

The Visible Power of Music: Louis François Roubiliac's Handel Statue for Vauxhall Gardens

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The statue of George Frederick Handel, made by Roubiliac for Vauxhall Gardens in 1738 not so very long after the sculptor had arrived in London, was an immediate popular success and marked his artistic breakthrough. Roubiliac's name was now forever associated with that of Handel and he became the sculptor of choice for portraits of the composer, whatever the format. The catalogue for the sale of Roubiliac's estate in 1762 lists medallions with portraits of Handel, and a whole series of portrait busts: several in plaster and a terracotta bust from which casts were made (two are listed in the catalogue).¹ The terracotta bust, which is now in the National Portrait Gallery, was the basis of the marble bust in the Royal Collection. The sale catalogue also lists four drawings for the monument to Handel in Westminster Abbey and the plaster model that was presumably cast from the 98-centimetre terracotta model of the same monument in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford; another smaller model from that sale has also survived.² Of the items listed in the catalogue, some have since disappeared from view, although we do know of at least one example of each of the types I have mentioned so far. But we have no knowledge of a bronze 'basso rilievo' mentioned almost in passing in the catalogue. Roubiliac owned a life mask of Handel, which he used as the basis for a whole range of portraits of the composer. The missing bas relief of a bust of Handel will probably have been made in Roubiliac's usual manner, with the front of the head and chest being cast in a hollow form and finished in some detail with files and chasing tools.³ Incidentally, since the real subject of this paper is the Vauxhall Gardens statue, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, I would like to draw attention to a bust of Handel, kept in a private collection, which is indeed a bronze 'basso rilievo' and can be identified as the missing Roubiliac work.

The Westminster Abbey Monument was discussed in detail by David Bindman und Malcolm Baker – today's leading experts on Roubiliac – in their 1995 book on Roubiliac's tomb monuments.⁴ Of course this monument also has a musicological dimension. It is no coincidence that there is a direct reference to the *Messiah* in the sheet of music he is holding, where we can see the opening of the *Larghetto*, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth': we see Handel inspired by the angels in Heaven

¹ David Bindman and Malcolm Baker, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth Century Monument: Sculpture as Theatre* (New Haven and London, 1995), Appendix B, pp. 362–9.

² *Ibid.*, p. 363, no. 3; p. 364, nos 4, 13, 23, 25, 29, 61; p. 365, no. 70, 6; p. 366, no. 75; p. 367, no. 33.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 365, no. 93.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 118–21, 231–3, 255, cat. no. 15, pp. 332–6.



Louis François Roubiliac, George Frederick Handel, 1738, marble, Victoria & Albert Museum, London



Louis François Roubiliac (?), George Frederick Handel, 1740s, bronze, Private Collection

and we sense his ultimate transfiguration in death. Some might say that enough has also been written about the Vauxhall Gardens Monument, particularly in the last few years – most notably by David Coke and Alan Borg in their highly acclaimed, prizewinning history of Vauxhall Gardens, published in 2011.⁵ And yet it seems to me, for all the wealth of literature from the past and the present on the Vauxhall Gardens Handel statue, that as yet the real programme of this sculpture has not been recognized, the reason being that three problems associated with this statue, which scholars tend to treat in a contradictory manner, have hitherto not been satisfactorily solved.

In the *Sculpture Journal* there have been three essays on Roubiliac's statue of Handel for Vauxhall Gardens, written in 1997, 1998 and 2007 by David Bindman, Malcolm Baker and David Coke.⁶ All three make the point that Handel is playing a lyre, which is crowned with a large, gleaming sun. In Roubiliac's own time this was already taken as an allusion to Handel either as Apollo or Orpheus. Both figures are named in historic sources. David Bindman argues strongly for Orpheus. Citing Orpheus's ability to calm wild animals, he suggests this would be a fitting comparison for Handel, whose music might encourage the public in the pleasure garden to behave in a seemly manner. In contemporary sources there are repeated references to this as the most important function of his music.⁷ Handel would be the *genius loci* of Vauxhall, embodying harmony as such, particularly since – in the statue's original installation – it was placed under an arch that was crowned with a personification of Harmony, also sculpted by Roubiliac. Flanked by two putti, Harmony was herself making music. In passing – and rightly so, as we shall see – there is a reference here to the musical analogy of the harmony of the spheres.⁸ However, Malcolm Baker feels the idea of Handel as an embodiment of Orpheus cannot be taken seriously. Since the composer is portrayed here in an extremely informal manner, with a soft cap, no wig and an open collar, with the knee buttons of his breeches undone, which has allowed his stockings to become wrinkled and – the ultimate in casual dress – wearing slippers, with one dangling from the foot of his crossed leg and the other merely serving as a resting place for his stockinged left foot, it seems to Baker that any comparison between the elderly Handel and a youthful Orpheus could only be intended as a parody. In fact he views the relaxed appearance of the composer as completely appropriate in view of the fact that Vauxhall Gardens was a place of

