

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
Timothy Vernon

PACIFIC
Opera
VICTORIA

Patrick Corrigan
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Rodelinda

Queen of Lombardy
(Rodelinda, regina de' Longobardi)



Music by George Frideric Handel
Libretto by Nicola Haym

First Performance February 13, 1725, King's Theatre, London

Study Guide for Pacific Opera Victoria's Production
November 2010


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Welcome to Pacific Opera Victoria!

This Study Guide and the attached Activity Guide have been created primarily to assist teachers in preparing students for their visit to the opera. It is our hope that teachers will be able to add this to the existing curriculum in order to expand students' understanding of opera, literature, history, and the fine arts.

Materials in the Study Guide may be copied and distributed to students. Some students may wish to go over the information at home if there is not enough time to discuss in class. The opera experience can be made more meaningful and enjoyable when students have the opportunity to learn about the opera before they attend the performance.

Please visit <http://www.pov.bc.ca> to download this study guide or to find more information about *Rodelinda*, including musical selections from POV's Best of YouTube and artist biographies. POV Study Guides for other operas are also available for download.

Teachers: Your comments and suggestions would be greatly appreciated. Please take a few minutes to fill out the questionnaire at the end of this study guide.

Please Note: The Dress Rehearsal is the last opportunity the singers will have on stage to work with the orchestra before Opening Night. Since vocal demands are so great on opera singers, some singers choose not to sing in full voice during the Dress Rehearsal in order to preserve their voice for opening night.

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RODELINDA

Queen of Lombardy

Rodelinda, regina de' Longobardi

Music by George Frideric Handel

Libretto by Nicola Haym

First Performance February 13, 1725, King's Theatre, London

Dress Rehearsal, Tuesday, November 9, 2010, 7:30 pm

Performances: November 11, 16, 18, 20, 2010, 8 pm; November 13, 3 pm

The Royal Theatre, Victoria, BC

Sung in Italian, with English Surtitles

The performance is approximately 2 hours 45 minutes, with one intermission.

Cast and Creative Team

Cast in order of vocal appearance

Rodelinda, Queen of Lombardy	Nathalie Paulin
Grimoaldo, Duke of Benevento, usurper of Bertarido's throne	Benjamin Butterfield
Garibaldo, Duke of Turin, Grimoaldo's counselor	Bruce Kelly
Eduige, Bertarido's sister, betrothed to Grimoaldo	Megan Latham
Bertarido, Rodelinda's husband, usurped King of Lombardy	Gerald Thompson
Unulfo, Bertarido's friend, counsellor to Grimoaldo	Matthew White
Flavio son of Rodelinda and Bertarido	Dylan Schmid, Ajay Parikh-Friese
Maids	Kristy Gislason, Denise Peters
Guards	Alex Granat, Geoff Malcolm Jeremy Roszmann, Sean Sager
Conductor	Timothy Vernon
Director	Oriol Tomas
Set and Costume Designer	Nancy Bryant
Lighting Designer	Claude Accolas
Resident Stage Manager	Sandy Halliday
Assistant Stage Managers	Steve Barker, Nicole Olszewski
Principal Coach	Robert Holliston
Assistant Accompanist	Kim Cousineau

With the Victoria Symphony

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Introduction

Rodelinda is an example of *opera seria* (*serious opera*), a musical drama featuring heroic characters who struggle with conflicts between love, honour, and duty. *Opera seria* focused on the beauty of lyric poetry written to reveal noble character. George Frideric Handel marks a high point in the creation of *opera seria*. His works explore the colours of human emotion, and the words, music and singers' dexterity combine to create moments of great beauty, passionate vigour and emotional catharsis.

Love, honour, and devotion shine through Handel's *Rodelinda*, an epic story of political intrigue in medieval Lombardy. Devastated by her husband's apparent death and fearful for her son, Queen Rodelinda shows remarkable courage and guile as she challenges Grimoaldo, the tyrant who has usurped the throne and is forcing her into marriage.

One of the most touching depictions of married love in opera, *Rodelinda* is also a fascinating study of the nuances of villainy, as Grimoaldo grapples with an uneasy conscience and his henchman Garibaldo plumbs the depths of Machiavellian treachery.

