HEINRICH BROCKES AND HANDEL:
CONNECTIONS TO A GERMAN PAST

by

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German-born composer Georg Frederic Handel wrote surprisingly few German pieces, the largest chamber work being his set of nine German arias (HWV 202-210), in which he set new enlightenment poetry by Heinrich Brockes. This set of songs, written when the composer was firmly established in London, can be measured against German music aesthetic, as observed and recorded by Johann Mattheson in Hamburg. Even though Telemann resided in Hamburg, Mattheson preferred Handel’s moderate text painting and strong melodic counterpoint, hailing him as the ideal of German musical aesthetic. Handel’s setting of Brockes’ enlightenment poetry is also compared with the same poems set by Swiss composer Johann Caspar Bachofen. A brief account of notes inégales issues is presented as it relates to Handel’s Neun deutsche Arien.
Although a native German speaker, born in Halle, Germany, Georg Frederic Handel composed only a handful of works with German text, a tiny fraction of his compositional output in English or Italian. Of the four operas with German librettos that he wrote during his youth at the Hamburg opera house, only *Almira* survives. The 1716 German passion with text by Heinrich Brockes and probably intended for performance in Hamburg, was composed when the composer was already established in London. The only other surviving German work of note is the set of nine German arias HWV 202-210. Again setting texts by the Hamburg poet Heinrich Brockes, Handel’s set of nine German arias was composed between 1724 and 1727 while he was working at the court of King George II in London.¹ The ambiguity of the exact date of composition stems from the lack of publication or recorded performance date, with only undated manuscripts surviving. However, Handel’s extensive borrowing of musical ideas from himself proves rather useful in determining when he wrote these German songs.

Ex. 1: Handel’s nine German Arios (HWV202-210) and corresponding source borrowings.

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As illustrated in Example 1, there are strong musical correlations between the German arias and various arias from the operas *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, and *Rodelinda*, as well as several of his Italian cantatas and sonatas for two violins and continuo. The first two operas premiered in 1724 and *Rodelinda* saw its premiere the following year, suggesting that Handel was working out this common musical material between the opera arias and the German songs at the same time. And we also know that they had to have been written before 1727 because the poet Heinrich Brockes, whose words Handel set, published a second volume of poetry in this year, featuring Handel’s chosen aria texts with the comments:

“The arias of this and the next two cantatas admittedly appear in various places in the earlier part of this work. However, because Herr Handel, the world-famous virtuoso, has set them to music in a very special way, the author has thought it a good idea to bring them all together, with newly-written recitatives, in three cantatas.”

This poet, Barthold Heinrich Brockes, clearly intended his poetry to be thought of musically, because the poems were conceived of and organized in what he specifically called cantatas, each one consisting of aria texts with adjoining recitatives. From this published 1727 account, we can infer that Brockes had heard a performance of Handel’s settings of his poems and was exceedingly pleased by them.

The nine German arias are an oddity among Handel’s compositions because of their very nature. Handel was by now internationally known as a composer of Opera Seria, as his Italian operas were performed throughout Europe. He composed English Anthems as part of his royal duties, along with large chamber works for special occasions. And during his stay in Italy between 1706-1709, he wrote hundreds of smaller Italian cantatas, for performance at the weekly assemblies held in the house of Marquess

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2 Heinrich Brockes, “Zweyter Teil” of *Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott* (Hamburg, 1727).
Francesco Ruspoli, to name one of the many patrons Handel composed for in Italy. Why should Handel then, at the height of his career as a composer of Italian opera in London in the mid-1720s, set a series of nature-oriented, religious, German poems for a small chamber ensemble of voice, obligato instrument, and basso continuo? To answer that question, we must go to the root of the poetry and Handel’s association with the poet, which takes us right to the heart of the German enlightenment at the beginning of the eighteenth century: Hamburg.

The Thirty Years’ War reshaped many areas of modern-day Germany in the mid-seventeenth century. The Germanic region was the battlefield for religious conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, which other European powers were eager to take part in to establish control over this quickly destabilizing region. The northern port city of Hamburg, however, remained relatively untouched by the war, famine, and disease that was rife elsewhere. Quite to the contrary, Hamburg’s population surged as others took refuge behind its walls. As a port city, Hamburg’s prominence on the international scene was always assured. It does not come as any surprise then that the Enlightenment in Germany had laid its roots there.