⁵ David Coke and Alan Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens. A History* (New Haven and London, 2011).

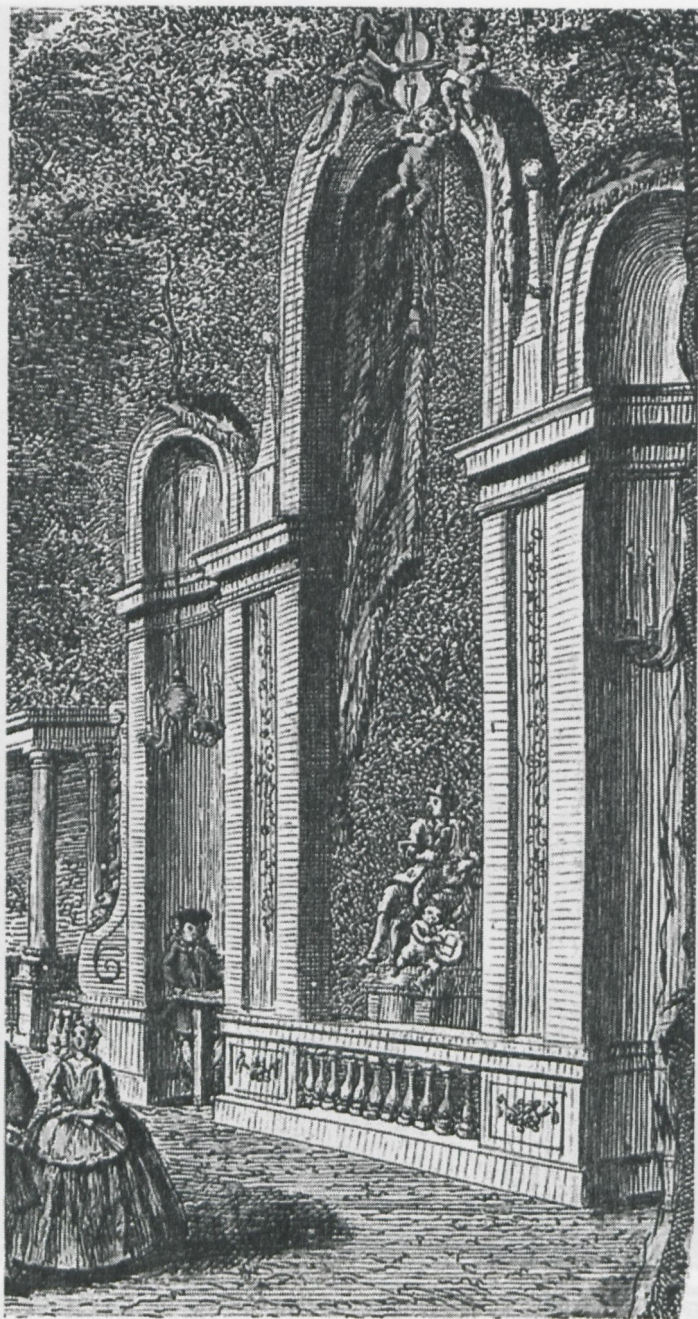
⁶ David Bindman, 'Roubiliac's statue of Handel and the keeping of order in Vauxhall Gardens in the early eighteenth century', *The Sculpture Journal* 1 (1997), pp. 22–31; Malcolm Baker, 'Tyers, Roubiliac and a sculpture's fame: a poem about the commissioning of the Handel statue at Vauxhall', *The Sculpture Journal* 2 (1998), pp. 41–5; David Coke, 'Roubiliac's "Handel" for Vauxhall Gardens: a sculpture in contest', *The Sculpture Journal* 16 (2007), 2, pp. 5–22.

