



# The Artistry and Singing Methods of Soprano Arias in Handel's Vocal Works

Mila Wang

College of Art, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, China

Email: 2027725256@qq.com

**How to cite this paper:** Wang, M.L. (2025) The Artistry and Singing Methods of Soprano Arias in Handel's Vocal Works. *Open Access Library Journal*, 12: e13659. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1113659>

**Received:** May 23, 2025

**Accepted:** July 14, 2025

**Published:** July 17, 2025

Copyright © 2025 by author(s) and Open Access Library Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

## Abstract

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759), as the most important composer of Baroque opera, wrote operas that were based on the early Italian opera experience in the Baroque style while incorporating various musical styles. Handel's works represent the highest achievement of Baroque music creation. Among them, recitatives and arias are used throughout, and the natural, relaxed, soft and beautiful bel canto is performed with ease. The rhythm, melody, dynamics and the essence of the human voice are in perfect harmony. This article will start with Handel's operas and oratorios, focusing on Handel's vocal art style and the value of his vocal works in today's vocal training, in the hope of being helpful for future vocal studies.

## Subject Areas

Arts Education

## Keywords

Handel, Soprano Arias, Opera

## 1. Visual Analysis

The author found the following literature through various channels: one work related to Handel and a total of 432 articles on CNKI (1954-2022). From the visualization chart, it can be seen that the study of Handel's operas has shown a fluctuating upward trend since 2007 (reaching a peak of 8 in 2007, 99 in 2008, 22 in 2005, 38 in 2012, and 40 in 2014), especially in the last decade, which indicates that academic attention to Handel's operas has been increasing.

### 1.1. Theme Distribution

In terms of the main themes of Handel's operas, a total of 347 articles related to

Handel's opera themes were found, including 299 Handel, 75 oratorios, 70 Messiah, 57 arias, 45 vocal works, 27 singing analyses, 22 soprano arias, 20 Baroque period, and 18 Let me suffer. I weep for my Destiny 17, singing studies 13, Baroque 12, Brahms 11, singing techniques 11, concertos 10, musical analysis 10, Handel vocal works 9, Julius Caesar 9, musical style 9, soprano 8, Variations on Handel Themes 7, Variations 7 "Happy Blacksmith" 7 pieces, Composer 7 pieces, "Rinaldo" 7 pieces, Violin Sonatas 7 pieces, style characteristics 7 pieces, Opera arias 7 pieces, musical characteristics 6 pieces. In addition, studies on operas such as "Messiah", "Let Me Suffer", "I Weep for My Destiny", "Julius Caesar", "The Happy Blacksmith", and "Rinaldo" accounted for 45 percent.

## 1.2. Subject Distribution

According to the distribution of disciplines in the searched literature, the disciplines related to Handel's opera studies mainly include: Music and dance (50.64 percent), theatre, film and television arts (39.96 percent), biographies (3.85 percent), secondary education (1.28 percent), foreign languages and literatures, world literature, higher education, physical education, religion, fine arts, calligraphy, sculpture and photography, archives and museums, public administration and national administration, architecture science and engineering Engineering, Ethnology, investment, cultural economics.

## 1.3. Source of Literature

The sources of literature for the study of national opera mainly include individuals and institutions.

### Distribution of sources

From the perspective of sources, literature related to Handel is mainly published in journals such as The Voice of the Yellow River, Northern Music, Music Review, and Theatre House. Voice of the Yellow River 27 articles, Northern Music 19 articles, Grand View of Music 18 articles, and Theatre House 17 articles.

Most of the above-mentioned journals are non-academic, that is to say, the level of journals in which such articles are published is flawed. In addition, if the literature originated from Wuhan Conservatory of Music, Shandong Normal University, etc., one is the journal of the university where it is located, and the other should belong to the institution where the thesis is based.