The enlightenment swept across all of Europe beginning in the eighteenth century. During the enlightenment people began to reject religious and other dogma, embracing instead the human ability to reason intelligently based on what could be perceived by their own senses. This shift in thinking led to more centralized governments and unified nations, all with the goal of de-emphasizing the importance of nobility rule and papal/religious power. Oppressive authoritarian rule began being replaced by democracy and greater rights for the common people. The second quarter of the eighteenth century,
the period that we are examining, marked the beginning of this new awakening of human reason, which built on the work of the previous century by the thinkers Galileo Galilei, René Descartes, and Isaac Newton.

Just before the age of the enlightenment though, the increasingly commercial and international scene in Hamburg at the end of the seventeenth century played host to a barrage of foreign diplomats and courtiers, who brought with them the air of the galant. The galant aesthetic, which circulated among the aristocratic circles, involved propriety, pleasantness, exercising good taste and good judgment, and showing a merriment and cheer that dispelled all things coarse or rude. The galant man, whose model came from the French court, was always to have an untroubled and easy expression that embodied cleverness, elegance, learnedness, and an air of “je ne sais quoi” that distinguished those with refined sensibilities.³

In an artistic sense, galanterie meant a revolt against the harshness of the extreme contrasts known to the “high baroque” style. The dramatic oxymora of phrases like “grotesque beauty” and “kind cruelty” evoked passionate, troubled, and extreme language. On the other hand, the galant trend preferred emotional restraint and pleasing, untroubled encounters. Salon societies hosted the galanterie movement, and chamber concerts, rather than grand, heroic operas, became the new aristocratic entertainment of the eighteenth century.⁴

The Enlightenment movement in Hamburg grew out of the shadow of the galant and was spear-headed by young writers such as Heinrich Brockes and Johann Mattheson. To them, the galant lifestyle of pleasing others and being amicable was very familiar.

⁴ Ibid., 321-337.
But eventually, this young generation of intellectuals rejected their “foppish” youths in lieu of creating a society in Hamburg of sincerity and deeper individual meaning. Mattheson, known in his youth as an excellent singer and composer, was the first to use his enlightened reason to point the finger at what had become Hamburg society. He went on record with his criticism in his 1713 publication *Der Vernünftiler or The Reasoner*, in which he exasperatedly pointed out the insincerity and ridiculousness of polished galant manners. He pointedly remarked that he thought much more highly of intellectual circles in Holland and England, which as a diplomat he was privileged to be familiar with.

If the young Johann Mattheson spent his time between singing the lead opera roles, composing, and commenting on the lack of good taste in Hamburg society, Brockes found his voice in poetry. Barthold Heinrich Brockes studied law abroad in his youth, but when he returned to Hamburg in 1704 with licensure, he did not go into practice. Instead, he mingled with the elite circle in the city and hosted weekly concerts in his home. It was at these weekly concerts that he met musicians such as Handel, Reinhard Keiser, and Mattheson. All of these composers, among a handful of others, set Brockes’ 1712 Passion oratorio, the work that made him immensely popular among his contemporary readers. Three years later in 1715, Brockes founded the *Teutsch-übende Gesellschaft*, or the Society of German Practitioners, with five other Hamburg intellectual writers. The goal of the society was to discuss the roles of language, poetry, and rhetoric,

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5 Ibid., 203.
6 Ibid., 251.
and they collaborated on translations of Italian, French, and English writings into German.  

In 1720 Brockes was elected to the Hamburg senate, but his life as a diplomat and foreign representative did not deter him from writing poetry or take him away from his intellectual pursuits. Quite to the contrary, his “emerging awareness of his public identity” contributed to his movement toward introversion and introspection. He sought profundity and meaning, and he desired his poetry to be more than galant-style play on words. His younger years were spent chasing a galant lifestyle, but as he stated in his own words, “Thereafter, however, moved by the beauty of nature, I decided to laud its Creator with joyous observations and, to the degree possible, description.” This theme subsequently became the impetus for his nine volumes of *Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott* or *The Earthly Delight in God*, published between 1721 and 1748. Take for example his poem, “Flammende Rose, Zierde der Erden,” Flaming Rose, Pride of the Earth.