⁷ Quoted by Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens* (see note 5), pp. 93 f., 146 f.; Baker, 'Tyers, Roubiliac and a sculpture's fame' (see note 6), p. 41; Bindman, 'Roubiliac's statue of Handel' (see note 6), pp. 29 f.; Coke, 'Roubiliac's "Handel"' (see note 6), p. 7; David Solkin, *Painting for Money. The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London, 1993), chap. 4: *Vauxhall Gardens*; or, *The Politics of Pleasure*, pp. 106–56, quotation: p. 112.

⁸ Cf. Bindman, 'Roubiliac's statue of Handel' (see note 6), p. 29; Coke, 'Roubiliac's "Handel"' (see note 6), p. 15; Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens* (see note 5), p. 89.



Louis François Roubiliac, Tomb monument of George Frederick Handel (detail), 1760–62, marble, Westminster Abbey



John Maurer, A Perspective View of Vaux Hall Gardens (detail), 1744, etching, Private Collection

entertainment.⁹ David Coke, for his part, takes the statue more seriously again; in his view the informal look of the statue was the result of a deliberate move by Jonathan Tyers, the proprietor of the pleasure garden, who, together with Handel, wanted to strike a more populist note in the hope of attracting a new, wider public (although not the *hoi polloi*) to the park and to the music. Ideally there should be a perfect balance between *Virtus* and *Voluptas*, who are depicted on some of the small, metal season tickets for the Gardens. Coke has evidence that Handel himself was a frequent visitor to Vauxhall. Even if Handel was often compared to Orpheus during his own lifetime, the only mythological attribute on the statue is the Apollonian sun on the lyre. Coke derives some very interesting ideas from this concerning the statue's installation. He points out that when the Gardens were opened at seven o'clock each evening during the summer months (they were closed for the rest of the year), the first thing visitors would see once they had passed through the entrance was the statue of Handel to their right, illuminated by the rays of the sun setting in the west. The Apollonian sun casts its glow on Handel and is reflected by the sun on the lyre. Coke concludes, without any additional comment, that, rather surprisingly, once the sun had set the statue of Handel remained shrouded in darkness, unlike all the other attractions in the Gardens, which were illuminated by over a thousand oil lamps that were lit all at once when a whistle was blown as a signal.¹⁰ We will come back to the reason why Handel alone languished in darkness, and to the question as to whether reference is made here to Apollo or Orpheus.

The other two unsolved problems are quickly outlined. How could Handel have approved the informality of this immortalisation – surely a contradiction in terms since he normally attached such importance to appearing on official occasions in a full-bottomed wig, at the royal palace and in the homes of the aristocracy? And lastly: Why was it that for the first decade or so of its existence, from 1738 until around 1748, the arch above *Handel* was exactly that, an open arch rather than an enclosed niche, whereas the two smaller arches flanking it were in fact rounded niches that were used as small supper boxes? The larger supper boxes that could be booked for a whole evening led away on either side of the small niches. And although a balustrade protected the statue from direct contact with the public, to the visitor gazing at the statue in that first decade it would have looked as though the statue of Handel were standing in greenery. There is no architectural logic here. As we will see, problems 1 and 3 are closely connected. Problem 2 (Handel's apparent approval of his unusual appearance in the pleasure garden) is a sociological issue and can be discussed separately. Broadly speaking David Coke is right when he suggests that Handel was bowing to Jonathan Tyers' entrepreneurial aim of attracting a wider public.¹¹ Although I would say he did so unwillingly, as I hope to show.

Handel settled in England in 1712, where he enjoyed royal and aristocratic patronage. From 1719 to 1728 he was Music Director of the newly founded Royal

⁹ Cf. Baker, 'Tyers, Roubiliac and a sculpture's fame' (see note 6), p. 43; Solkin, *Painting for Money* (see note 7), pp. 111 f.

¹⁰ Cf. Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens* (see note 5), *passim*.

¹¹ Cf. Coke, 'Roubiliac's "Handel"' (see note 6), pp. 8 f.; Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens* (see note 5), pp. 91, 148.



