play as the orator recalls each of these elements during the course of the speech; and *actio*, the delivery of the oration with a gracious use of the voice and pleasing gestures ([Quintilian 1920: 383](#); [Medine 1994: 9](#)).

This research investigates aspects of the composer's *dispositio* and *elocutio* in framing the illumination of light, considering the role taken by periodic removal of instrumental accompaniment in promoting intelligibility of the text ([Quintilian 1921a: 367–9](#)), autonomy of delivery, and subtle syllabic and dynamic inflection on the part of the singer ([Quintilian 1921b: 365–9, 553–5](#)). The study will survey a *recitativo accompagnato* and aria illustrating rhetorical *decoratio* through two of the rare examples of notated cadenzas in Handel's output. It also examines *dispositio* through the rhetorical employment of *aposiopesis*, unanticipated silence, to heighten the effect of emotive text, while an investigation of melodic contouring in several arias reflects upon the relationship between pitch and rhetorical declamation ([Quintilian 1922: 277–9](#); [Mei 1989: 58–9](#)). Thus the performer's grasp of *actio* through eloquent interpretation of the composer's *inventio* and *dispositio* allows sensitive communication with the listener.

Rhetoric

The exploration of rhetorical principles is significant for musicians of today through the reciprocal nature of performativity evident between music and rhetoric. From approximately the fifth century BC to around 1800, rhetoric served as one of the most prestigious and influential means of conceptualising and organising language, and for articulating persuasive and elegant forms of communication. Furthermore, writers on music in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries consistently drew upon rhetorical terms and analogies. As rhetoric shares with music the structured recitation of sound across time, the fundamental notion of the oration and the score as a work, and the enactment of said work through the characteristics of performance and delivery, the two disciplines intuitively form a cohesive alliance.

In his extensive treatise on the theoretic and applied elements of the rhetorical arts, Roman scholar Quintilian described rhetoric as a manner of speaking in accord with the merits of an acclaimed orator, whose message informs, persuades and entertains the listener ([Quintilian 1921b: 91, 181, 213, 245](#)). Cicero and other intellectuals of classical antiquity explored the intimate relationship between rhetorical theory and the tone and rhythm of persuasive speech ([Dugan 2013: 30–1, 34, 38–9](#); [May and Wisse 2001: 290–3](#)). Such historical figures document associations between music performance and the compelling discourse employed by accomplished orators to influence the emotional responses of the listener.



Early Roman scholarship underlines the unswerving rhetorical rapport between music and text, highlighting the power of musical elements to sway the emotions of the audience ([Quintilian 1920: 173, 175](#)). Examining the manner and pacing of persuasive speech, Cicero draws parallels between affecting singing and the consummate orator's eloquent delivery ([Dugan 2013: 38–9](#)). Quintilian and the Greek philosopher Aristotle also allude to the elements of such a rhetorical style, including ornate speech, clarity of voice and variations of pitch, rhythm and tone to inspire the emotions of the listener ([Freese 1926: 347](#); [Quintilian 1922: 275–7](#)).

Affect

Derived from the Greek 'pathos' and Latin 'affectus', affect refers to moods, emotional states, or rationalised, implicit passions such as joy, sorrow, rage, and doubt ([Buelow 2007](#)). In a similar manner to oratory, in which rhetorical speech swayed the emotions of the listener, theorists of the Baroque period echoed observations by ancient rhetoricians in suggesting the speaker, or composer, move the affect or emotions of the audience. Quintilian ([1922: 277–9](#)) notes arousal of the listener's sentiments as dependant upon the orator's power to represent or imitate the passions. In the same manner as an orator conceived an idea elaborated upon through decoration with figures of speech, so too composers of the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries cultivated an accord imposed on the work by its affect. Through stimulus of the auditory senses by means of the voice, the acoustical signal inherent to the human body ([Sloboda 2007](#)), music of the period often incited audience expectations and moods; so it was with Handel's operas and oratorios.

In establishing the rhetorical union of text and music as a heightened expressive form intended to move the emotions of the listener, theorists allude to the presentation of an affection arousing the emotions of the listener through music as one of the principal objectives of composers in the Baroque period ([Bartel 1997: 29](#)). Bacilly ([1668: 199–204](#)) was one of the first practitioners to discuss the affective qualities of particular ornaments, while theorist, composer and singer Johann Mattheson (1681–1764) argued the primary purpose of melody, harmony, intervals and keys is the arousal of the soul's affections ([Harriss 1981: 51, 104–11](#)). Other concurrent writers, including Geminiani ([Boyden 1952: 1](#)), Quantz ([Reilly 1966: 119–20](#)) and Mancini ([Treitler 1998: 866–75](#)) suggested vocal and instrumental performers should convey musical affect through a declamatory style replicating the ideals of oratory. In order for singers to etch within the listener affections inherent in the musical language, such a delivery incorporated clarity of articulation, syllabic accentuation of the text, subtle variants of dynamics and vocal inflections.

By entering 'into the principal and related passions that he is to express', Quantz places the performer's role in context, urging the latter to heed the affective ideals 'the composer ... had in mind when he wrote the piece' ([Reilly 1966: 124–5](#)). In this way, Quantz suggests composers and performers share the orator's principles:

in regard to both the preparation and the final execution of their productions, namely to make themselves masters of the hearts of their listeners, to arouse or still their passions, and to transport them now to this sentiment, now to that ... The good effect of a piece of music depends almost as much upon the performer as upon the composer himself ([Reilly 1966: 119–20](#)).

Sources contemporaneous of Handel note the poignant quality of his music in swaying the emotions of the listener. In 1722, a poem by Daniel Prat, former chaplain to the royal household at Kensington Palace, commended Handel's ability at the keyboard, while noting music's power to influence the audience's moods:

... As Thou our Spirits do'st command,
which rise and fall by just Degrees,
Each Soul obsequious to thy Hand.
With Joy and Wonder fill'd, we seem
Born on the swelling Sounds on high ...
All things are hush'd, and ev'ry Breath
Seems stop'd as in the Arms of Death!
Each restless Passion's softly lull'd to Peace,
And silent Thought seems only not to cease ...



What sacred Rage their breast alarms,
Whose more than barb'rous ZEAL exclaims
Against the soft persuasive Charms
Of Musick, which the savage tames?
... Thy Music, like the sacred Page,
Tempers the fierce, uplifts the Faint,
Composes Youth, enlivens Age,
The' obdurate melts, inflames the Saint!
Each now refin'd from low Desires,
Rais'd high by Thee, and nobler grown,
His elevated Thought admires,
And feels a Spirit not his own! ([Deutsch 1955: 139–44](#)).

References to the fluctuating passions produced by Handel's music are also apparent in the following poetic extract by Laurence Whyte, which appeared in Faulkner's *Dublin Journal* following the premiere of *Messiah* in 1742:

... Here nature smiles, when grac'd with Handel's Art,
Transports the Ear, and ravishes the Heart;
To all the nobler Passions we are mov'd,
When various strains repeated and improve'd,
... None but the Great Messiah cou'd inflame,
And raise his soul to so sublime a *Theme*, ... ([Deutsch 1955: 546–7](#)).

An anonymous epitaph published in the *Universal Chronicle* on 21 April 1759 celebrated Handel's ability to capture emotional states empathetic to his audiences:

Beneath this Place
Are repositied the Remains of
GEORGE FREDERICK HANDEL.
The most excellent Musician
Any Age ever produced:
Whose Compositions were a
Sentimental Language
Rather than mere Sounds;
And surpassed the Power of Words
In expressing the various Passions
Of the Human Heart ([Deutsch 1955: 820](#)).

In his *History of the science and practice of music* (1776), the English music historian John Hawkins, an acquaintance of Handel, described the effect of the latter's organ playing on audiences. In reference to the type of listener possessing little general knowledge of music, Hawkins suggests:

Persons such as these, who, had they been left to themselves, would have interrupted the hearing of others by their talking, were by the performance of Handel not only charmed into silence, but were generally the loudest in their acclamations. This ... was a much stronger proof of the power of harmony, than the like effect on an audience composed only of judges and rational admirers of his art ([Hawkins 1963: 913](#)).

Noting Handel's capacity to sway his listeners' emotions, the criticality of *affect* and rhetorical principles within music of the Baroque period, and the significance of light in varying shades within Samson's spiritual journey from denunciation to redemption, the current study explores the manner in which the composer's musical structures draw upon ancient rhetorical principles, and considers means through which present-day singers may cultivate an affecting, rhetorical interpretation.



Figure 1. The ritornello (bars 1–5) to the aria ‘Total Eclipse!’ ([Handel 1741–1742](#)).