Blazing rose, Earth’s pride  
bewitching glory of gorgeous gardens!  

Eyes which observe your excellence,  
in amazement at such loveliness, must confess  
that a divine finger made you.  

Galant expression in the arts was focused on subdued emotions of pleasant and untroubled scenes, where intimate details were the focus, instead of the grand, heroic themes of the high baroque. If the galant aesthetic was a reaction to the high baroque

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9 Fry, 66.  
10 Le Bar, 262.  
expression of extreme emotions, then Brockes’ nine volumes of *Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott* represented the reaction to the galant style and its empty word play. Compared to the frivolities of galant writing, his poems showed a profound sense of introspection on the subjects of God and nature as perceived through the human senses, the very substance of which marked his poetry as the beginning of the German enlightenment.

Brockes’ intellectual colleague Johann Mattheson devoted his mature years to writing theoretical treatises, a biography of local Hamburg intellectuals, and a periodical in two volumes, *Critica Musica*, in which he served as the definitive voice on the aesthetics of German music in the first half of the eighteenth century. In Mattheson’s written opinion, Brockes’ poetry was fine for reading and contemplating, but it had no place among musical composition. In volume one of *Critica Musica*, Mattheson asserted that music’s role was to move the soul and affections, and it could best accomplish this by accompanying words that described calm and gentle movements. His issue with Brockes was that his new form of descriptive poetry used violent movements of passion to describe the awesomeness of nature in a nearly onomatopoetic style. Furthermore, music with religious text was meant to move the soul to God by invoking inward reflection, not by representing the image of active physical nature. Prompting the listener’s senses to be moved toward godly thoughts was much more preferable to an outwardly showy display of the performer’s prowess, even if it were reflective of the words. Mattheson complained that the Hamburg poet always arrived at god through the visible aspects of nature, which could only prompt unseemly music that was trite and not
genuine. Thus the poems by Brockes, while moving and exciting to read, were simply not musical.\footnote{Johann Mattheson, \textit{Critica Musica}, vol. 1 (Hamburg, 1722), 96.}

Despite Mattheson’s critical aesthetic opinion, Brockes’ poetry enjoyed popularity among composers as well as readers. Telemann, Handel, and Swiss composer Johann Caspar Bachofen all set poems from his collection of \textit{Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott}. In a comparison of these composers’ musical settings, we will see how each musically responded to this new style of enlightenment poetry.

Since it was Senator Brockes himself who aided Telemann in getting the appointment of Hamburg’s city music director in 1721, there is little doubt that the popular composer was well acquainted with the poet.\footnote{ Fry, 66.} Telemann’s setting of Brocke’s poetry led to the multi-movement chamber cantata \textit{Alles redet jetzt und singet} (Everything now talks and sings), the piece with which Mattheson most took issue. In Mattheson’s opinion, such overt and extensive use of coloratura, as Telemann employed, was more representative of the Italian style, and he did not understand why composers would go to such great lengths to overplay word painting to the point when it became pedantic.\footnote{Werner Braun, “B. H. Brockes’ \textit{Irdisches Vergnügenin Gott}’ in den Vertonungen G. Ph. Telemanns und G. F. Händels” in \textit{Händel Jahrbuch} (1955), 42-71.}

We can see an example of the Italianate style Mattheson referred to in the recitative “Wie aber schweigen wir” from Telemann’s cantata in Example 2. The defense for such a setting was that the poem by Brockes describes a lively, singing nightingale, and the music could capture this image by echoing the exclamations of the bird and
sounding like a nightingale itself. Rapid-fire repeated notes and fast successions of ornamented arpeggios reflect the nightingale in full-spirited twittering improvisation.

Mattheson’s retort to this so-called nightingale music is clear in his criticism of Telemann’s cantata. To him, the notion of high-art music imitating a bird was incomprehensible. Music’s noble purpose was to move the human soul to experience a noble, virtuous passion. Thus each piece or movement of a piece should focus on one specific affect, whether love or despair, and impress that affect upon the listener’s soul.  

He expressed in a later treatise, Der vollkommene Capellmeister, that “Where there is no passion, no affection, neither is there virtue. If our passions are sick, then they must be healed, not murdered.” Imitating a bird was not a human emotion experienced or shared by listeners and had no point in a musical performance.