Francis Hayman, *May Day or the Milkmaid's Garland*, c. 1741–42, oil on canvas, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Academy of Music, a company set up to perform and promote Italian opera. Following the collapse of this enterprise and of similar, rival companies, Handel tried twice to establish an opera company. He went on trying until 1738 – the year when Roubiliac's statue was installed at Vauxhall – Handel's last opera was premiered in 1741. Faced with the steady decline of Italian opera in England, which seemed to be under attack from all sides, soon after 1730 Handel turned his attention instead to oratorios and organ concertos. Despite his enduring preference for Italian opera, he had to respond to the changing tastes of the public. The first serious attack on Italian opera in England, which was to prove fatal, came in the shape of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*. This was to become the most successful stage work in eighteenth-century England, with countless echoes and repercussions as far into the future as Bertolt Brecht. Instead of a classical hero, Gay presented his audience with the highwayman Macheath; instead of Italian, his characters speak and sing in English; instead of intricate arias, the action is interspersed with catchy songs that everyone is soon humming. Despite Macheath's misdemeanours and his many entanglements with women, he became the audiences' favourite while Peachum (the thief catcher) and the jail-keeper Lockit were seen to be the real criminals, for the action of the opera also had the added appeal of being an unveiled allusion to the corruption of the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, and his government.¹²

¹² Cf. Werner Busch, 'Händel und der Wandel der Konversation', *Englischness. Beiträge zur englischen Kunst des 18. Jahrhunderts von Hogarth bis Romney*, ed. idem, (Berlin and Munich, 2010), pp. 9–31; Christopher Hogwood, *Georg Friedrich Händel. Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt a.M. and Leipzig, 2000), chap. 5: London: Die Oratorien 1737–1759, pp. 243–405.

William Hogarth painted no less than six versions of one of the most dramatic moments towards the end of the opera (Act III, Scene XI), since the undercurrent of the *Beggar's Opera* was very much in keeping with his own thinking.¹³ Hogarth had formed St Martin's Lane Academy, an artists' club where all the members had equal rights; their main interest was in life drawing and they pursued a new type of art that sought to depict the reality of that time. Amongst its members was Louis François Roubiliac. The artists used to meet at Old Slaughter's Coffee House and were keen to find a new market of bourgeois buyers – which they succeeded in doing at Vauxhall Gardens, since Tyers had the numerous supper boxes decorated with oil paintings, many executed by another member of St Martin's Lane Academy, Francis Hayman, who turned out to be the ideal artist for this task.¹⁴ It may have been that Hogarth was pulling all the strings in the background. It was not for nothing that, in the early 1740s, Roubiliac made a splendid, terracotta portrait bust of Hogarth. The two men clearly soon became good friends, as we know from the fact that not only did Hogarth return the compliment with a portrait of Roubiliac, but Roubiliac's bust of Hogarth was accompanied by a small terracotta sculpture of Hogarth's dog Trump.¹⁵ The combination of bust and dog impressed Roubiliac's contemporaries, but it also showed that here two artists, with a seemingly light touch, had in fact delivered a programmatic expression of their determination to represent reality untainted by idealistic transfiguration.

It is still hard to imagine Handel in this ambience, and yet it seems that he sought it out. The attacks on Italian opera must have been disheartening, to say the least. Even the very first opera Handel presented in England, *Rinaldo*, in 1711, came under attack from Joseph Addison in No. 5 of the *Spectator*, a moralising weekly directed (despite its learned tone) at the middle classes. It fell on fertile ground in the City of London with its vast array of emerging service industries. The motto heading Addison's mocking essay on Italian opera says it all. It is a quotation from Horace's *Ars poetica*: 'Spectatum admissi risum teneatis?' – 'Admitted to the sight, would you not laugh?'¹⁶ The well-educated reader will have known that in his *Ars poetica* Horace opened by ridiculing the painted chimeras an artist might invent.¹⁷ By the same token Italian opera is discredited as an abstruse chimera by the very presence of this quotation – and this was to set the tone for the debate that continued for the next thirty years. The critics of Italian opera complained that the subject matter was too far-fetched, that it was irrelevant in that day and age, that Italian

¹³ Cf. David Bindman and Scott Wilcox, *Among the Whores and Thieves: William Hogarth and The Beggar's Opera* (New Haven, 1997).