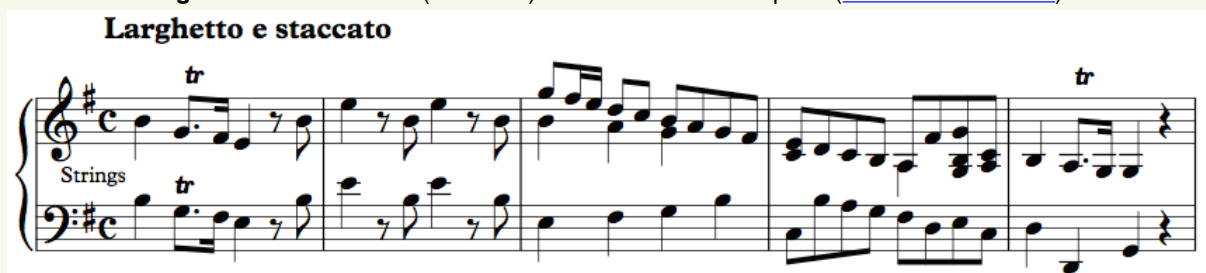
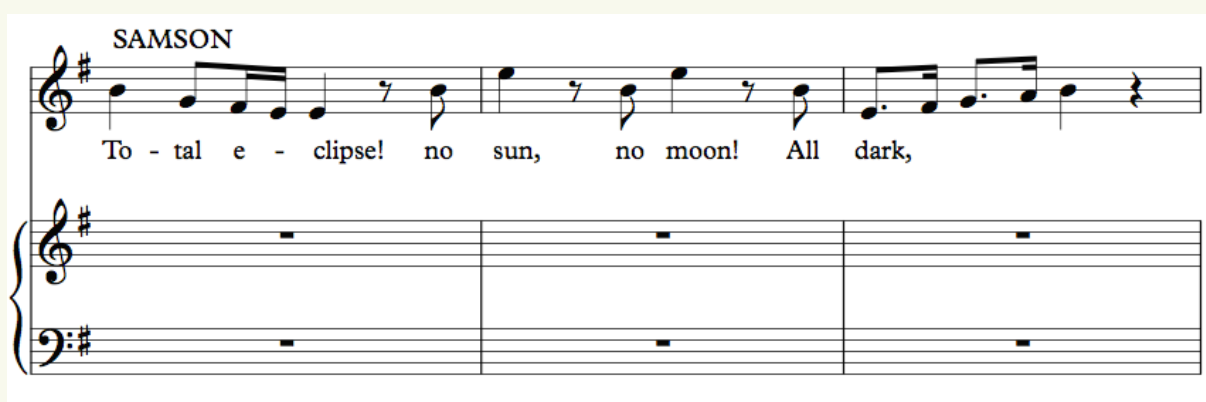


Figure 2. The tenor’s unaccompanied melody in bars 6–8 of ‘Total Eclipse!’ ([Handel 1741–1742](#)).



Transparency of the Text

In rhetorical practice, the transparent articulation of text was considered of prime significance. Quintilian alludes to heightened verbal expression through the lucid, distinct presentation of language ([Quintilian 1921a: 367–9](#); [Quintilian 1922: 261](#)). Italian historian Girolamo Mei and other humanists of the sixteenth century ruminated on such ideals; extant communication between Vincenzo Galilei and Mei suggests the latter recognised distinct delivery of the text and precision of a singer’s pronunciation within a single melodic line as integral to moving the emotions of the listener ([Mei 1989: 63](#)).

The eighteenth-century elocutionist Thomas Sheridan drew upon such notions, suggesting lucidity of the words as a most indispensable component of delivery:

The first, and most essential point in articulation is distinctness; and therefore its opposite is the greatest fault. Indistinctness, to a certain degree, renders the speaker unintelligible; or demands a more than ordinary attention, which is always painful to the hearer ([Sheridan 1781: 31](#)).

Offering the vocalist broad scope to illuminate the text, the following examples illustrate Handel’s periodic removal of instrumental accompaniment. The composer introduced fragments of the melody within the ritornello to the aria ‘Total Eclipse!’ ([Fig. 1](#)). In a subdued reference to Samson’s incarceration, the singer commences in solitude, unhindered by an underlying instrumental texture while the text takes prominence of place ([Fig. 2](#)). In the chorus ‘O first created beam’, Handel’s rhetorical structure supports the intelligibility of the text by placing unaccompanied voices in unison in bars 7 and 18, drawing listeners’ attention to the proclamation of light ([Fig. 3](#)). Although the jubilant praise of Jehovah at the work’s conclusion contrasts the subdued tone of ‘Total Eclipse!’, the episodic absence of accompaniment extends the soprano’s opportunity for rhetorical prominence of the text in sections of the final aria ‘Let the bright seraphims’ ¹ ([Fig. 4](#)). Handel employs a similar technique in the work’s concluding chorus, as the restrained absence of accompaniment offers the choristers latitude for subtle emphasis and clarity of the text ‘Let their celestial concerts all unite’ ([Fig. 5](#)).



Figure 3. The absence of accompaniment promotes clarity of the text ‘Let there be light’ in bars 7 and 18 ([Handel 1741–1742](#)).

7

"Let there be light!"

"Let there be light!"

"Let there be light!"

18

"Let there be light!"

"Let there be light!"

"Let there be light!"



Figure 4. In bars 12–14 of the aria ‘Let the bright seraphims’, the composer offers the singer leeway for rhetorical clarity of the text through unaccompanied melodic lines ([Handel 1741–1742](#)).

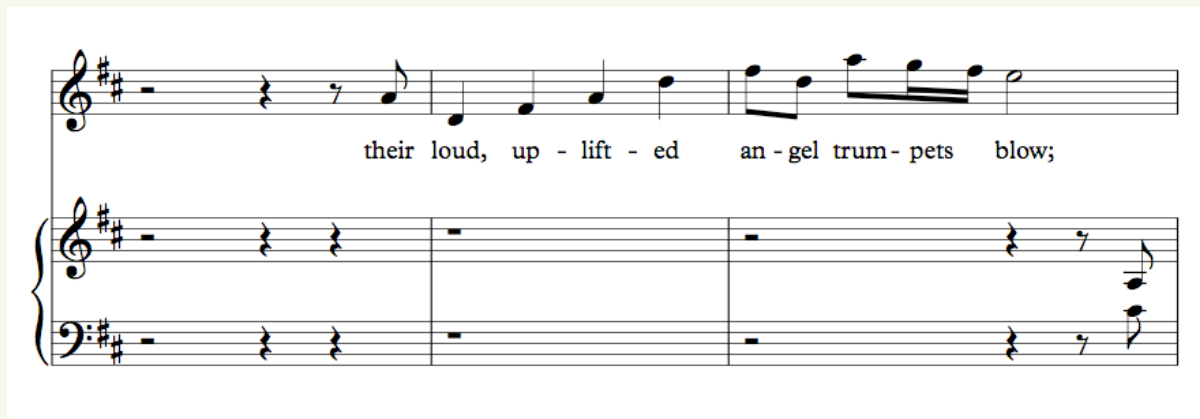


Figure 5. Unaccompanied vocal lines promote the singers’ capacity for prominent articulation of the text ‘Let their celestial concerts all unite’ in bars 77–8, 115–6, 131–2 of the choral finale to the aria ‘Let the bright seraphims’ ([Handel 1741–1742](#)).

77 SOPRANO

Let their ce - le - stial con - certs all u - nite,

ALTO

TENOR

BASS



115

Let their ce - le - stial con - certs all u - nite,

Let their ce - le - stial con - certs all u - nite,

Let their ce - le - stial con - certs all u - nite,

Let their ce - le - stial con - certs all u - nite

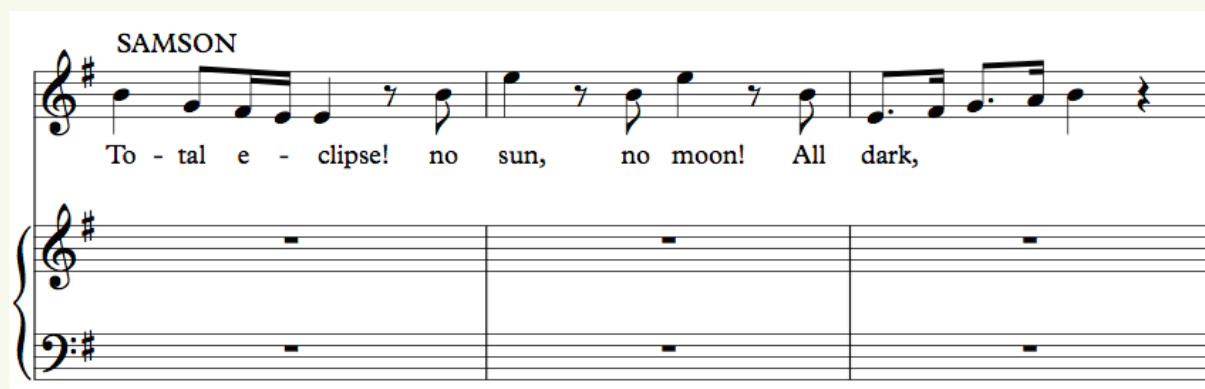
131

Let their ce - le - stial con - certs all u - nite

Let their ce - le - stial con - certs all u - nite



Figure 6. In bars 6–8 of ‘Total Eclipse!’, the singer’s capacity for rhetorical inflection of delivery is enhanced by the transitory absence of accompaniment, while rests punctuate the text ([Handel 1741–1742](#)).