## 2. Theoretical Research

Opera has won favor throughout Europe for its unique combination of music and drama, which brings the performers to the peak of emotional expression, and the use and development of bel canto has undoubtedly played a key role in this [1]. History always coincidentally, when the two greatest innovations of the Baroque era-opera and bel canto-happened to meet, the artistic expressiveness they produced was unparalleled. Opera and bel canto are almost a natural match, which has been proven by countless masters in the development of music over the next

few centuries. It was the emergence of these two art forms that led to a new era of vigorous development in European music.

Before we understand the artistry of soprano arias, we must first understand the art of opera. Most non-professionals are unfamiliar with Handel's vocal works and the way soprano arias are sung, but they are very familiar with the form of opera. Opera is an art form that originated in Italy. Among them, arias can express the emotions, images and mental activities of the characters in an opera.

## **2.1. Handel's Vocal Works**

As one of the greatest composers of the Baroque period, Handel's vocal artistic achievements are worthy of worldwide attention. Handel's works represent the highest achievement of Baroque music creation, known for their grandeur and magnificence, and his grand musical expressiveness is breathtaking. Among them, recitatives and arias are used throughout, and the natural, relaxed, soft and beautiful bel canto is performed with ease. The rhythm, melody, dynamics and the essence of the human voice are in perfect harmony. To understand the artistry of soprano arias, it is necessary to start with Handel's vocal works. Before understanding Handel's vocal works, it is necessary to first understand the artist's own life and achievements.

### **2.1.1. An Introduction to Handel's Life**

Handel was a good vocal artist. He also created many distinctive singing styles, including soprano arias. This distinctive singing style is rich in artistry, delicate in emotion, and distinct in Italian style. In addition to this, he can use a variety of methods to bring out the merits of his singing style. His vocal works hold a very important position in the history of music, and many higher music schools teach and study Handel's artistic techniques and works.

### **2.1.2. Overview of Handel's Vocal Works**

Handel's vocal works have two themes, namely the theme of historical heroes and biblical stories. The historical hero theme mainly tells of more dramatic scenes and more perfect serious operas, while the second theme is mainly about opposing national dictatorship and striving for national independence. These are mainly presented through the form of opera singing. This aspect is mainly related to the circumstances Handel was facing at that time.

In the two themes of opera and oratorio, there are many forms of soprano singing. For example, King Celes' "Green leaves" in Celes, and Linaldo's "Let me suffer" in Linaldo. In the 'Sinking', Dalilla's 'The Angel is singing' and everyone sings in a soprano aria. The soprano arias are sung so vividly and vividly that they express the characters' emotions and images very well [2]. These two themes also have a distinct Italian style.

### **2.1.3. Characteristics of Handel's Vocal Works**

Handel's vocal works are not only popular for his soprano arias, but also for his oratorios, which are well-suited for sopranos to perform. His 1942 composition,

“Messier,” was performed in the form of an oratorio and caused a huge stir at the time. The lyrics are concise, the melody is clear, and there is a lot of repetition in the lyrics, sometimes using the native language, and skillfully blending Italian and Latin into it [3]. The melodies of Handel’s operas will have a long blooming, flexible rhythmic jumps, and the rhythm of the music is very large, usually at a lower level, showing a high artistic effect.

### **1) Secular (humanistic)**

Under the influence of humanist thought in Handel’s time, Western music was gradually liberated from the cage of religious theology. The music he composed was highly secular, and the content was not limited to praising God or preaching religious doctrines. There are many themes depicting life and praising nature, and he has created a lot of music for the general public to enjoy [4].

The descriptive arias in the aria “Shade of the Trees” have a lyrical and beautiful melody and a steady rhythm, with few big jumps. The lyrics mainly depict the flourishing of maple trees, expressing praise for nature. The perfect blend of the melody and the lyrics creates a fresh and natural feeling for the audience, powerfully embodying humanism and secular themes. The oratorio “Messiah” is based on religious content, but it uses this theological theme to bring a fresh, natural and comfortable feeling to the audience. The work adds a bright high voice above the low chorus of the bass part, as if the dark clouds were dispelling the light. In addition, his music is aimed at the general public class, using bright colors and relatively popular melodies to create works with positive emotions that are in line with the aesthetic tastes of the masses. This is also an important reason why his works are so popular.