¹⁴ Cf. Brian Allan, *Francis Hayman* (New Haven and London, 1887), pp. 62–5, 107–12; ex. cat. *Manners & Morals. Hogarth and British Painting 1700–1760*, The Tate Gallery (London, 1987), cat. no. 146, p. 160, cf. cat. no. 147; Elizabeth Einberg and Judy Egerton, *The Age of Hogarth. British Painters Born 1675–1719* (London, 1988), (Tate Gallery Collections vol. 2), cat. nos 16 and 17, pp. 40–3; Solkin, *Painting for Money* (see note 7), pp. 137–56.

¹⁵ Cf. John V. G. Mallet, *Hogarth's Pug in Porcelain* (London, 1971), (Victoria and Albert Museum Bulletin Reprints 16).

¹⁶ Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, vol. 1, no. 5, Tuesday, March 6, 1710–1711, London.

¹⁷ Cf. Quintus Horatius Flaccus, *Ars Poetica. Die Dichtkunst. Lateinisch / Deutsch*, transl. and ed. with epilogue by Eckart Schäfer (Stuttgart, 1994), lines 1–23.

libretti were mannered and convoluted. By contrast, they claimed, English opera has the purity and clarity of the classical Latin of Cicero or Virgil. The scenes and stage machinery in Italian opera was mocked as ‘childish and absurd’, people liked to complain that nothing that happened in these operas made sense – so the moral weeklies, Hogarth and the artists of St Martin’s Lane Academy staunchly supported English opera. The English writer and theatrical entrepreneur Aaron Hill, who provided the outline for the libretto of *Rinaldo*, wrote to Handel in 1732 asking that Handel should at last ‘deliver us from our Italian bondage’. Some years later, in 1737 or 38, when the battle of the operas was almost over, Doctor Johnson described Italian opera as ‘an exotic and irrational entertainment’. Alexander Pope, in volume 4 of his satirical *Dunciad*, that is to say, after the battle had been decided in 1742, dismisses Italian opera as affected, effeminate and incoherent.¹⁸

In 1737 Handel suffered a bout of serious illness, which meant that he missed most of the season that year; however, as soon as he recovered he made an about-turn as a composer. In 1738 an oratorio concert at the Theatre Royal, with various excerpts and billed as a benefit concert for Handel himself, was a resounding success. This alone makes it clear that he had adopted the same strategy used by Hogarth, who, in 1735, had made fun of ‘Handelmania’ in the second scene of *A Rake’s Progress*¹⁹ and whose *Enraged Musician* was obviously poking fun at Handel’s concert master Pietro Castrucci, who is driven to distraction by the cacophony on London’s streets and cannot play in peace. Hogarth’s sympathies are clearly with the characters outside in the street, and there is poster on the wall of Castrucci’s house advertising the *Beggar’s Opera*. The mannered appearance of the concert master is countered by the natural beauty of the milkmaid outside his house.²⁰ It is the same antithesis of naturalness and over-refined culture that was depicted by Chodowiecki in his series *Natural and Affected Ways in Life*.²¹ In Chodowiecki’s opinion nature and all things natural are the ideal. Handel must have taken note in 1734, when Hogarth in effect sidelined the Italian painter Jacopo Amigoni, who was to be invited to decorate the staircase leading up to the Grand Hall in St Bartholomew’s Hospital, by offering to carry out the commission free of charge.²² Handel must also have registered that Hogarth became a Governor of the Foundling Hospital, that in 1740 he gave the hospital a life-size portrait of Thomas Coram (the philanthropist and sea captain who had founded the institution) and that Hogarth used the Grand Hall for England’s first permanent art exhibition by encouraging fellow artists – particularly

¹⁸ ‘Childish and absurd’: Addison, *The Spectator* (see note 16); ‘Aaron Hill’ quoted by Hogwood, *Georg Friedrich Händel* (see note 12), p. 184; ‘Dr. Johnson’, *ibid.*, p. 198; ‘Pope’, *ibid.*, p. 319.

¹⁹ Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth’s Graphic Works* (3rd, revised edn., London, 1989), cat. no. 133, pp. 92 f.