Varied Modulation of Delivery

The intelligibility of text was closely aligned with ancient rhetoricians’ observations on syllabic length, rhythmic effect and discreet variations of tempo in the skilful orator’s manner of delivery ([Quintilian 1921b: 553–87](#); [Freese 1926: 381–97](#); [May and Wisse 2001: 290–6](#)). Handel’s sporadic abolition of the accompaniment in ‘Total Eclipse!’ momentarily liberates the formal aria’s customary obligation for rhythmic unanimity between the singer and the instrumentalists. The composer’s dramatic prudence offers the vocalist leeway for subtleties of syllabic and rhythmic inflection, and heightened dynamic contrasts in the melodic line ([Fig. 6](#)).

Musico-rhetorical Punctuation and Rhetorical Silence: *Aposiopesis*

Cicero and Quintilian deliberate upon the punctuation of language, that is, the discreet observation of pauses and breaks in speech as a rhetorical configuration heightening the listener’s perception of the words ([May and Wisse 2001: 288–93](#); [Quintilian 1922: 261–3](#)). In ‘Total Eclipse!’, Handel vigilantly considers the text’s ebb and flow, with quaver rests delineating the punctuation ([Fig. 6](#)). In the chorus ‘O first created beam’, crotchet rests define the final consonants in ‘beam’ and ‘word’ (bars 3, 5, 14, 16), while the quaver rests punctuate ‘light’ ([Fig. 7](#)).

The English lawyer and amateur musician Roger North (c. 1651–1734) discussed a wide variety of musical topics at the time of Henry Purcell (1659–1695), and the early stages of Handel’s London career. Underscoring Cicero’s ruminations on the orator’s rising and falling of the voice ([May and Wisse 2001: 292](#)), North notes the affective qualities of dynamic variation, and the ‘great expectation and wonder’ ([Wilson 1959: 220](#)) created within the audience by the truncation of the instrumental and vocal lines in Purcell’s 1692 masque *The Fairy Queen* ([Fig. 8](#)).

Such observations reflect early Roman commentary on the rhetorical influence of unexpected silence ([May and Wisse 2001: 293](#)). Musing on the relationship between poetry and music in the eighteenth century, Hildebrand Jacob notes the rhetorical element of surprise evident in periodically muted melodic and harmonic lines: ‘a rest in its proper Place has often a wonderful effect, and from the beauty of its surprise, makes the suspension of the harmony itself agreeable’ ([Jacob 1970: 25](#)). Present day scholars, notably the American musicologist Ellen Harris, take up the case. Harris explores the cumulative effect of Handel’s rhetorical silences as a means of heightening emotive text ([Harris 2001: 176–7](#)), and the composer’s ‘musical depiction of overwhelming emotion that fragments and inhibits normal speech with silent pauses’ ([Harris 2005: 558](#)). Recapitulating the text in the latter stages of ‘Total Eclipse!’, Handel intensifies Samson’s indecision by simultaneously breaking the melodic and accompanying instrumental textures with rests. The composer creates faltering indecision in Samson’s speech through the insertion of silence where such breaks do not logically belong ([Fig. 9](#)).



Figure 7. Quaver rests promote the delineation of the word ‘light’ in bars 7 and 9 of the chorus ‘O first created beam’ ([Handel 1741–1742](#)).

and light was ov - er all, and light, and

"Let there be light!" and light was ov - er all, and light, and

"Let there be light!" and light was ov - er all, and light, and

"Let there be light!" and light was ov - er all, and light, and

Figure 8. Roger North reports on the rhetorical impact of notated silence in music from Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* ([Wilson 1959: 220](#)).

SLEEP:

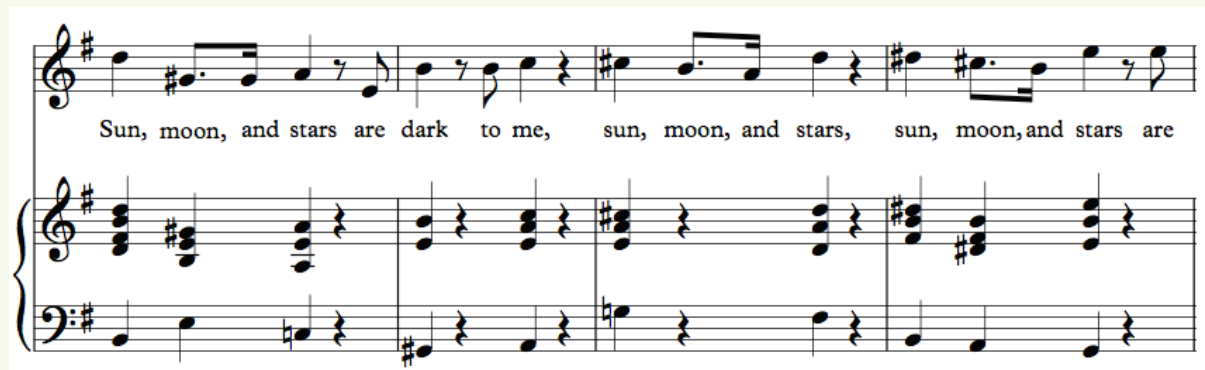
Hush, no more, hush, no more, be

(Vlns 1 & 2)

si - lent, be si - lent, be si - lent all,



Figure 9. The insertion of rests in bars 25–8 intensifies Samson’s indecision in the aria ‘Total Eclipse!’ ([Handel 1741–1742](#)).



Variance of Pitch: The Rise and Fall of the Voice

In discussing the rhetorical variation of pitch and modulation of the voice as a means to arouse, inform and delight the listener, Quintilian indicates:

... when we deal with a lively theme, the flow of the voice is characterised by fullness, simplicity and cheerfulness; but when it is roused to battle, it puts forth all its strength and strains every nerve. In anger it is fierce, harsh and intense, and calls for frequent filling of the lungs, since the breath cannot be sustained for long when it is poured forth without restraint. When it is desired to throw odium upon our opponents, it will be somewhat slower ... On the other hand, in flattery, admission, apology or question it will be gentle and subdued. If we advise, warn, promise or console, it will be grave and dignified, modest if we express fear or shame, bold in exhortation, precise in argument, full of modulations ([Quintilian 1922: 277–9](#)).

As mechanisms influencing the listener’s emotions through the clarification of facts, the voice shall ‘be even and pitched halfway betwixt high and low. But it will be raised to express violent emotions, and sink when our words are of a calmer nature, rising and falling according to the demands of its theme’ ([Quintilian 1922: 265, 279](#)). Theorists of later times explored similar notions: in the sixteenth-century, Girolamo Mei reflected upon the declamatory qualities of the human voice in high, medium and low pitches as a means of expressing particular affects ([Mei 1989: 57–9](#)). Similarly, Mattheson ([1739](#)) remarked on the soul’s emotions as an embodiment in sound, implying ascending intervals represent an elevation of the spirit, and those descending are characteristic of despair ([Harriss 1981: 104–5, 109](#)).

Handel incorporates such rhetorical variation of pitch in the arias and choruses discussed below. In [Fig. 2](#), the melodic compass rises high in the tenor’s register, reflecting Samson’s hope of once more seeing the light of day and the celestial planets, ultimately sinking in despair at the impenetrable, pervasive blackness. Later in the aria the composer repeats the effect: a melodic progression falling to the low register signifies the eclipse, rising to the elevated part of the voice as Samson seeks vision of the sun and moon, before tumbling immediately on the word ‘dark’ ([Fig. 10](#)).

In ‘Total Eclipse!’, the pitch rises by degrees in Samson’s pleading to see the ‘sun, moon and stars’, however the word ‘dark’ imposes a melodic descent to the bottom of the stave ([Fig. 11](#)). Handel contours the melody in the aria’s final phrase; the pitch rises to F#5 as the tenor sings ‘stars’ ([Fig. 12](#)), culminating in an E minor scale descending to the low aspect of the tenor range as Samson exclaims the ‘stars are dark to me’ ([Fig. 13](#)). While presenting a complete contrast of mood, tempo and tonality, the final aria ‘Let the bright seraphims’ features similar rhetorical contouring of the melodic line. The depiction of rousing, joyous sentiments in ‘loud, uplifted angel trumpets’ ascending through a D major arpeggio are apparent in [Fig. 14](#), with ‘trumpets’ placed on A5. Reflecting principles of rhetorical pitch discussed by Aristotle, Quintilian and Cicero ([Freese 1926: 345–7](#); [Quintilian 1922: 275–7](#); [May and Wisse 2001: 292–3](#)), the text ‘their loud, uplifted angel trumpets blow’ is frequently set in the soprano’s upper register ([Fig. 15](#)). Later in the aria, the principal melodic notes convey ‘their loud, uplifted angel trumpets blow’ through a rising trajectory ([Fig. 16](#)).