As an enlightenment thinker, Mattheson thoroughly delved into this subject of human passions and how they were expressed in music. In his 1713 treatise Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre, or the Newly-Opened Orchestra, Mattheson assigned character traits to seventeen common baroque keys, in which he called E-flat major “hostile to all sensuality” and G major “for serious as well as gay things.” You may or may not agree that A minor “invites sleep” or that F minor is “a fatal mental anxiety,” but Mattheson was obviously very meticulous about his attributions to each of these keys and the character they embodied.
Ex. 2: Telemann, "Wie aber schweigen wir," recitative from *Alle redet jetzt und singet*

6. Rezitativ Sopran

Sopran

Wie aber schweigen wir vom Wunder-schall der

Generalbaß

Wal-der Kö-ni-gin, der Nach-tigall? Sie lass-et Tag und

Nacht, zu ihres Schöp-fers Eh-ren, viel tau-send sü-ße Lie-der

hö-ren, wo mit sie Feld und Wald, Luft, Herz und Oh-ren füllt. Ihr klei-ner

Hals, woraus ein flö-ten Giak-ken quellt, lockt, schmeichelt, gir-rei, lacht, singt
feurig, schlägt, pfeift, erst zieht sie lange,

dehnt und schließt, dann wirbelt sie den Ton, zer-

teielt, fügt ihn wieder, und ändert wunder-schnell die

man-nig-falt-gen Lie-der. Fast al- ler Sin-ge-vü-gel Klang, Ma-nie-ren, Me-

die, Gesang, hat der Na-tur-geist, wie es scheint, in ei- ner Nach-ti-gall ver-eint.
One of the inspirations for Mattheson’s ideas of music and affections, otherwise known as Affektenlehre, or Doctrine of the Affections, was René Descartes’ 1649 Les passions de l’âme, the Passions of the Soul, in which Descartes described and categorized different emotions that act upon people. In Mattheson’s 1739 treatise Der vollkommene Capellmeister, Mattheson stressed the importance of composers understanding the passions if their music was to be moving, and he discussed fifteen different categories of passions, such as anger, stubbornness, pride, lust, despair, hope, and pity. In the second part of Der vollkommene Capellmeister, he designated different affections for each of the dance movements and tempo indications. For example, in his mind, a sarabande could have “no other emotion to express but Ambition,” and a presto section must connote desire.\(^{20}\)

Mattheson poured tremendous thought and energy into devising his Doctrine of Affections, as it goes into considerable more detail of how to express each affect than there is time to devote to it here. Even though he put forward his ideas in the utmost detail, right down to the meaning of each interval, it is the subject of contemporary musicological debate whether he truly meant his Doctrine of Affections as a rigid system of composition. George Buelow believes that Mattheson was expressing his personal opinion as he experienced music and fully expected that other composers and theorists would quite probably arrive at different conclusions. Mattheson himself expressed his distaste for blatant rules when he said in Der Vollkomene Capellmeister, “Concerning such would-be luminaries who believe that music has to follow their rules, when in truth their rules have to follow the music, one can rightly say ‘Faciunt intelligendo ut nihil

\(^{20}\) Mattheson, Der vollkommene Capellmeister, vol. 2, 81.
intelligent.’ They manage in their thinking to understand nothing.” Mattheson later said in the first volume of Critica Musica, “Rules are valid as long as I consider it well and sensible to abide by them. They are valid no longer than that.” As an intellectual of the enlightenment, not a dictator, Mattheson would expect other learned persons to feel the same toward any observations of his own and not adhere to them as strict rules.

The Swiss composer Johann Caspar Bachofen escaped the scrutiny of Mattheson’s pen, as his musical settings were written in 1740, a year after Mattheson’s last theoretical work, Der vollkommene Capellmeister. By this time, the popularity of Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott was so great that Brockes’ volumes of poetry had undergone many reprints and spread throughout the continent. Bachofen set the entire first volume to music, which, in line with his usual style, was intended for home use.