²⁰ Cf. Werner Busch, ‘Kakophonie! William Hogarths “The Enraged Musician”’, *Musik im sozialen Raum. Festschrift für Peter Schleuning zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. Freia Hoffmann and Markus Gärtner and Axel Weidenfels (Munich, 2011), pp. 58–74.

²¹ Cf. Werner Busch, ‘Daniel Chodowieckis “Natürliche und affectirte Handlungen des Lebens”’, *Daniel Chodowiecki (1726–1801). Kupferstecher, Illustrator, Kaufmann*, eds. Ernst Hinrichs and Klaus Zernack (Tübingen, 1997), pp. 77–99.

²² Cf. Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth, vol. 2 High Art and Low, 1732–1750* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1992), pp. 77–103.



William Hogarth, *The Enraged Musician*, 1741, etching and engraving, Private Collection

from St Martin's Lane Academy – to donate paintings on subjects relating to the work done at the Foundling Hospital.²³ Hogarth and his wife even fostered foundlings in their own home. Handel must have been impressed by this, and by the way that it extended Hogarth's potential clientele. In 1749 Handel donated an organ to the Foundling Hospital; it was inaugurated with a performance of the *Foundling Hospital Anthem*, which finishes with the Halleluia Chorus borrowed from the *Messiah*. The same concert also included the *Fireworks Music* and excerpts from other works. Handel was duly elected a Governor of the Hospital, and must have come into contact with Hogarth at this time, if not before.²⁴ The *Fireworks Music* had been heard that same year, 1749, at Vauxhall Gardens, reputedly to an audience of 12,000. It is said that an endless procession of carriages blocked London Bridge for hours.²⁵ Evidently Handel was a hit with his own new clientele – how much of a pleasure this was to him is doubtful; he had perhaps changed sides rather too suddenly for that.

²³ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 323–41.

²⁴ Cf. Hogwood, *Georg Friedrich Händel* (see note 12), p. 382.

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 370–3.

David Coke rightly points out that the Vauxhall statue can only have been made in consultation with Handel, and with his approval.²⁶ So it is hardly likely to have been intended as a parody. The unconventional appearance of the figure, the emphasis on private domesticity – very surprising in a public statue – must not only have been in keeping with the aims of the artists of St Martin's Lane Academy, it must also have been accepted by Handel, maybe not without a hint of opportunism, for he might almost seem to be currying favour with his demonstratively nonchallant attitude. At the same time Handel will no doubt have insisted on his iconographic attributes, which elevate an otherwise populist image. And in that sense the statue is open to two distinct readings: on one hand Handel is 'one of us', on the other hand his special musical gifts raise him up out of our ordinary sphere to the traditional status of revered artist. One could describe this as a historically necessary compromise, of the kind that Roubiliac also made in other sculptures. As a genre, tomb monuments and monumental statues demand a certain degree of exaggeration, yet we should not forget that these two dimensions – we could call them the public and the private – are not really reconciled here. Our two possible readings are an Either/Or and are mutually exclusive. This unresolved contradiction is the hallmark of all eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art that questions artistic conventions.

In what follows here let us pursue only the official reading. It is encouraged by the attributes: the lyre, the Apollonian sun on the lyre, the putto at Handel's feet notating his improvisations, and lastly, behind Handel, a stack of scores with abbreviated titles that was only properly visible once the statue was repositioned in an open space in 1750. The topmost volume is a score of *Alexander's Feast*, Handel's most recent success; below it are operas, oratorios and lastly lessons. *Alexander's Feast* is based on the poem of that name written by Dryden to celebrate St Cecilia's day in 1697. This may well have been doubly pleasing to Handel, for St Cecilia was not only the patron saint of music, she was also credited with having invented the organ. And in his poem Dryden vividly describes the power of music. Timotheus, the court musician in Persepolis, has the power not only to soothe the spirit and passions of mighty Alexander, but also to rouse them again. He had the Emperor in his hands.²⁷

As David Bindman says, this was not dissimilar to Handel's task at Vauxhall Gardens, as it was described with succinct precision in the *Daily Post* of April 18th, 1738. It is likely that the article in question was written by John Lockman, Jonathan Tyers' propagandist, who was in charge of the 'puffing' at Vauxhall Gardens for decades: the newspaper article tells its readers that the music of Handel, the Orpheus of his time, can charm 'even the greatest Clouds into the profoundest Calm and most decent Behaviour'.²⁸ This explains one attribute, but not the overall aspect of the statue, which – we should not forget – was the first ever monument to a living artist or thinker in the history of art; it was not until the 1770s that Pigalle

²⁶ Cf. Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens* (see note 5), p. 91.