Figure 10. Handel's contouring of the melodic line reflects rhetorical practices identified by Quintilian ([Handel 1741–1742](#)).



Figure 11. In 'Total Eclipse!', an ascending melodic line conveys brightness, while the descending line expresses darkness ([Handel 1741–1742](#)).

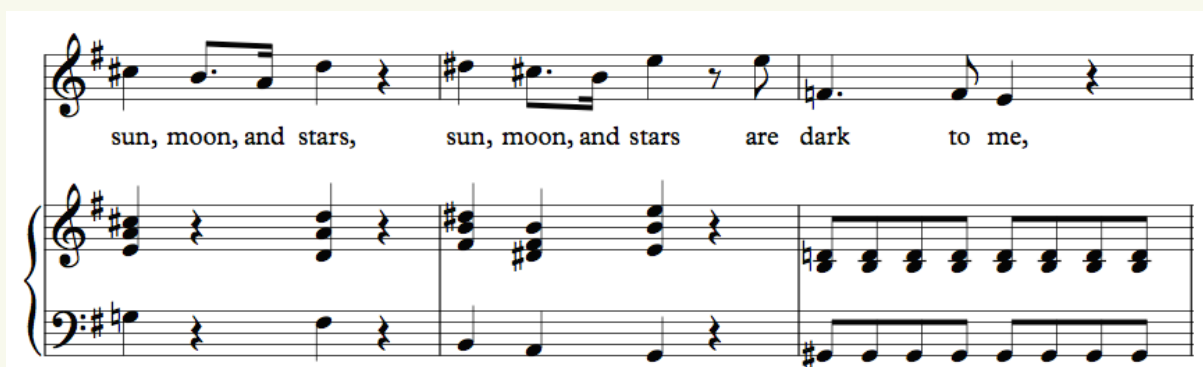


Figure 12. Handel rhetorically places the word 'stars' in the upper register of the tenor voice, F#5 in bar 31 ([Handel 1741–1742](#)).

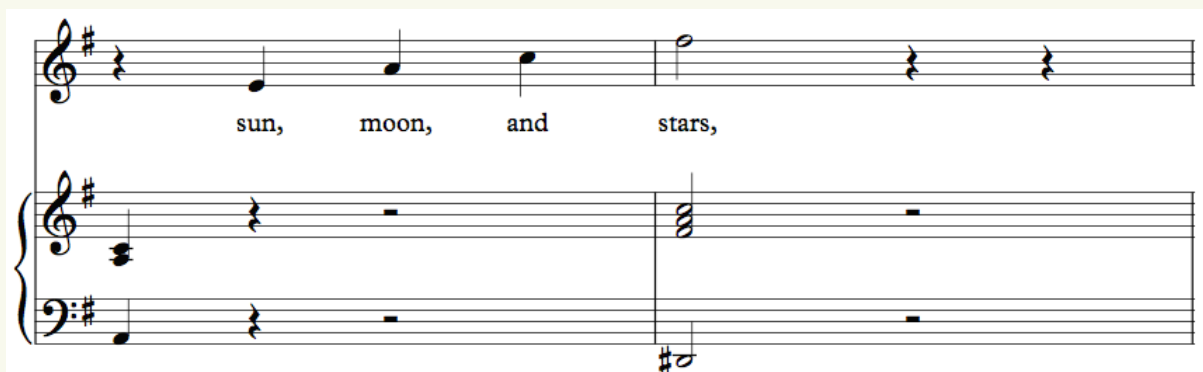




Figure 13. A descending melodic line in bars 32–3 reveals the composer’s rhetorical expression of darkness ([Handel 1741–1742](#)).



Figure 14. An ascending melody rhetorically depicts the heavenly angels in bars 13–14 of the aria ‘Let the bright seraphims’ ([Handel 1741–1742](#)).

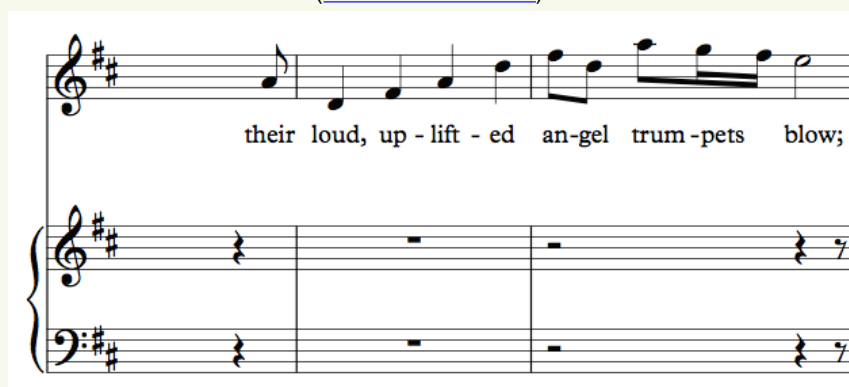


Figure 15. Handel exploits the soprano’s upper range for the expression of uplifting sentiments in bars 22–3 ([Handel 1741–1742](#)).

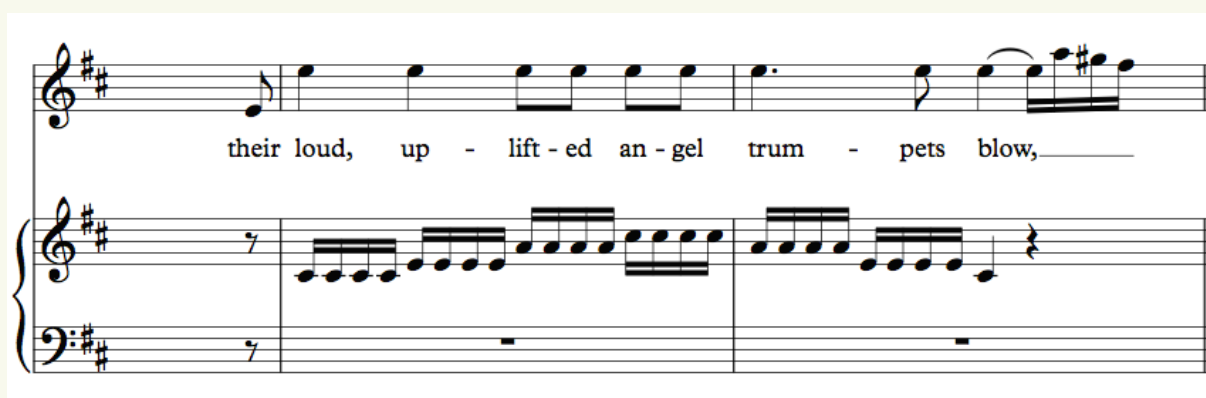


Figure 16. As a means of rhetorical expression, the tessitura of the principal melodic notes is elevated in the soprano voice in 'Let the bright seraphims', bars 43–7 ([Handel 1741–1742](#)).

The musical score is for a section of Handel's oratorio. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a soprano staff and a keyboard staff (treble and bass). The second system also has a soprano staff and a keyboard staff. The lyrics are written below the soprano staff. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The soprano line shows a clear upward shift in pitch for the words 'up - lift - ed' and 'their loud,'.

Decoratio: Cadential Ornamentation

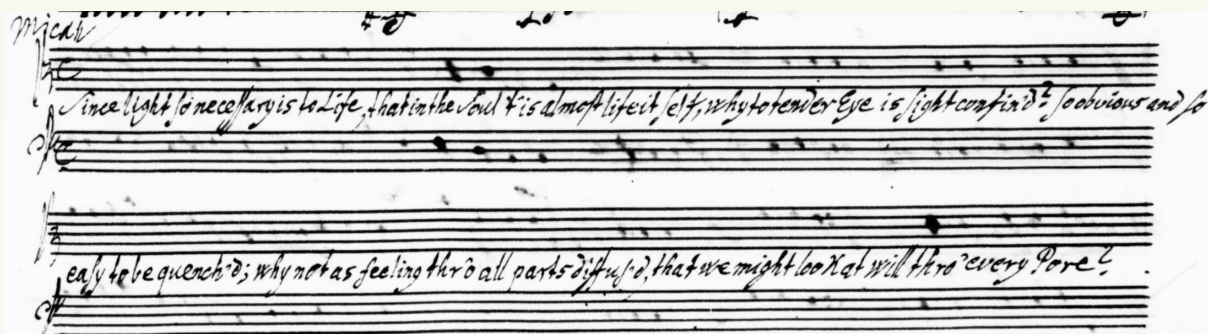
Aristotle and Cicero note the rhetorical power inherent in figures of speech ([Freese 1926: xi](#); [May and Wisse 2001: 288–9](#)). Similarly, Quintilian considered ornamentation of rhetorical speech as the diverse embellishment of ideas or thoughts ([Quintilian 1921b: 371](#)) allowing a turn of phrase to ‘[escape monotony of rhythm](#)’ ([Quintilian 1921a: 115](#)). Reflecting upon the decoration of public discourse in the sixteenth century, the English literary critic George Puttenham referred to rhetorical ornamentation as an intrinsic element of language, lest it become ordinary or unsavoury. In discussing poetic forms, he proposed decoration as a means of affectionately moulding and directing the listener’s heart ([Puttenham 1971: 5, 115](#)). Peacham ([1971: Aii–Aiii](#)) referred to the affective nature of ornamentation, while Zarlino ([1558](#)) cautioned composers to adapt their musical embellishment to accommodate singers’ declamatory delivery of text ([Treitler 1998: 460](#)). In musico-rhetorical terms then, the composer’s *inventio* decorates the score, thus enhancing its rhetorical expression in order to persuade the audience.