### **2) Creativity**

Handel has always been bold in innovation in his music composition and has developed his own distinctive style in music. Of course, all innovations do not come out of thin air. His innovations are mainly about drawing on the original excellent musical traditions and adding his own elements. It is mainly analyzed through vocal works:

Broadly speaking, innovation is reflected in the diversity of his musical styles. His musical works do not belong to any particular genre, nor are they confined to any particular style. They are a combination of elements of various styles. Narrowly speaking, innovation is reflected in his various genres and in each of his works. Handel is unique in every genre of his works.

#### **2.1.4. Handel's Vocal Style**

Handel’s musical style is broad, distinct and powerful. Because Handel has composed and studied in Germany, Italy and England, his vocal works can be said to be a combination of the best and the best. Although Handel was a noble musician for a long time, this did not give his works a hint of flattery. Deep down, he was a musician with the typical cultural spirit of the British bourgeoisie, and his musical works maintained the artistic pursuit that a true master of the arts should have.

Handel’s vocal works are always full of rich emotions and have a noble style.

Like many musicians of the Baroque period, Handel also focused on rhythmic variations and the use of decorative notes, which gave his vocal works an air of elegance, grandeur and magnificence [5]. But Handel was popular at the same time, and you might think that nobility and popularity don't go well together, but that's the truth. Handel interprets the essence of his music in a way that is easy to understand, and his expressiveness and appeal are enough to shock both those who know and those who don't.

### **1) Key music**

Handel's vocal works are dominated by tonic music, with rich harmonies, free melodies and a wide variety of musical expressions. Although polyphonic music dominated the European music scene in the early 18th century and Handel himself was well-versed in it, he had his own explorations. In the course of his composition, Handel discovered the distinct emotional expression and distinct musical image of the main music. So Handel gradually turned his opera and oratorio works towards the main music. The form of the main music is rich and its harmonic functions are diverse. The perfect harmony and melody create musical images that are easy to express and accept, making it easier for the audience to immerse themselves in the music.

### **2) Natural and beautiful bel canto**

Handel's music has a narrow range, which is conducive to the singer's instinctive voice. In Handel's time, although there was no professional study of the human voice, the sharp Handel already knew and mastered the secrets of allowing singers to fully and comfortably exert their talents. Singing Handel's operas and oratorios doesn't require a high pitch or a large volume; it shows more of a control of the voice. Show a natural, soft, and beautiful voice.

### **3) Concise and condensed lyrics**

In Handel's vocal works, the lyrics are often simple and concise, yet they convey profound and rich emotional connotations. Sometimes, even an aria repeats a line of lyrics. It is precisely this line of lyrics that, through the coordination of melody and rhythm, expresses different emotions of the characters, releases different feelings of the characters, and at the same time shows different scene characteristics. Handel has created a profound musical quality by repeatedly singing a simple line of lyrics.

## **2.2. Characteristics of Handel's Soprano Arias**

Handel's soprano arias are mostly in the form of ABA triad, and the A section and the repeated A section often take a certain tempo. Usually the A section is in a major key and the B section is in a minor key. The melody is more varied from the A section to the B section, and even in the repeated A section there are many jumps and variations.