²⁷ Cf. Bindman, 'Roubiliac's statue of Handel' (see note 6), pp. 29 f.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30; the London Daily Post article (by John Lockman?) quoted by Solkin, *Painting for Money* (see note 7), p. 112 and by Coke, 'Roubiliac's "Handel"' (see note 6), p. 7.

made his statue of Voltaire. It is not impossible that this fact may in part account for the ambivalent status of the statue, caught somewhere between the 'private' and the 'public'. But let us turn now to the public claims it makes, its programme of artistic elevation. This clearly draws on classical mythology, less on Virgil's telling of the story of Orpheus than on the account given by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* and on the Orpheus legends compiled by later mythographers.²⁹ In the eighteenth century the most important of these was probably the three-volume compendium, *La mythologie et les fables, expliquées par l'histoire*, published in Paris by Abbé Banier between 1738 and 1740 and immediately translated into English.³⁰

It is perhaps worth reminding ourselves of the legend of Orpheus. Orpheus was the son of Apollo. Apollo, known in Greek as *Apollon Mousagetès*, was in other words, Leader of the Muses. The Muse Calliope was the mother of Orpheus. As the wisest of the Muses, Calliope was the Muse of epic poetry and of elegies; she gave the bard Orpheus the material for his songs. It happens that Apollo received from his artful brother Hermes the lyre that he had invented. Hermes was the first to sing to the lyre. Apollo gives the lyre to Orpheus as a gift, who takes it with him when he joins Jason and the Argonauts. When he plays it on board their ship, seabirds gather above his head and fish leap out of the water. The power of his music is now seen for the first time; it is enough to soften stones, it can even destabilize the rules of the underworld for it persuades Persephone to allow Orpheus to lead his beloved wife Eurydice out of Hades. Eurydice had suffered a fatal bite after falling into a nest of vipers. Having ultimately failed in his attempt to rescue her, through his own lack of caution, Orpheus withdrew into the forest and grieved for his wife. He is joined there by young men, who he instructs in Orphic ways and initiates in Orphic rituals. Since he now spurns the advances of any women, he is torn limb from limb by intoxicated Thracian maenads. His lyre, which none was worthy to own after Apollo and Orpheus, was placed among the stars by Zeus. In order to preserve their secrecy, Orpheus had communicated his mysterious knowledge to the young men at night. Darkness is the attribute of Orpheus, who once walked in the Underworld. Nightingales sing by his grave; a shepherd fell asleep on his grave and, as he dreamt, sang Orphic songs, as though they had risen up and come to him out of the realms of the dead.³¹ Although the myth repeatedly tells us that the sound of Orpheus singing to the accompaniment of his lyre moved people, wild animals

²⁹ Publius Ovidius Naso, *Metamorphosen*, transl. and ed. by Hermann Breitenbach (Stuttgart, 1988), book 10, lines 1–147. The tradition of the myth: Karl Kerényi, *Die Mythologie der Griechen*, vol. 2: *Die Heroengeschichten* (Munich, 1966), esp. pp. 63, 201–3, 207 f., 213, 220–5; also: Renate Schlesier, 'Orpheus, der zerrissene Sänger', *Die Erfahrung des Orpheus*, eds. Armen Avanesian and Gabriele Brandstetter and Franck Hofmann (Munich, 2010), pp. 45–60.

³⁰ Abbé Banier, *The Mythology and Fables of the Ancients Explain'd from History*, 4 vols, London, 1739–40 (reprint New York and London, 1976). The German edition with extensive comments: *Anton Baniers Erläuterung der Götterlehre und Fabeln aus der Geschichte, 'aus dem Französischen übersetzt, in seinen Allegaten berichtet, und mit Anmerkungen begleitet, von Johann Adolf Schlegel und Johann Matthias Schröckh'*, 5 vols, (Leipzig, 1754–1766).