The decoration of cadences through improvised cadenzas was considered an indispensable component of performance practice for Italian singers of the eighteenth century ([Galliard 2009: 61](#)). Soloists from the European continent whom Handel employed in his *opera seria* were skilled in such improvisatory exercises, and the composer did not trouble himself to write out cadenzas. Instead, the term *adagio* often substituted at cadences as an indication a cadenza was permissible. While the English singers taking solo roles in Handel’s oratorios were not steeped in the traditions of *opera seria*, nor in many cases did they possess the technical proficiency of Handel’s operatic soloists, the composer seldom elected to write out cadenzas in his English vocal works. The presence of two cadenzas notated in the music for Micah therefore presents an intriguing anomaly in *Samson*.

One such written cadenza is present in the accompanied recitative ‘Since light so necessary is’, although chronicling the history of this part of the score is demanding in itself. As was occasionally his practice, Handel wrote out recitative text and sometimes a vague sketch



Figure 17. Handel's practice of first writing the text and filling out the musical material at a later stage is evidenced in the autograph. © British Library Board MS R.M. 20.f.6, ff 25v/26r, reproduced with permission.



of the baseline or melody in the autograph, with the remainder of the musical detail to be filled out at a later stage. Such is the case in [Fig. 17 \(Handel 1741–1742\)](#); it appears the composer originally conceived ‘Since light so necessary is’ as *recitativo semplice*, a vocal melody accompanied only by instruments of the *basso continuo*.

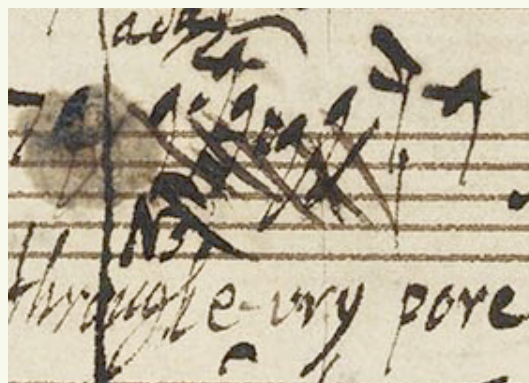
Yet as [Fig. 18](#) demonstrates ([Handel 1742](#)), Handel eventually settled on the *recitativo accompagnato* form as a mechanism appropriate to the sentiment of the text ([Handel 2011: Teilband 1, xxi, Teilband 2, 461–2](#)). Observing the final cadence, Handel's modest melodic figure is evident, as is the term *Adagio*, here abbreviated to *Adag*, as the customary indication the singer may embellish the melody. Significantly, the original melody has been crossed out at the cadence ([Fig. 19](#)).

Figure 18. *Recitativo accompagnato* ‘Since light so necessary is’ in its completed form. © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, MU MS259, 20, reproduced with permission.





Figure 19. Handel's initial melodic figure is crossed out in MU MS 259, 20. © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, reproduced with permission.



Although some of the copyist's wet ink has blotted through the pages in Handel's conducting score ([Handel 1742–1743](#)), the melodic outline of the notated cadenza is discernible ([Fig. 20](#)).²

In the premiere season, Mrs Susanna Maria Cibber (1714–1766) took the role of Micah ([Dean 1959: 349](#)). Although she had sung for Handel previously in Dublin, London audiences primarily knew Cibber as an actress. Historian Charles Burney attended *Samson* during the 1743 season, describing Cibber's voice as '... a thread, and her knowledge of music very inconsiderable' ([Dean 1959: 349](#)). Perhaps Handel wished to assist this inexperienced singer by designating the type of cadenza he considered stylistically appropriate; in any case, the ornamental fragment offers a pertinent example of the composer's rhetorical decoratio. Derived from the Walsh edition, [Fig. 21](#) offers a lucid depiction of Handel's cadential figuration ([Handel 1743](#)).

Figure 20. The cadenza notated in Handel's conducting score (Hamburg MS M A/1048). Microfilm 1473 reel 192, ff 38r, Princeton University Library. © Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg, reproduced with permission.

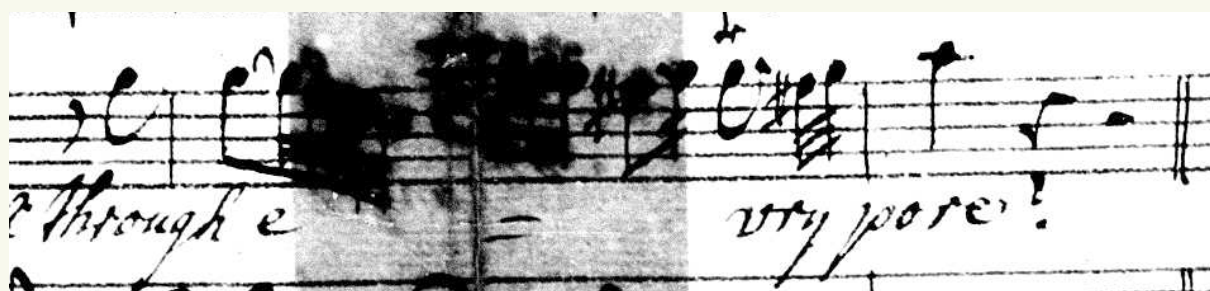


Figure 21. The cadenza concluding 'Since light so necessary is' printed by Walsh ([Handel 1743: 31](#)).





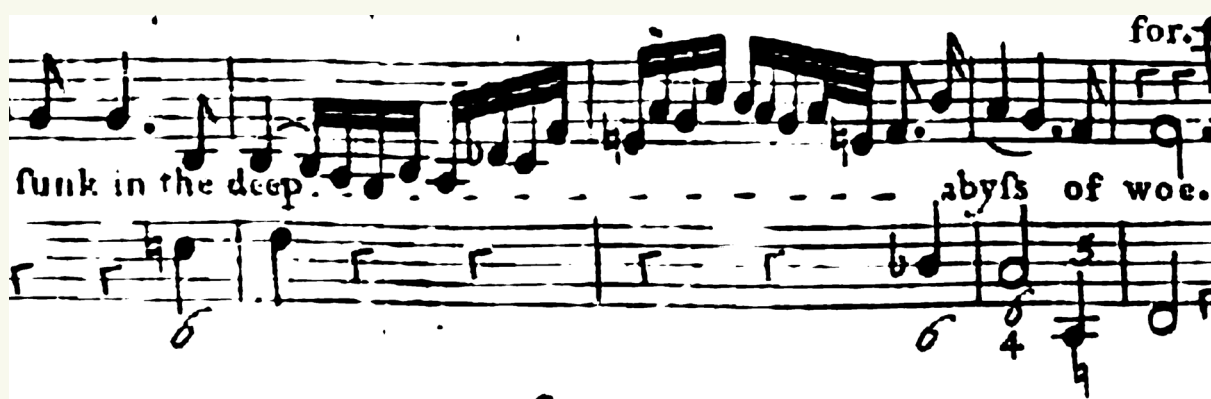
Authors including Mattheson (1739) discuss the art of invention, in which the composer's *decoratio* allowed ascending and descending figuration of the melody (Harriss 1981: 283, 481). Perhaps Mattheson's comment on un-notated or obligatory ornaments, for example the *messa di voce*, *appoggiatura* or trill sums up the structure of this cadenza. He proposes such ornaments 'belong to the vocal and instrumental performers' art ... [yet] a composer of melody must give opportunity for them' (Harriss 1981: 484). The succinct cadential figuration that concludes 'Since light so necessary is' (Figs. 20 and 21) encompasses the range of an octave, incorporating ornamentation considered by Bacilly (1668: 199–204) as essential, such as deployment of the cadential trill, and non-essential decoration through the descending *tirata* (Harriss 1981: 275–6).

In the cadenza closing the aria 'O mirror of our fickle state', Handel's truncated first draft of the cadential ornamentation is evident through his revisions in the autograph (Fig. 22). Perhaps the composer felt the initial passage was unwieldy, or too protracted for the singer to complete in one breath. In their commentary on the execution of cadenzas, both Tosi (1723) and Quantz (1752) suggest brevity as one of the principal tenets of a performer's good taste (Galliard 2009: 45–6, 48; Reilly 1966: 180–2, 85). Although lacking the customary *adagio* marking, this cadential excerpt holds with remarks by Mattheson (1739) on descending and ascending figuration of the melody (Harriss 1981: 481). As the coloratura develops, the absence of the bass line allows the singer rhetorical flexibility to vary the tempo of delivery and the dynamic inflection of the voice. The melody covers the broad expanse of an octave and a third from G3 to C5, and establishes the cadence in F minor (Fig. 23).