Handel's ravishing music illuminates the profound humanity of the characters. This is Baroque opera at its loveliest – utterly graceful, sublimely emotional.

Premiere and History of the Opera

Rodelinda is an Italian opera, written by a German – and first staged in London, England, at the King's Theatre, in February of 1725.

The first performance featured two of the composer's favourite singers, both superstars imported from Italy. The wildly popular soprano Francesca Cuzzoni was Rodelinda, and the Sienese contralto castrato Francesco Bernardi, better known even today by his stage name Senesino, performed the role of her husband Bertarido.

Operatic superstars like these enjoyed adulation that goes beyond what rock stars enjoy today; they commanded exorbitant fees, were given lavish gifts by their admirers, and behaved like thoroughly spoiled divas and divos. Any composer eager to please his public had first to write carefully for his stars. Handel was no exception, but he was made of sterner stuff than most.

Handel's biographer John Mainwaring recounts what happened when Cuzzoni refused to sing a particular aria for her London debut in 1723, apparently because it had originally been composed for another singer. Handel told her *Oh! Madame I know well that you are a real she-devil, but I hereby give you notice that I, I am Beelzebub, the Chief of Devils*. Mainwaring continues: *With this, he took her up by the waist, and, if she made any more words, swore that he would fling her out of the window*.



Francesca Cuzzoni, the first Rodelinda

In her role as the star of *Rodelinda*, Cuzzoni wore a brown silk dress trimmed with silver. According to historian Charles Burney, this scandalized the older ladies of the audience with its vulgarity and indecorum, but among fashionable young girls it became all the rage for the remainder of the season.

Contemporary accounts indicate that Cuzzoni was neither a great actress nor a beautiful woman. Historian Charles Burney described her as *short and squat, with a doughy cross face, but fine complexion; ... not a good actress; dressed ill; and was silly and fantastical*. But she could sing! Giovanni Battista Mancini, an influential Italian castrato, voice teacher, and writer on singing, called her *a complete mistress of her art. Her trill was perfect: she had a creative fancy, and a command of tempo rubato. Her high notes were unrivaled in clearness and sweetness, and her intonation was so absolutely true that she seemed incapable of singing out of tune*.

Cuzzoni is famous for her bitter rivalry with another Italian superstar, the mezzo soprano Faustina Bordoni, who also starred in some of Handel's operas. The two primadonnas first appeared together a year after Cuzzoni's

triumph in *Rodelinda*, in Handel's new opera, *Alessandro*. Knowing the sensitivities of his divas, the composer carefully gave them exactly the same number of arias, wrote a duet with the hero (Senesino) for each of them, and gave the two ladies a duet together, making sure that each part was equally difficult and equally spectacular. Each diva had a camp of supporters. The equivalent of today's soccer hoodlums, these fans would cheer on their favourite and jeer when her rival sang.

The rivalry between the two divas culminated in a 1727 performance of Bononcini's *Astinatte*, in which both ladies were singing. The British Journal reported the fracas: *A great disturbance happened at the Opera, occasioned by the partisans of Two Celebrated Rival Ladies. The contention was at first carried on merely by Hissing and Clapping, but proceeded at length to Catcalls and other Great Indecencies.*" Fist fights in the house soon extended to the stage as the primadonnas themselves came to blows.



Francesco Bernardi,
(stage name Senesino)
The first Bertarido

Just as celebrated as Cuzzoni and Bordoni was the alto castrato Senesino, for whom Handel created a succession of leading roles, despite the fact that Senesino seems to have been *the star castrato from hell: vain, insufferably arrogant, likely to throw a tantrum at the slightest provocation* (Richard Wigmore, *Gramophone*).

This is not to say that Handel wasn't a match for the temperamental and sublimely talented divo. As Mainwaring points out, *the one was perfectly refractory; the other was equally outrageous*. Senesino was *rotund, piggy-faced, insolent, demanding, fantastically gifted* (Geoff Brown, *The Times*) – and audiences clamoured for him.