For instance, the two soprano arias in "Linaldo" and "Julie Caesar" are in the ABA triplet form with repetition. Both pieces have their A sections in 3/4 and 3/8 time signatures, and the main melody is based on the ascending scale of the major

key. First, in terms of tempo, the composer allows the character to express Linaldo's pain, resentment, and longing in a more relaxed and unrestrained manner in a specific situation [6]. In "Julie Caesar", Crapatna, facing the cruel reality, narrates and cries with unrestrained emotion. Second, in terms of tonality, the ascending scale in the major mode is used to express more emotions, transforming the mournful mood into longing, and with the ascending texture of the main melody, it shows the protagonist's longing and unwillingness to submit to the mercy of fate. The B section is another masterpiece of the artist's technique. The two arias begin with a three-beat major scale ascending from the A section and then suddenly shift to the descending note of the minor mode in the 4/4 time in the B section. This shift not only helps to express the development of the character's inner emotions, but also, in terms of time, makes the protagonist's emotional development more solid and confident. The tone is more resolute. As the minor downscale 5-3-1 progresses, Linaldo in Linaldo and Crapatna in Julie Caesar, from first lamenting and crying about fate to full of hope, suddenly turns into acceptance and submission, depression and even despair of tragic fate in the development of B section. In this passage, one can see Crapatna's indignation at creating a cruel fate, yet her despair of being unable to take revenge, and see Linaldo has no hope of seeking help and has given up completely without mercy.

In Handel's soprano arias, whether they are sad, lamenting, passionate, and zingy, Handel gives them beautiful, lyrical, flowing, broad, and magnificent melodies, allowing the singer to feel Handel's creative wisdom and the charm of the combination that is coherent and consistent from beginning to end in every word. In Handel's vocal works, we rarely see vigorous, firm high or strong notes, but long phrases based on the soprano middle range are everywhere. This inevitably adds a certain degree of difficulty for singers, especially those who have an uneven control of breath dynamics, who often hesitate to do so. This is the real purpose of studying Handel's vocal works.

The above mainly describes the arias in Handel's works. Through research, it can be found that there is always a piece of music at the beginning of the arias in Handel's operas.

### 2.2.1. Recitatives

This is a piece of music that always appears before an aria, which we call a recital. Both oratorios and operas use recitals to drive the plot forward. The accompaniment of a recital is very simple, but the way it is expressed is not simple, it is diverse, like declarative, recitation, etc. Although these are two forms, they do have common features, they are mixed with complex harmonies, and at the same time they have their own harmonies. And the melody is slow and free, leaving ample room for the audience's imagination.

Even if the singer has extremely proficient singing skills, mastering recitative is more difficult than mastering aria. Before singing, the performer should fully understand the lyrics of the recital, understand the emotions that the lyrics are going to convey, and then sing in a more free and unrestrained state, so as to give the

audience a feeling that the music itself intends to express. This kind of music does not allow the singer to speed up or slow down at will, but to perform with a constant tone.

### **2.2.2. The Narrative Tone**

The rhythm lies between the arias and the recitatives, and is richer than the recitatives. Compared with recitals, rhythms have more musicality and usually end with short, melodic music. The narration has more singing parts than the recital but less singing parts than the aria, so it is somewhere in between.

### **2.2.3. Soprano Arias**

When performing an aria, the singer should be good at arranging and combining their imagination and understanding with the general rules of music. One part of the movement should be sung according to the corresponding rules, while the other part requires the performer to imagine the emotions in the lyrics according to what they want to express. It is very demanding for the performer. It is easy for them to handle a high note correctly, but it is very difficult for them to sing a complete vocal part like parallel or descending, and to sing it from top to bottom in the middle frequency. This requires singers not only to have good singing skills and the ability to control their breath perfectly, but also to be able to control the intensity of the volume in response to the emotions expressed by the music itself, so as to express the emotions expressed by the music more perfectly. When the performer is ready to sing, there is another situation where the composer does not clearly indicate the appropriate symbols, and the player should judge according to the rhythm of the music while discussing and determining the symbols that the composer should indicate in the singing technique mountain. Only in this way can every character in the song be expressed as desired and naturally reveal the true emotions of the performer, and with the performer's own correct comprehension ability and precise breath control ability, the meaning of the music can be expressed more accurately.

## **2.3. Singing Methods and Techniques**

Handel's musical works not only require players to master techniques and learn to control the atmosphere precisely, but also need to consider the singer's musical expression ability and range. Handel is very good at using the middle range of soprano. Vocalists must master Hendry's distinctive melodic style and artistic style when studying his vocal works, often accompanied by the piano.