Figure 22. Bars 78–81 depict Handel's cadenza in the aria 'O mirror of our fickle state'. MS R.M. 20.f.6, ff 19v/20r © British Library Board, reproduced with permission.



Figure 23. Handel's cadenza to the aria 'O mirror of our fickle state' printed in the Walsh edition (Handel 1743: 28).





As examples of *inventio*, both cadenzas reflect Quintilian's notion of rhetorical diversity. These ornamental figures allow the performer to surprise and delight the listener through fresh or unanticipated rhythmic and harmonic models ([Quintilian 1921a: 113–5](#)). Marked *largo* and *largo e piano* in the respective manuscripts, the tempo and pensive language of both these movements affectively governs the nature of the cadenzas. Neither piece is ostentatious of tempo or design. The cadenzas notated by the composer therefore echo the reflective character of the text and music present within the aria and *recitativo accompagnato* themselves.

Rhetorical Performativity in *Samson*

Before elaborating on practical sensibilities in the performance of *Samson*, a brief discussion of Handel's exposure to rhetorical training in his formative years is appropriate. Although records of the time are deficient, it seems likely Handel followed in his father's footsteps as a student of the Latin School or Gymnasium in Halle: a comprehensive school education was a prerequisite for the former to enrol as a student at the University of Halle in 1702. In addition to Latin and Greek, pupils in the latter stages of schooling at the Gymnasium studied the writings of Cicero and other rhetoricians, as well as oratory and the art of debating ([Butt 1997: 13](#)). In August 1692, as a counterpart to formal studies, Handel began practical keyboard and violin tuition, as well as instruction in figured bass, improvisation and counterpoint with organist and composer Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow (1663–1712), who was music director at the Marienkirche in Halle. Although the elaborate dramatic cantatas for which he is best known reveal an essentially late-seventeenth century aesthetic, Zachow gave the young Handel a taste of compositional and performative elements which the latter expanded within his creative career: '... the younger composer's feeling for characterization in his operas and oratorios must have been stimulated by his teacher' ([Baselt 1987: 52](#)). Handel's studies appeared dedicated to the agreeable merger of theory and practice, thus cultivating a broad 'affective repertory' ([Butt 1997: 20](#)).

This study of Handel's vocal writing presents implications for modern-day vocalists through the consideration of rhetorical practices known to Handel and his contemporaries. Rhetoricians laid down guidelines on the use of the voice in the delivery of oratory, while offering instruction on the appropriate modulation of speech through volume and pitch, as well as vocal pace and inflection ([Quintilian 1921b: 365–9, 553–55](#); [Quintilian 1922: 277–9](#)). In application to music, the performer's expressive voice and rhetorical delivery sensitively enhanced the music's affective presence. While perhaps less prone to the overt displays of virtuosity exhibited by their Italian counterparts performing *opera seria*, contemporary sources indicate that the English singers for whom Handel conceived the primary solo roles in *Samson* maintained musically affecting and dramatically sensitive conveyance of the text.

Tenor John Beard performed the title role, 'Handel's first great tenor part, and one of the earliest in dramatic music outside France' ([Dean 1959: 333](#)). Trained from age twelve in the Chapel Royal choir under Bernard Gates (1686–1773) and noted for his 'extreme fine English voice' ([Deutsch 1955: 374](#)), firmness of tone, eloquence of interpretation, and 'articulate utterance of the words', Beard became Handel's tenor of choice ([Hawkins 1963: 889](#)). The poignant movements in *Messiah* ('Thy rebuke'), *Samson* ('Total Eclipse') and *Jephtha* ('Deeper and deeper still') which Handel wrote with Beard's voice in mind attest to the latter's powers of rhetorically expressive delivery. Mrs Kitty Clive (Dalila) was a celebrated comedienne and 'ballad opera star with a large following among the public of all classes' ([Dean 1959: 349](#)), while Mrs Cibber's rhetorical skill in moving the emotions of the audience in Micah's aria 'Return, O God of Hosts' is evidenced through Burney's remark: '... yet from her intelligence of the words and native feeling, she sung this admirable supplication in a more touching manner, than the finest opera singer I ever heard attempt it' ([Mercer 1935: 899](#)).

The excerpts from *Samson* discussed in this paper reveal the composer's response to stimuli reflecting the essence of classical rhetoric. Handel's willingness to temporarily remove instrumental accompaniment in several arias and chorus lends prominence to the text, echoing Quintilian's desire for lucid presentation of language ([Quintilian 1922: 279, 289](#)). The absence of instrumental texture in such passages enhances the vocalist's capacity to replicate the classical orator's declamation of the text through subtle inflection of strong and weak syllables, rhythmic variation and sensitive adaptation of tempo as a means of influencing the listener's emotions ([Quintilian 1922: 13](#); [Freese 1926: 419–25](#); [May and Wisse 2001: 277–83](#)). Rests punctuating the text reflect observations by Cicero and Quintilian on rhetorical pauses and breaks in speech as a means of heightening the listeners' perception of the text ([May and Wisse 2001: 288–93](#); [Quintilian 1922: 261–3](#)). Furthermore, Handel draws upon Quintilian ([1922: 275–7](#)) in the use of musical pitch to promote specific sentiments, while the former's notated cadenzas suggest rhetorical figures of speech espoused by Aristotle and Cicero ([Freese 1926: xi](#); [May and Wisse 2001: 288–9](#)).



In considering the practical application of rhetorical principles in Handel's *Samson*, views expressed by the composer's contemporaries resonate with Quintilian's mandate for the orator's well-defined conveyance of the text ([Quintilian 1921a: 367–9](#); [Quintilian 1922: 261](#)). Tosi's command that words 'be distinctly understood, and no one Syllable be lost' ([Galliard 2009: 18](#)) are reinforced by Mancini's commentary on theatrical recitation, in which the audience 'would be able to hear all the words' through the orator's precise articulation ([Treitler 1998: 866–7](#)). While containing a more rhythmically regulated melodic structure than the inherently flexible *recitativo semplice*, Handel's periodic elimination of the accompaniment in critical phrases of some arias allows the singer scope for well-defined conveyance of the text, wide ranging dynamic contours and subtlety of syllabic inflection.

Handel's setting in E minor, a key Mattheson ([1713](#)) described as 'very pensive, profound, grieved and sad' ([Cyr 1992: 32–3](#)) aptly reflects Samson's mental state and despair as the prevalent affect in the aria 'Total eclipse'. Handel's marking *larghetto e staccato* implies a measured, detached interpretation on the performers' part. In judging the aria's tempo, performers find favour in the words of Quantz ([1752](#)), who suggests *larghetto* signifies a 'slow piece ... very clearly distinguished from a pathetic Adagio' ([Reilly 1966: 165](#)). Handel employed *larghetto* in movements from other works, including 'Comfort ye' (*larghetto e piano*), and 'The people that walked in darkness' (*Messiah*), as well as 'Ombra mai fu' (*Serse*) ([Fallows 2007](#)). The steadiness of tempo inherent in the performance of such movements lends weight to the adoption of a measured pace in 'Total eclipse'!

Embracing Quintilian's appraisal of the persuasive orator's diversity of tone, expressive juxtaposition of linguistic emphasis and varied amplitude of the voice through which to delineate Samson's despair, [Fig. 24](#) indicates the manner of syllabic inflection and dynamic variation accessible through the opening phrase ([Quintilian 1922: 279](#)). The tenor may heighten the first syllable in 'To – tal', allowing a diminishing tone within the descending melodic line that follows, subtle emphasis on the latter syllable in 'e – clipse' and an elevated volume in rising intervals accompanying the accentuation of the words 'sun' and 'moon'. Variation of delivery is considered utmost to good taste, in such a manner of execution as described by Quantz ([1752](#)):

Light and shadow must always be maintained. No listener will be particularly moved by someone who always produces the notes with the same force or weakness and, so to speak, always plays in the same colour, or by someone who does not know how to raise or moderate the tone at the proper time ([Reilly 1966: 124](#)).

Published in the early eighteenth century, Sébastien de Brossard's *Dictionnaire de musique* describes 'tempo ordinario' or 'tempo alla semi-brevi' as the Italian terms for ordinary or common time, notated as 4/4 ([Grassineau 1740: 282](#)). Handel consistently employed the

Figure 24. Varied emphasis and amplitude of the voice demonstrated in the unaccompanied opening phrase of Samson's aria 'Total eclipse!'.