Bachofen depicted this nature poetry in very straight-forward settings for two sopranos, bass, and continuo line. There is not much to be said for counterpoint and structure, and even Bachofen’s own contemporaries criticized him for lacking any harmonic or melodic development. If we look at his setting of the poem “Künft’ger Zeiten eitler kummer” in Example 3, the cantus parts are merely trading notes in measures one and five, while the bass is frequently making acrobatic runs up and down the scale. The stagnation of the second cantus line in the second measure is an obvious symptom of the lackluster malady that plagues most of his settings. These short pieces never capture an affect or emotion of any kind, but simply make the poetry singable for all to enjoy. The fact that Bachofen, like Handel, set the poems “Das zitternde Glänzen” and “Flammende Rose” in triple meters shows his awareness of the poetic word stress.

21 Mattheson, Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre, vol. 1, 3.
22 Mattheson, Critica Musica, vol. 1, 302.
Beyond that, Bachofen’s grappling with any sort of affective artistry is limited to the level of activity in the piece. For example, the poem “Süße Stille” or “Sweet Quietness” is calmer and less busy than “Meine Seele hört im Sehen” (My Soul Hears in Seeing), or “Flammende Rose” (Flaming Rose). Clearly Bachofen’s local popularity resided in the fact that these popular poems were instantly accessible to amateur musicians for singing and accompanying themselves.
Ex. 3: Johann Caspar Bachofen, "Künft'ger Zeiten eitler Kummer."

Künft'ger zeiten eitler kummer

Johann Caspar Bachofen

Cantus 1
Künft'ger zeiten eitler kummer, Stöht nicht un-sern sanften schlumber.

Cantus 2
Künft'ger zeiten eitler kummer, Stöht nicht un-sern sanften schlumber.

Bassus
Künft'ger zeiten eitler kummer, Stöht nicht un-sern sanften schlumber.

C 1
Ehrgeit hat uns nie besiegt.
Mit dem unbesorgten leben.

C 2
Ehrgeit hat uns nie besiegt.
Mit dem unbesorgten leben.

B
Ehrgeit hat uns nie besiegt.
Mit dem unbesorgten leben.

C 1
Das der Schöpfer uns gegeben, Sind wir ruhig und vergnügt.

C 2
Das der Schöpfer uns gegeben, Sind wir ruhig und vergnügt.

B
Das der Schöpfer uns gegeben, Sind wir ruhig und vergnügt.
Even though Handel was well established in London when he wrote his set of German songs, he still maintained his connections to the artistic community in Hamburg through the infrequent visits that brought him back to north Germany in subsequent years and through his friendships with Brockes and Mattheson, which persisted even as he lived abroad. Even his friendship with Telemann, whose late arrival in Hamburg meant the two composers never resided in the same city at the same time, told of his continuing connection to the important Germanic city. The popularity of Brockes’ poetry across Europe could not evade Handel’s notice. He was connected by friendship and by intellectual and artistic ties, but did the Italian opera composer of international repute respond to the climate of the enlightenment in Hamburg, reflected in Mattheson’s unerring taste and judgment in new music?

When we compare the Telemann cantata with Handel’s songs, we notice the difference in the choice of texts. While Telemann set an entire cantata of poetry, drawn from the section “Das Wasser im Frühlinge,” or The Water in Spring, Handel drew poems from various different sections, seemingly at random. Since Bachofen set the entire first volume indiscriminately for general domestic use rather than public performance, his poetic choice, or lack thereof, is of no concern to this question.

What motivated Handel to choose these separate texts from the various cantatas? In actuality, Handel seems to have had his critical Hamburg friend in mind for his text selection. Mattheson’s requirement that texts for musical setting be passion-free or calmly-moving did not describe much of Brockes’ poetry, where the focus was often on catastrophic natural phenomena, filled with onomatopoetic gestures. Handel carefully avoided those particular texts in the selection for his song cycle. The most extreme or
exciting poem Handel chose was “Das zitternde Glänzen,” whose poem translates roughly as:

The sparkling brilliance of playful waves
coats the shore with silver, and bejewels the sand.

Rushing rivers, bubbling springs
enrich, moisten and refresh the earth,
and in a thousand delightful ways make known
the goodness of the glorious creator.²³

The use of the active adjectives “sparkling,” “rushing,” “bubbling,” and “playful” excite the listener’s attention. At this point Mattheson would protest the unmusicality of the poem, but Handel showed restraint in his setting and confined the coloratura to a few tasteful embellishments on these words with a few instances of word-appropriate melismas on “waves” and “bejewels.” Even Mattheson conceded that for the sake of the poetic rhetoric and rhetorical clarity, a few melismas were permissible, but their case must be completely solid. Mattheson was pleased that Handel exercised prudence in choice of poetry and use of coloratura, because the Hamburg music critic could not suffer useless or mindless coloratura elaborations. Note in this instance that Handel did not choose a single aria that Telemann had set in his cantata.