Although *Rodelinda* was revived during its composer's lifetime, with stagings through the 1730s, it was then left to languish for nearly 200 years, save for performances of a few hits (notably the aria *Dove sei*, known in England as *Art thou troubled*). This was the fate of all Handel's operas. After 1754 they were simply not performed.

The first modern staging of a Handel opera was a 1920 production of *Rodelinda* in Göttingen, Germany (the first since 1736!). The Göttingen *Rodelinda*, although rearranged, rescored, truncated, and translated into German, marked the beginning of a Handel opera revival and a new appreciation of the composer's superb dramatic and musical skill.

Today *Rodelinda* is more popular than ever, with performances by contemporary operatic superstars, including Renée Fleming, David Daniels, and the late Joan Sutherland.

Right: A caricature by John Vanderbank of a performance of Handel's *Flavio, re de' Langobardi*, featuring Gaetano Berenstadt on the far right, Francesca Cuzzoni in the centre, and Senesino on the left.

Flavio, which premiered two years before *Rodelinda*, is actually a sort of sequel to *Rodelinda*, for the title character is the son of Rodelinda and Bertarido.



Robert Holliston & Maureen Woodall

Synopsis

In the mid-7th century, Lombardy has been torn apart by war. The former king divided his kingdom between his sons, giving Milan to Bertarido and Pavia to Gundeberto. But brother warred against brother, and Gundeberto enlisted Duke Grimoaldo as an ally, promising him the hand of his sister Eduige.

As the opera opens, Gundeberto has been killed through Grimoaldo's treachery. Bertarido has fled and is presumed dead, leaving his wife Rodelinda and son Flavio in the power of Grimoaldo, who has seized the throne. Eduige, in mourning for her brothers, has postponed the wedding with Grimoaldo. No one knows Bertarido is alive except his friend Unulfo, who is also an advisor to Grimoaldo.

Act 1

Grimoaldo offers the grieving Rodelinda a chance to regain the throne by marrying him. She indignantly refuses. Egged on by his henchman Garibaldo, Grimoaldo jilts Eduige. Garibaldo, who has his own designs on the throne, worms his way into Eduige's affections; she is open to his advances if he will help her punish Grimoaldo.

Bertarido, who has returned in disguise, contemplates his own memorial and longs for his wife. Unulfo joins him and insists that Bertarido remain in hiding; not even Rodelinda can know he is alive. The pair hide as Rodelinda and Flavio arrive at the tomb. Rodelinda's laments for her husband are interrupted by Garibaldo, who delivers an ultimatum: her son will be killed unless she marries Grimoaldo. Rodelinda capitulates, swearing she will have Garibaldo's head once she is queen, and unaware that Bertarido is a shocked witness to her apparent disloyalty.

Act 2

As Garibaldo and Eduige plot to gain the throne, Garibaldo senses that Eduige still loves Grimoaldo.

Rodelinda sets one condition before she will marry Grimoaldo: he must personally kill her son in front of her, for she cannot be both wife to the usurper and mother to the rightful king. This breathtakingly audacious bluff sends Grimoaldo into an emotional tailspin. He cannot bring himself to kill Flavio, and Rodelinda's implacable fidelity makes him love her more than ever. The unscrupulous Garibaldo urges Grimoaldo to call her bluff.

While out for a walk, Eduige chances upon Bertarido and recognizes him. When Bertarido tells her he wants only his family, not his kingdom, she resolves to help him. She and Unulfo reassure him of Rodelinda's loyalty.

Intermission

Unulfo brings Bertarido to Rodelinda, but no sooner have the couple been reunited than Grimoaldo arrives. He doesn't recognize Bertarido and is furious at Rodelinda's apparent hypocrisy: not only has she scorned his offer of marriage, but she has taken a lover. To save her honour, Bertarido reveals that he is her husband, but Rodelinda, desperate to protect him, insists that he is lying. Grimoaldo declares that as the man is either his enemy or his rival in love, he will die. He leaves the couple to make their final farewells.

Act 3.