SAMSON

To - tal e - clipse! no sun, no moon! All dark,



term *tempo ordinario* within instrumental and vocal works, including notable choruses in *Messiah* ('Lift up your heads' and 'Their sound is gone out'); such is the case in the chorus 'O first created beam'. In discussing tempi in relation to the composer's music, Paul Henry Lang describes Handel's *tempo ordinario* as an 'animated *andante-allegro*' (Lang 1967: 667); similarly, scholar and conductor Christopher Hogwood considers *tempo ordinario* as somewhat quicker than *andante* (Hogwood 2005: 70).

Considering the movement's affect in light of a vibrant *tempo ordinario*, the text holds a character of reverence and thanksgiving, as the Israelites intone Jehovah's praise for his bestowal of the sun's abundant light. Although bookended by passages in A minor, a tonality Mattheson (1713) considered 'plaintive, melancholy' (Cyr 1992: 34), the command 'Let there be light' (Figs. 25 and 26) heralds respective modulations to C major and D major, tonalities applicable to jubilant, stirring music (Cyr 1992: 32). In an oratorical guise incorporating a modulated dynamic range, the *a cappella* bars in the chorus 'O first created beam' may be interpreted with a crescendo to the word 'light', while singers' emphasis on the consonants brings rhetorical force to significant text (Figs. 25 and 26). Such discreet variants act to capture the listener's attention through the unity of textual clarity and undulant dynamic shading.

Reflecting a jubilant affect, the concluding aria 'Let the bright seraphims' alludes to instrumental consorts of heavenly spirits, which Handel accommodates through a trumpet obbligato in the customary key of D major. Mattheson's commentary on this tonality supports the aria's affective conception, with D major 'suited to noisy, joyful, warlike, and rousing things' (Cyr 1992: 32). Handel originally marked *Andante allegro* in the autograph, before revising it to *Andante*. In discussing tempo and differing moods, Quantz (1752: 231) refers to lightness of execution as inherent to the *poco andante*. This type of buoyant, agile realisation from the soloists and the accompanying forces is fitting within 'Let the bright seraphims'. A martial atmosphere and the presence of trumpets and timpani suggests the appropriateness of a generally elevated dynamic level on the singer's part. Transparency of the text in scenes of triumph is assisted by Handel's periodic removal of the instrumental accompaniment, while the vocal soloist's emphasis on the broad contours of the melody creates the manner of falling and rising dynamics indicated in Fig. 27. The singer's crescendo to the penultimate syllable in 'uplifted', syllabic inflection in 'uplifted', 'angel' and 'trumpets', diminuendo over the final three notes of the bar and attention to lucid articulation lends rhetorical precision to the text throughout such phrases.

In order to arouse the listener, Aristotle suggests the orator adopt flexible rhythms and nuanced inflections of speech. He indicates rigidity of delivery 'lacks persuasiveness, for it appears artificial, and at the same time it distracts the hearer's attention' (Freese 1926: 383). In a similar approach, Mattheson (1739) considers the essential nature of emphasis, that is, 'the tone and stress of words in and for themselves' (Harriss 1981: 369), as vocal melodic lines draw accentuation from the text. Handel's intermittent subtraction of the accompaniment presents the vocalist latitude to explore discerning rhetorical delivery, coupling nuances of syllabic length and weight with discrete variations of melodic tempo. In Samson's arias, a modest drawing out of emphasised syllables and a somewhat brisker pace through the unaccented word-parts offers finesse of inflection, as the accentuated syllables (underlined below) demand more prominence than those they surround: 'To-tal e-clip-se! No sun, no moon' ('Total eclipse!'); similarly 'each fet-ter'd ghost slips to his sev-'ral grave' ('Thus when the sun').

Eloquent vocal shading and articulate punctuation may be united as a means of heightening the rhetorical conveyance of text. In Quintilian's view, clarity of delivery is achieved when rhetorical language is appropriately punctuated. It is 'necessary to note at what point our speech should pause and be momentarily suspended ... Correctness of punctuation may seem to be but a trivial merit, but without it all the other merits of oratory are nothing' (Quintilian 1922: 261–3). Theorists of the eighteenth century concur: Mattheson (1739) highlights the performer's application of rhetorical pauses and breaks as essential to eloquent delivery (Harriss 1981: 413). In his commentary on singers' recitation, Mancini (1777) proposes the interpretation of punctuation marks should be governed by the diverse passions the text is intended to awaken within the listener (Treitler 1998: 871–2).



Figure 25. Vocal inflection and dynamic variation through unison voices combines to articulate the text ‘Let there be light!’ in bar 7.

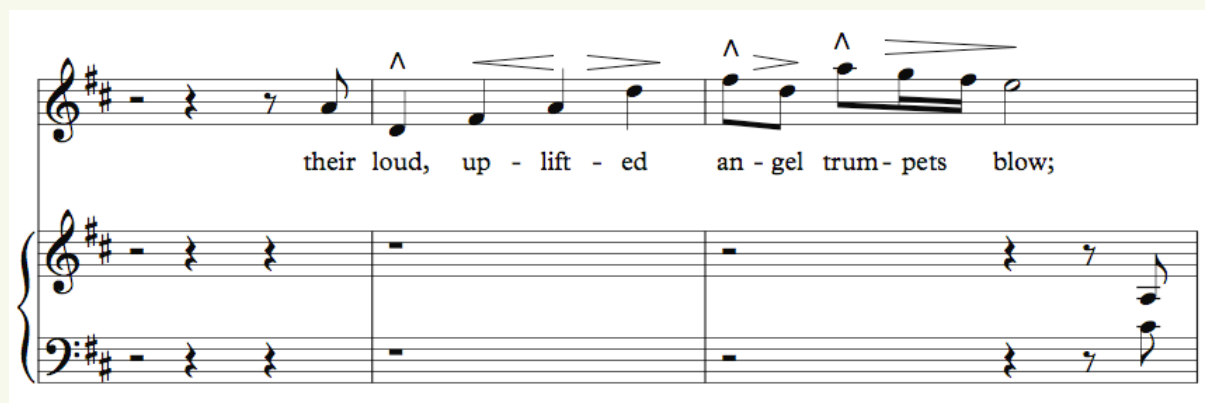
Figure 25 shows a musical score for bar 7. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) are in unison, singing "Let there be light!". The piano accompaniment is in the right and left hands, providing harmonic support. The score includes dynamic markings like *f* and *p* and articulation marks like *acc* and *stacc*.

Figure 26. Modulated tonal levels and inflection within unaccompanied voices combine in the modulation to D major in bar 18.

Figure 26 shows a musical score for bar 18. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) are in unison, singing "Let there be light!". The piano accompaniment is in the right and left hands, providing harmonic support. The score includes dynamic markings like *f* and *p* and articulation marks like *acc* and *stacc*.



Figure 27. Syllabic inflection and modulated dynamics add rhetorical vigour to unaccompanied sections within ‘Let the bright seraphims’.

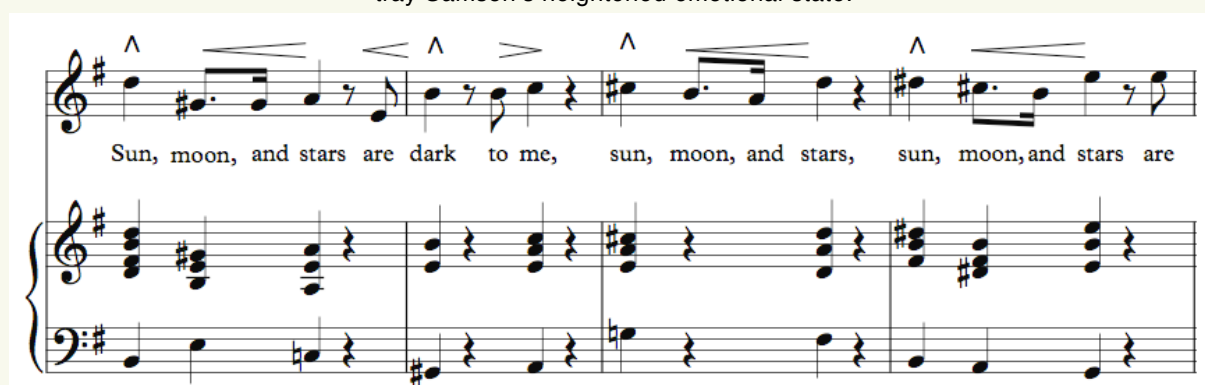


In such a manner, observation of the composer’s notated rests offers rhetorical clarity of punctuation within the text. Through the alignment of the quaver rests in ‘Total eclipse!’ (Fig. 6) and ‘O first created beam’ (Fig. 7), Handel indicates to the singer where the points of punctuation should occur. Thus, the effect of punctuated speech heightens the rhetorical impact of the text ‘Total eclipse! No sun, no moon’, and ‘Let there be light!’

Establishing a sense of expectation through the articulation of text-based punctuation partners the notion of *aposiopesis*. Cicero’s inference regarding the orator’s projection of anguish is akin to the portrayal of Samson’s torment, as ‘[l]amentation and grief require another kind of voice, wavering in pitch, sonorous, halting’ (May and Wisse 2001: 292). In the latter stages of ‘Total eclipse!’, the tenor’s stringent observation of Handel’s rests, varied tone and fluctuating dynamics in the repeated text ‘sun, moon and stars’ reinforces the indecision and faltering state of mind evidenced in Samson’s fragmented speech.