Fortunately, Handel’s habitual borrowing of musical material from himself perfectly shows the aesthetic distinction he perceived between Italian style and German song. A comparison of the German arias with their corresponding opera arias, Italian cantata, or sonata compositions, as listed in example 1, reveals the different compositional choices Handel made.

²³ Brockes, Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott, vol. 1. Translated by Anthony Hicks.
The seventh German aria, “Die ihr aus dunkeln Gräften,” makes a very straightforward demonstration, since it shares musical material with only one other piece, the aria “Forte, e lieto” from the 1724 opera *Tamerlano*. You can see the conceptual similarity between the two arias in Example 4.\(^{24}\) The bass lines and harmonic progressions in the corresponding sections are virtually identical, save for ornamental decorations. Aside from the obvious instrumentation difference, one violin in the German aria versus the entire orchestra for the opera, the greatest difference is in the treatment of the vocal line. While the German aria remains mostly syllabic with occasional passing ornaments, the Italian aria breaks into melismatic arpeggiations on the word “celassi,” meaning hidden. The vocal line in the German song remains strictly syllabic at the corresponding section of the opera aria’s long and dramatic melisma. This musical parallel reveals Handel’s attention to the different aesthetics of chamber cantata from dramatic opera. He saved his most dramatic writing for those dramatic affects of the stage, such as heroism, grandeur, suffering, and loss. Handel showed no reservation in his writing of opera seria, as the stage is perfectly suited for larger-than-life drama.

This particular example also shows a direct contrast in the style of the melody. The Italian melody is more step-wise and fluid, whereas the German melody line seems more disjunct. Handel always proves an excellent contrapuntal composer, but this contrast perhaps shows his attention to different aesthetic goals. He aimed to make the opera aria more singable and melodic, whereas the German song is more concerned with learned counterpoint.

\(^{24}\) Example drawn from Hill, 400.
Ex. 4: Comparison of corresponding Handel arias: “Die ihr aus dunkeln Grüften” (HW 208) and “Forte e lieto,” from Tamerlano (HWV 18).
Mattheson was a firm believer in melody having a substantial contrapuntal foundation. It must have substance and rhetorical clarity since it strings the entire piece together. He found Telemann lacking in basic melodic substance, but praised Handel for his observance of poetic rhetoric in his melodic settings. In the third aria “Süsser Blumen Ambratlocken,” Handel observes the word “fallt” or “falls” by dropping the melody an octave, and his setting of soaring heavenward with “Himmel-wärts” rises as if looking toward the heavens. In this case, Mattheson approved of the text painting because it guided the direction of a well-crafted melody. The counterpoint between the melody and the bass is still strong, and within that good contrapuntal writing is a melodic leap that carries added meaning in the words painted.

Handel created melodies with substance, meaning, and clarity, upon which foundation tasteful ornaments and melismas were added. Compositionally, Telemann reflected more Italian ideals of displaying virtuosity than Hamburg ideals of applying carefully governed reason to melodic and contrapuntal writing. Handel served to gray the area between having no reflection of the text in the music and Telemann’s extreme text painting. If Telemann’s rendition was criticized by Mattheson as fake text painting with no underlying musical foundation, Handel’s collection of nine artful songs was thus hailed as the realization of Hamburg theoretical ideas of musical aesthetic. Handel seems to have taken Hamburg’s musical enlightenment culture to heart in the composition of these nine songs and has shown tasteful eloquence setting the poems of Heinrich Brockes, according to the good judgment of the music critic and theorist Johann
Mattheson. Even for all his opinions, Mattheson readily admits that, “The rule of nature, in music, is nothing but the ear.”

The first piece in the set of nine songs, HWV202 “Künft'ger Zeiten eitler Kummer,” rhythmically sits at the heart of the notes inégales polemic. Handel notated triplet eighth-note figures consistently throughout the piece, and often they occur with duple musical figures that would not normally coincide with triplets, such as dotted quarter notes plus eighth notes, or a dotted eighth note and a sixteenth note. Such notation raises the question of whether or not the performers should treat the duple figures unequally so that they align with the triplets. Debate over this very question, and concurrently the use of overdotting, has been active for decades.