Eduige and Unulfo plot Bertarido's escape from prison. Eduige throws a sword into Bertarido's cell. When someone enters, he strikes, wounding Unulfo, who has come to guide him to safety. Unulfo has Bertarido change his clothes and then leads him to the palace garden before going back to find his family. Meanwhile Rodelinda and Eduige come across Bertarido's bloodstained clothes and fear the worst.

In the garden Grimoaldo agonizes over his feelings of jealousy, love, and remorse, finally falling into an exhausted sleep. He is discovered by Garibaldo, who steals his sword and is about to murder him when Bertarido intervenes and pursues and kills Garibaldo.

As Rodelinda and Flavio arrive, Bertarido returns and tosses the bloody sword at his enemy's feet, challenging the tyrant to kill him too. Grimoaldo, owing his life to Bertarido, hails him as king of Milan and declares that he will marry Eduige and rule in Pavia. All rejoice.

Maureen Woodall

The Music of *Rodelinda*

The glory of *opera seria* comes through in *Rodelinda*, which is, above all, a singer's opera. The score is beautiful, and – as you would expect with Baroque opera – decorated with all kinds of lovely embellishments. This is music that delights the ear!

Handel was a canny man of the theatre, and he is always absolutely in tune with the dramatic moment, his music mirroring the emotions and the conflicts – inward and outward – of each character.

Handel ... knew in spades how to pace a music drama. In fact, you could argue he pretty much wrote the text book on the subject!
Conductor Paul McCreesh on Handel (*Gramophone*, April 2009)

Here are a few musical highlights from *Rodelinda*. Follow the links to Youtube to hear the selections, or go to <http://www.pov.bc.ca/rodelinda-music.html> to hear all the selections.

Grimoaldo (Act 1 Aria) *Io già t'amai*

Grimoaldo has seized the throne of Lombardy. His betrothed, Eduige, is in mourning for her brothers, the rightful kings, and has postponed the wedding. Encouraged by the treacherous Garibaldo, Grimoaldo jilts Eduige in order to pursue Bertarido's wife Rodelinda.

Io già t'amai is an example of the *da capo* aria, which comprises three sections. The first section is a setting of the words *Io già t'amai, ritrosa: (I loved you once, but you were aloof; you refused to be my wife, you always said no)*.

The second section contrasts in key, mood, and tempo: *Or ch'io son Re, non voglio. (Now that I'm King, I wouldn't want a consort who once spurned me.)*

The third or *da capo* section repeats the first section (*da capo* is Italian for "from the head" or "from the beginning").

However, the *da capo* part is not just a simple repetition. Baroque singers did not stick to the notes the composer wrote. Instead they were expected to improvise, to show off their virtuosity by adding lavish embellishments and extravagant musical curlicues. This improvised ornamentation added an element of unpredictability to the music, upping the artistic excitement and magnifying the dramatic impact.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBU59wfnLAq>

Steve Davislim as Grimoaldo. Alan Curtis conductor, Il Clesso Barocco

Bertarido (Act 1) Recitative *Pompe vane di morte!* and Aria, *Dove sei*

The heroic roles in Baroque opera were customarily taken by castrati. Today the castrati roles are usually performed by countertenors (occasionally by mezzo sopranos and contraltos). *Rodelinda* features not one, but two countertenor roles: Bertarido, the beloved husband of Rodelinda, and Unulfo, his faithful friend. Both roles provide outstanding musical moments.

Bertarido is in hiding and believed dead. However, he has secretly returned in disguise and reads the inscription on his tomb. He begins with an accompanied recitative in which he comments on the inscription, saying sadly that he has not found the peace of death:

Pompe vane di morte!

Hollow splendor of death ... you say that I am dead, but my sorrow replies that it is not true.

"Bertarido was king; defeated by Grimoaldo he fled; now he lies beside the Huns.

May his soul find rest and his ashes peace"

Peace for my ashes? Cruel stars!.

A recitative is a passage of speechlike singing in which the singer adopts the rhythms and tones of normal speaking. There are two distinct types, which are defined by the type of instrument that accompanies the singer.