Both Quintilian and Cicero remark upon the persuasive orator’s fluctuating vocal intensity and prudent repetition as a means of emphasising emotive words. The text ‘may be ... reiterated with some slight change ... [and] our language may rise by gradations to a climax’ (Quintilian 1921b: 369–71). Emotions ‘must especially be expressed or imitated through delivery ...’, as the voice responds through ‘high, low, fast, slow, loud, and soft ... restrained and wide ranging [tonal qualities] ... with crescendo and diminuendo and changing of pitch’ (May and Wisse 2001: 292). Emphasis on the word ‘sun’, illustrated in Fig. 28, makes an immediate drop in tonal amplitude effective in the ensuing descending interval.

Figure 28. The soloist’s textual emphasis, modulated dynamics and observation of Handel’s rests combines to rhetorically portray Samson’s heightened emotional state.





An escalation of tone primes the listener for the emergence of 'stars' and 'dark', while a diminution of voice sees a more introspective character emerge. An intensifying tonal quality through the repeated words 'moon' and 'stars' aligns with emphasis on the word 'sun', before receding in conclusion of the phrase.

Singers noting Quintilian's remarks on figures of speech employ ornamentation as a means of variety in which to charm the listener ([Quintilian 1921b: 371](#)). Quantz describes the cadenza as a performer's means of indulging the listener with a pleasurable element of surprise ([Reilly 1966: 180](#)). In influencing the emotions of the listener, cadential embellishments should therefore reflect and affirm the *affect* of the aria they complete. Handel's contemporaries indicate that a sense of conciseness and good taste is essential in such cadential decoration. Mattheson ([1739](#)) urges the discrete application of embellishment ([Harriss 1981: 324](#)), while cadenzas should avoid 'an overflowing of *Passages and Divisions at Pleasure*', lest to the listener's irritation, the voice be 'set a going, like a Weather-cock in a Whirlwind' ([Galliard 2009: 45](#)). Tosi likens the blunder of 'long-strung *Passages in the Cadences*' to performers 'begging for applause from the blind Ignorant' ([Galliard 2009: 46](#)).

The succinct cadenzas notated within *Samson* provide a guide for present-day performers, as indicative of the composer's taste in cadential figuration. The two ornamental figures examined here also underscore Quantz' ([1752](#)) references to the affective cadenza's simplicity of construction and rhetorical performance:

... [A]s something unexpected, they should astonish the listener in a fresh and striking manner and, at the same time, impel to the highest pitch the agitation of the passions that is sought after. You must not believe, however, that it is possible to accomplish this simply with a multitude of quick passages. The passions can be excited much more effectively with a few simple intervals, skilfully mingled with dissonances, than with a host of motley figures ([Reilly 1966: 186](#)).

The presence of light in undulating shades links the excerpts discussed in this paper. From concealed sunlight and the veiled glow of the moon to the brilliant lustre of the celestial seraphim, the primary sources examined in the research offer a window to Handel's rhetorical *inventio* through the development and refinement of his musical designs. The composer's *dispositio* and *elocutio* are evident in the periodic removal of the accompaniment. Such a mechanism offers vocalists scope to exploit clarity of articulation by casting a spotlight on emotive words in arias of contrasting mood and dramatic context. The *elocutio* of the notated rests evident within the chorus 'O first created beam' punctuates the lyrics, while unanticipated silence is employed as rhetorical *dispositio* to intensify Samson's indecision and emotional turmoil. The composer's melodic contouring reflects distinct elements of the orator's expressive declamation, propagating Samson's dark despair and false hope in the lower segment of the voice, and transmitting the compelling effervescence of bright light in the higher vocal range. Infrequently realised in notated forms, Handel's cadenzas offer enticing samples of rhetorical *decoratio*, as the discrete embellishment of the cadences sways the auditor's heart with unannounced musical language.

The classical literature of ancient Greece and Rome notes an intimate association between the orator's elevated mode of discourse and the rhetorical composition and performance of music as a means of influencing the listener's emotions. Validating Handel as a composer drawing upon the principles of classical rhetoric and ideologies advocated in the theoretical, vocal and instrumental treatises of his contemporaries, the findings presented in this article are meaningful in light of the ongoing pursuit of historically informed performance practices by present-day musicians.

The evidence documented in this study suggests familiarity with the philosophies set down by ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians offers a tangible basis for the twenty-first century performer's *actio*, or gracious interpretive delivery. The beliefs of the ancients allude to the tenor and pace of heightened speech. Thus, rhetorical delivery in singing matches the orator's fluency and articulateness through intelligibility of the voice and the expressive inflections of dynamics, pitch, rhythm and tone appropriate to the music's affect. As a means of moving the listener, the presentation of cadenzas stylistically reflective of the music's affect offers the enrichment of *decoratio*. Thus, in urging performers to express passions inherent in the musical language and poetical text, remarks on performance style presented by theorists of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries align themselves with the rhetorical ideologies of ancient Greek and Roman philosophers.



The informed application of such interpretive doctrines brings performers of our time closer not to enigmatic notions of authenticity or the elusive pursuit of composer's intentions ([Montagu 1975: 242–3](#); [Dreyfus 1983: 297–322](#); [Taruskin et al. 1984: 3–25](#); [Taruskin 1988: 137–40, 151](#); [Kenyon 1988: 1–18](#); [LeHuray 1990: 1–4](#); [Kivy 1995: 1–107](#); [Butt 2002: 16, 23, 25, 57–8](#); [Parrott 2015: ix–15](#)), but a persuasive, eloquent and expressive performance allowing interpretive freedom buoyed by the tasteful precincts of style. Comprehension of such conventions and a grasp of eighteenth-century notational practices provide an aesthetic framework underpinning the performer's autonomy of expression. As a contribution to performance studies of the Baroque period, the pursuit of similar research in other vocal works by Handel and his contemporaries will be fruitful. Such enquiry adds weight to the ongoing discourse on Baroque performance practice, illuminating the rhetorical practices of a seminal composer through the rapport between text and music while offering current performers avenues to interpretation sustained by historical principles.

ENDNOTES

1. The libretto sources consistently employ the spelling 'seraphims'; Handel wrote 'seraphims' at bars 9 and 17 but 'seraphim' at bar 39. For critical commentary upon the sources, see Burrows ([2005: xiii–xv](#)).
2. Handel's chief copyist, John Smith the Elder produced the composer's performing or conducting score ([Handel 1742–1743](#)). Smith senior copied the names of the singers for the original 1743 performances; Handel and John Christopher Smith junior added subsequent names in pencil ([Burrows 2005: xiii](#)).

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IMAGE CREDITS

Drafted in 1741, revised and completed in 1742 and now part of the Royal Music collection in the British Library, Handel's autograph manuscript RM.20.f.6 is the principal source examined in this study. The research draws upon other primary sources, including MU MS 259 (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge), which contains some fragmentary autograph material to *Samson*. Additional sources also include Handel's conducting score MS M A/1048 (Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Hamburg) and the edition by Walsh dating from 1743, the year of the London premiere, which is available through the virtual public domain International Music Score Library Project [imslp.org/wiki/Samson, HWV 57 \(Handel, George Frideric\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Samson,_HWV_57_(Handel,_George_Frideric))

ABSTRACT

In his study of Handel's dramatic oratorio *Samson* (HWV 57), Winton Dean alludes to darkness and light as multi-hued poetical and spiritual elements perpetuating the narrative. Literature contextualised by rhetorical ideology, the aesthetic notion of the affections in which the composer sought to arouse and manipulate the emotions of the listener, and contemporary scholarship pertaining to Baroque performance practice offers scant evidence investigating Handel's adaptation of rhetorical principles. This article surveys the composer's manuscript sources, observing through a performative lens the depiction of darkness and light apparent within Handel's rhetorical *inventio*.

In Act One, Samson's despair at his state of blindness is poignantly expressed through the aria 'Total Eclipse!', in which melodic contouring, tacet accompaniment (*dispositio*), and notated rests (*elocutio*) promote transparency of the text. Handel's choral setting of the text 'O first created beam' creates a similarly translucent vocal texture. The composer's musico-dramatic structures offer the singer opportunities for declamatory, modulated delivery (*actio*), while two cadenzas notated in the score provide evidence of rhetorical *decoratio* within contrasting aria and *recitativo accompagnato* movements. In the final aria and chorus, the endless blaze of light created by a burning row of bright seraphim signifies the praise of God, while alluding to the redemption of Samson's honour.



This article highlights the expressive rhetorical practices evident within one of the eighteenth-century's finest English oratorios through an examination of the composer's artistic response to poetical stimulus, while reflecting upon tangible pathways framing an expressive, rhetorically based vocal interpretation of the work.

Keywords. Handel, *Samson*, rhetoric, affect, Baroque performance practice

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