Getting more interactive musical communication is a practical help in promoting the study of Handel's works. These substantial AIDS can inspire the singer's passion for music and express the feelings of the song precisely. When performing Handel's works, the singer should bring in their most genuine emotions during the performance and experience the dramatic feelings in a quiet and relaxed manner [7]. When singing, the singer can add some embellishments and high notes on top of the original, but remember to act naturally; too deliberate is not good.

In addition to this, some parts of Handel's works need to express solemn and heroic emotions, but you cannot express such solemnity and heroic spirit with a strong chest voice or Verdi operatic heroic voice. Instead, it is necessary to maintain the dexterity and lyricism of the vocal line, and pay attention to the differences between passages but also keep up with the beat. Once a beat of a certain tempo starts, keep the regularity forever until the end. It is absolutely forbidden to add any impulsive or random style, slow movement and weakened artificiality at will, and always maintain the solemn style of the correct and complete Bavlock music. This style is not suitable for a free and unrestrained singer, as free singers prefer to be spontaneous. His works need to have obvious rules and regulations but also be able to follow his heart.

## **2.4. The Artistic Value of Handel's Vocal Works**

As a musician with exceptional creative skills, Handel's achievements in opera and oratorio are unparalleled. His vocal works have been sung for hundreds of years and still hold high artistic appreciation and learning value, and are highly regarded by musicians around the world. Handel, of course, is not a pioneer of opera and vocal art, but a peak master and monument. His true artistic achievement and contribution was taking opera and oratorio to new heights and accelerating the refinement and development of bel canto.

### **2.4.1. Handel's Artistic Value in Opera**

The artistic value of Handel's opera lies mainly in its application in today's vocal education. Bel canto, which originated in 17th-century Italy, emphasizes the elegance and softness of the voice in its singing style; It requires the resonance and relaxation of the human voice; Technique emphasizes the control and use of breathing. These qualities of bel canto complement Handel's opera works. Handel lived in a time when bel canto was just emerging, and his elegant, solemn, smooth and grand musical works were conducive to the full play of bel canto's singing style based on nature, beauty, softness and relaxation. So Handel's operas are not only a treasure in the history of music art, but also a model and benchmark for vocal training. Whether it is the use of breath, the smoothness and coherence of the cadence, the soft expression of the voice, or the control of variations in rhythm and dynamics, his works are of great significance and value in modern vocal technique training.

### **2.4.2. Handel's Oratorio Artistic Value**

Handel's greatest achievement in his life was his heroic oratorio. At a time when Italian-style serious opera was eventually rejected by the British audience, Handel, who had experienced a string of failures, finally completed the transformation of his artistic career. At this time, Handel was no longer a court musician serving the royal nobility, but a musician with the spirit of the emerging British bourgeoisie culture, serving the broader lower class.

Handel is known as the "father of oratorios" [8], and his oratorios represent the



highest achievement of Baroque music, marking the time when music art finally broke free from religious constraints and became a tool for musicians to express their emotional demands. Handel's oratorios broke through the traditions and limitations of opera: First, his oratorios covered a wide range of subjects, including mythological and historical stories as well as biblical tales. In terms of content, it focuses on the rise and fall of nations and the achievements of heroes, and is an epic ode to heroes full of liberal democratic spirit and humanistic concern.

#### **1) The "Public Nature" of Oratorio**

Performed in English (instead of Italian), it was aimed at the middle class, with choral singing playing a dominant role (for example, in "The Israelites in Egypt", choral singing accounted for 70%). Scholar Ruth Smith believes that collective choral singing symbolizes "the musicalization of civic spirit" and reflects the power of the people's unity and resistance.

#### **2) The Democratic Nature of Musical Form**

Handel elevated the status of choral singing, making it the main narrative element. For example: In "The Israelites in Egypt", "He Gave Them Hailstones" uses intense music to depict divine punishment, symbolizing the power of the people.