³¹ Cf. Publius Vergilius Maro, *Georgica. Vom Landbau. Lateinisch / Deutsch*, transl. and ed. by Otto Schönberger (Stuttgart, 1994), book 4, lines 57–527; Kerényi, *Die Mythologie der Griechen* (see note 29), pp. 221, 225.

and even the trees, for two reasons it was Ovid's account that was most important to Tyers, Roubiliac and Handel.

In one lengthy passage Ovid presents us with an entire arboretum; one after the other he lists the trees that gathered around Orpheus, literally moved by the sound of his music. Ovid expressly refers to the harmony of Orpheus' playing. And it is this that explains the arch above Roubiliac's statue and his programme for the work. In Ovid we read that 'after the bard, sprung from the Gods, had seated himself in this place, and touched his tuneful strings, a shade came over the spot. The tree of Chaonia was not absent ...' This is followed by the long, colourful list of trees which closes with the words: 'Such a grove of trees had the bard attracted round him, and he sat in the midst of an assembly of wild beasts, and of a multitude of birds. When he had sufficiently tried the strings struck with his thumb, and perceived that the various tones, though they gave different sounds, still harmonize, in this song he raised his voice ...'³² And he sings of his father Phoebus Apollo, that is to say, Apollo in his role as the sun god.

If we take all these factors together, we may arrive at the following conclusion regarding our statue of Handel. Let us start with the outer framework: the unusual arch, which does not form a niche for the statue but is open behind, allowing the plentiful trees in the background to evoke the trees that gathered round Orpheus, drawn in such numbers by the sound of his lyre. The rather striking notion of trees that can move from one place to another may be explained by the fact that at an earlier stage in the myth it is said that plants, animals and human beings all come from the same source and that knowledge of this is preserved in the Orphic mysteries. The fact that the arch was crowned with a personification of Harmony is entirely in keeping with Ovid's description; the sounds produced by the lyre have drawn everything together in harmony. The harmony of the spheres finds its way through the music of the man playing the lyre to all things that exist in this world. When the rays of the setting sun strike Handel's lyre with Apollo's sun sign in Vauxhall Gardens, this makes perfect sense, for according to the myth Apollo used a sunray as a plectrum when he played the lyre.³³ And now the question, Apollo or Orpheus, is easy to answer. Or rather, it's the wrong question, for what really matters is the Apollonian lyre and its function. Apollo gave it to Orpheus; after him no-one was worthy of it until it came into Handel's hands, for – as Cardinal Pamphili had already put it in an extended poem, written in Rome in 1708 – Handel was the new Orpheus, the Orpheus of our time, a new Orpheus who now outshone his predecessor.³⁴ This topos of panegyric is sustained. And the fact that of all the attractions in the Gardens, only the Handel statue was not illuminated at night, but remained shrouded in darkness, is very much in keeping with this myth. In order to preserve them, the true mysteries of Orpheus were only communicated to the initiated in darkness. And in the instant when the Gardens were bathed in light

³² Ovid, *Metamorphosen* (see note 29), book 10, lines 87–90, 143–7.

³³ Cf. Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens* (see note 5), p. 93.

³⁴ Quoted by Hogwood, *Georg Friedrich Händel* (see note 12), pp. 74 f., 98, 220, 263–5.

from the oil lamps, the mystical truths embedded in Handel's music would transfer to the visitors there, to the initiated and now, literally, enlightened.

The initiation of the visitors to Vauxhall Gardens took the following course. At seven o'clock in the evening they would enter the Gardens; their gaze would alight on the statue of Handel bathed in the gleam of the evening sun, particularly on his divinely inspired lyre. Slowly darkness would descend, enveloping the visitors. Suddenly a whistle is heard and countless lights burst into life. The visitors gather around the orchestra seated opposite the Handel statue; the music begins, the crowds fall silent as they listen and as they do so, they become initiates; they are in harmony with the wider world around them. The transformation of the divine light in Handel's music and its effect on the visitors is like an Orphic initiation rite. All this is apparent to the educated visitor in the set-up of Roubiliac's statue of Handel. The fact that in reality the majority of the audience poured into the supper boxes where they revelled in good food and drink, and that behind the mask there were also licentious activities, is simply the other side of the coin, which in turn once again points to the enigmatic, contradictory dual encoding of the statue, which is so emphatically of this world, yet cannot resist also pointing to the next.