Arnold Dolmetsch first introduced the idea of “rhythmic alteration” in 1915. Since then, he developed “the style,” the buzzword for the French overture style of overdotting, which consisted of lengthening the dots as long as possible, resulting in the final note being very snapped and short. The discovery of a passage in the Quantz treatise Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversière zu spielen advocating the use of notes inégales led Dolmetsch and Sol Babitz to theorize about applying unequal rhythms to baroque music outside of France, chiefly Bach.

Frederick Neumann reacted to this passage in the other extreme, pointing out that Quantz had been cited as an authoritative figure on common performance practice in German music when he was not a representative account of contemporary practice. Neumann believed that the remarks by Quantz recommending the inégales style were recommendations, and that the statement had been far too highly emphasized and given too much importance when very meticulous German theorists made no mention of the

practice of employing the French style. After almost two decades of heated debate, Neumann’s 1981 article “The Overdotting Syndrome: Anatomy of a Delusion” had all but succeeded in convincing musicologists that *notes inégales* applied strictly to French music and that the “French overture style” was a complete fabrication of the twentieth century.

Just over a decade later, Stephen Hefling threw the question of *notes inégales* and overdotting wide open again with his book *Rhythmic Alteration in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Music: Notes inégales and Overdotting*. In an unassuming, thorough investigation of hundreds of treatises, French and otherwise, Hefling compiled contemporary comments on the subject of rhythmic alterations. He concluded that the use of *notes inégales* could not be confined to just France, as musicians often traveled abroad, such as the French violinist Volumier who served as concertmaster in Dresden from 1709 to 1728. Furthermore, if the French were accustomed to employing *notes inégales*, as Neumann and Hefling both agreed upon, dotted rhythms would necessarily need to be synchronized with the degree of inequality in the smaller note values, particularly in a polyphonic texture. Neumann did not want to admit such “jerky” synchronization of aligning polyphonic rhythms, because it gave validity to the French overture style of overdotting. Neumann staked his reputation on this supposedly-

30 Ibid., 88.
fabricated style being a result of misunderstanding Quantz’s use of “short and sharp” in his explanation of the style, which Neumann translates to mean staccato and detached playing, not overdotting.

Hefling’s greatest argument against the intellectual tyranny of Neumann’s towering figure was that Neumann argued over the interpretation of words and clung to his conclusions as if they were mandates or rules, without concern for musical context, cultural climate, or the life experiences of individual composers and theorists. If he looked beyond the meaning of the words, he might’ve seen that performing a French overture with staccato, detached notes would result in a blundering and awkward performance that speaks nothing of elegance or grace, let alone style. If he had acknowledged that Bach traveled to Dresden and heard this French concertmaster’s infusion of French style into the appropriate repertoire, Neumann could not deny that carefully applying some use of *notes inégales* to certain movements of a Bach suite would not be in bad taste. Beyond the science of notes, which was where Neumann was tied up in arguing about, *notes inégales* and overdotting were simply instruments of ornamentation that added to the graceful, elegant air of the French aesthetic. Neumann attempted to adhere to strict, clear-cut rules for when and where to use *inégales*, which had to become grossly oversimplified to accommodate all treatise authors, but Hefling embraced all of the information presented in treatises and acknowledged that there was no rule to cover every exception, every musical passage, and that we must apply our knowledge of *notes inégales* according to each situation, given the composer, the place, and the piece.
I must fall on the side of Hefling, who wisely suggests that we consider each musical situation independently. Handel traveled widely, and while he never visited France himself, the French style had widespread influence by the second quarter of the eighteenth century. In considering the notational inconsistancies of the first German aria, I consulted several other pieces with similar musical material to see how Handel treated the alignment problem. The aria “Deh! Lasciatemi il nemico” from the opera *Tamerlano* shows the triplet eighth-note figures frequently occurring simultaneously with dotted-eighth plus sixteenth notes. This seems to me a very strong case for synchronizing the final notes in the different figures to sound at the same time.