The fugue form (such as "And He Shall Purify") reflects equal dialogue among vocal parts, echoing the idea of social contract.

#### **3) The Dialectical Relationship between the Individual and the Collective**

The heroic aria (such as "Why Does the God of Israel Sleep?" from "Samson") portrays individual resistance, while the chorus represents the collective response, forming an "leader - public" interaction model, similar to the republican ideal.

#### **4) The Receptive Context in 18th-Century Britain**

Most of Handel's patrons belonged to the Whig noble class, and he implicitly expressed political positions through biblical themes. For example, the lyrics of "Judah Maccabee" emphasize "restoring the ancient constitution", implicitly referring to the "Bill of Rights" of Britain.

Secondly, his oratorio changed the tradition of the old oratorio being sung in Italian and instead was sung in English. This gave the oratorio a wider audience in the UK and a life force for long-term development. Thirdly, although most of Handel's works dealt with religious themes, his oratorios were not church music. They were not performed in churches but were presented in the form of secular concerts, usually in theaters and concert halls [9]. Handel's oratorios are grand and magnificent, with the choral parts being particularly captivating, elevating the artistic value of the oratorio genre to a new level.

### **3. Conclusions**

Opera is a comprehensive art form with its own characteristics and rules. Mastering the works of composers from different periods is of great significance for the improvement of a singer's singing skills and artistic accomplishment, so we should have as much exposure as possible to arias from different periods, and Handel is an expert among experts in this field, and learning his works is of great

benefit to singers. Generally speaking, the arias that are sung are usually solo performances of the main characters in operas.

The Baroque period was an important time for the development of bel canto and opera, and the two art forms, both born in Italy, have a perfect fit. Handel undoubtedly played a significant role in this development. Handel, with his remarkable creative talent, contributed to the development of opera and oratorio. His operas and oratorios, while being passed down as artistic treasures, also became a model of bel canto vocal works.

Handel's life was glorious, and he was very popular in Germany, Italy and England. His oratorio Messiah was highly regarded worldwide and became an unrivaled classic in the history of oratorios. Handel, who died in England in 1759, received a state funeral as a musical giant. Handel's death also marked the end of the Baroque era, when he, along with Bach, brought the glorious period to a perfect close.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

## References

- [1] Yang, T. and Duan, C. (2024) George Frideric Handel's Arias: An Attempt on a Performer's Interpretation. *German International Journal of Modern Science*, **94**, 49-52.
- [2] Hume, R.D. (2022) The Morphology of Handel's Operas. *Eighteenth-Century Life*, **46**, 52-82. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00982601-9955324>
- [3] Trainor, C. (2022) Fielding, Opera, and Oratorio: The Case of Handel. *Eighteenth-Century Life*, **46**, 83-100. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00982601-9955338>
- [4] Nott, K. (2018) The Synthesis of Biblical and Operatic Styles in Handel's Jephtha. *Journal of Musicological Research*, **37**, 300-316. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411896.2018.1524693>
- [5] Reynolds, D. (2022) Spectacular Soprano Arias. *American Record Guide*, **85**, 147.
- [6] Godwin, E.S. (2019) Stories Told through Music: Soprano Aria "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth" from Messiah and Peter and the Wolf Op. 67. Master's Theses. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/masters/586>
- [7] Lee, J. (2020) An Understanding of Style of Baroque Ornamentation in Handel's Operatic Arias: A Study of Selected Recordings (1950s-2010s). [https://uknowledge.uky.edu/music\\_etds/156](https://uknowledge.uky.edu/music_etds/156)
- [8] Xu, J.D. (2019) Fun Talk on Music History—Handel, the Father of Evergreen Oratorio. *Qin Tong*, No. 6, 42-44.
- [9] Tang, H.M. (2022) An Analysis of the Artistic Characteristics of Oratorios in the Baroque Period—Taking Handel as an Example. *Drama World*, No. 18, 51-53.