The assumption that these two figures should be synchronized revealed yet another problematic rhythm for this particular piece. In order to have final notes in the figures sounding at the same time, the dotted quarter note plus eighth note figure that is such a hallmark of the piece needed to be treated with a little *inégales* so that it would line up with the final eighth note of the triplet. This is exactly in accordance with Hefling’s theory that eighteenth-century ensembles well versed in the French flavor would synchronize their playing to avoid all the awkward placements of notes that a strict interpretation of the music, as Neumann believed Handel wanted, would create.32 While the piece looks visually complicated, the knowledge of *notes inégales* actually allows the ensemble to aurally correct the incongruencies in order to create a beautifully lilting piece that can in fact soothe anxieties for times to come.

32 Ibid., 22-24.
APPENDIX: Neun deutsche Arien, G. F. Handel  
Translations by Anthony Hicks

Arie 1: Künft’ger Zeiten eitler Kummer
Künft’ger Zeiten eitler Kummer
stört nicht unsern sanften Schlummer,  
Ehrgeiz hat uns nie besiegt.

Mit dem unbesorgten Leben,  
das der Schöpfer uns gegeben,  
sind wir ruhig und vergnügt.

Aria 1: Futile anxiety for times to come
Futile anxiety for times to come  
does not disturb our quiet slumber;  
ambition has not gained victory over us.

With the carefree life  
which the Creator has given us,  
we are calm and content.

Arie 2: Das zitternde Glänzen der spielenden Wellen
Das zitternde Glänzen der spielenden Wellen
versilbert das Ufer, beperlet den Strand.

Die rauschenden Flüsse,die sprudelnden Quellen
Bereichern, befeuchten, erfrischen das Land  
und machen in tausend vergnügenden Fällen  
die Güte des herrlichen Schöpfers bekannt.

Aria 2: The sparkling brilliance of the playful waves
The sparkling brilliance of the waves play  
coats the shore with silver, the sand with pearls.

Rushing rivers, bubbling springs  
enrich, moisten and refresh the earth,  
and in a thousand delightful ways make known  
the goodness of the glorious Creator.

Arie 4: Süße Stille, sanfte Quelle
Süße Stille, sanfte Quelle  
ruhiger Gelassenheit!

Selbst die Seele wird erfreut,  
wen ich mir, nach dieser Zeit arbeitsamer Eitelkeit  
jene Ruh vor Augen stelle,  
die uns ewig ist bereit.

Aria 4: Sweet quietness, gentle source
Sweet quietness, gentle source  
of calm serenity!

Such quietness will delight my soul  
when I, after this time  
of laborious futility,  
gaze on that peace which  
awaits us in eternity.
Arie 6: Meine Seele hört im Sehen
Meine Seele hört im Sehen,
wie, den Schöpfer zu erhöhen,
alles jauchzet, alles lacht.

Höret nur!
Des beblühnten Frühlings Pracht
ist die Sprache der Natur,
die sie deutlich, durchs Gesicht,
allenhalben mit uns spricht.

Aria 6: In seeing, my soul hears
In seeing, my soul hears
how all things rejoice and laugh
to exalt the Creator.

Just listen!
The blossoming splendour of the spring
is the language of Nature,
who, through sight,
speaks clearly to us everywhere.

Arie 7: Die ihr aus dunkeln Gräften
Die ihr aus dunkeln Gräften
den eitlen Mammon grabt,
seht, was ihr hier in Lüften
für reiche Schätze habt.

Sprecht nicht: es ist nur Farb und Schein,
Man zählt und schließt es nicht im
Kasten ein.

Aria 7: You who from dark caverns
You who from dark caverns
dig out useless lucre,
see what rich treasure
is here for you in the open air!

Do not say: it is only colour and light:
it cannot be counted and shut away in
coffers.

Arie 9: Flammende Rose, Zierde der Erden
Flammende Rose, Zierde der Erden
glänzender Gärten bezaubernde Pracht!

Augen, die deine Vortrefflichkeit sehen,
müssen, vor Anmut erstaunend,
gestehen,
daß dich ein göttlicher Finger gemacht.

Aria 9: Blazing rose, Earth’s pride
Blazing rose, Earth’s pride
bewitching glory of gorgeous gardens!

Eyes which observe your excellence,
in amazement at such loveliness, must
confess
that a divine finger made you.
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