1. *Recitativo secco* (*dry recitative*) is accompanied only by continuo (a continuous bass accompaniment usually played by a harpsichord and a sustaining bass instrument such as a cello).
2. *Recitativo accompagnato* (*accompanied recitative*) is accompanied by the orchestra, and is used for especially tense dramatic situations.

Bertarido then launches into the beautiful *da capo* aria *Dove sei* – one of the most famous musical selections from the opera. He expresses his longing for his wife Rodelinda.

Dove sei, amato bene?

*Where are you, my beloved? Come console my heart.
I am tormented with anguish and the pain of my
sorrow can be soothed only with you*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8xjFUViTzo>

Countertenor Andreas Scholl as Bertarido. *Arias for Senesino*. Academia Bizantina/Ottavio Dantone

Rodelinda (Act 1 aria)

Ombre piante, urne funeste!

Rodelinda has brought her son Flavio to the memorial to Bertarido, and gives voice to her grief for her husband. She does not know that he has returned in disguise and is hidden nearby with his friend Unulfo, watching and listening. The score includes beautiful interplay between the soprano voice and the flute.

*Shade trees, sorrowful tombs,
you would bring delight to my heart
if I could find in you
as well as the likeness the ashes of my beloved.*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqAQOQy93M74>

The late Joan Sutherland as Rodelinda.

Rodelinda (Act 2 Aria) *Ritorna o caro*

Rodelinda has just learned that Bertarido is alive, and she is overwhelmed both with joy and with fear for his safety.

*My dear sweet treasure,
come back and bring comfort and joy to my heart!*

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10ZVegVKy_M

Joan Sutherland in a 1959 recording.

Rodelinda and Bertarido (Act 2 duet)

Io t'abbraccio

No sooner have Rodelinda and Bertarido been reunited than Grimoaldo arrives. He does not recognize Bertarido and is furious at Rodelinda's apparent hypocrisy: not only has she refused his offer of marriage, but she has taken a lover. Bertarido explains that he is her husband, but Rodelinda, to

protect him, insists that her husband is dead. Grimoaldo tells Rodelinda that the man is either her lover, and therefore his rival, or else her husband, and therefore his enemy. In either case, he is to be executed. Grimoaldo tells the couple to make their final farewells. Husband and wife sing the ravishing duet, *Io t'abbraccio, e più che morte*.

*I embrace you, and this farewell
that takes us from one another
is crueler and more bitter to my heart than death.*

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXEBWC_3BPU

Mezzo soprano Magdalena Kozena as Rodelinda, countertenor David Daniels as Bertarido. Kammerorchester Basel Ensemble, conducted by Paul Goodwin. Live recital, Bruxelles 2005.

Bertarido (Act 3 Aria) *Vivi, tiranno*

The climax of the opera is Bertarido's great aria *Vivi, tiranno*. Bertarido has saved Grimoaldo's life by killing the would-be assassin Garibaldi. He now returns and tosses the bloody sword at his enemy's feet, challenging the tyrant to kill him too.

*Vivi tiranno! Io t'ho scampato Svenami, ingrato, sfoga
il furor.*

Live, Tyrant! I have saved you.

Now kill me, ingrate, unleash your rage!

*I wished to save you only to show you
that my heart is greater than my fate.*

Today the male roles in Baroque opera that were originally performed by castrati are performed by women (mezzo sopranos or contraltos) – or by countertenors. A countertenor is a male singer, whose vocal range is equivalent to that of a contralto, mezzo-soprano, or (less frequently) a soprano.

Here are two versions of *Vivi, tiranno*, one sung by a countertenor, David Daniels, the other by a mezzo soprano, Marilyn Horne.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lwz4BNQNRko>

Countertenor David Daniels as Bertarido. Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Sir Roger Norrington, conductor

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87r-NU7S81g>

Mezzo soprano Marilyn Horne as Bertarido. James Levine, conductor, Metropolitan Opera Orchestra.

Maureen Woodall

How to Enjoy *Opera Seria*

Programme Notes by POV Artistic Director and Conductor Timothy Vernon

Rodelinda is the third – and assuredly not the last – of Händel’s great operas that we are thrilled to bring to life on our stage. Every one of his more than 40 scores written for the theatre is now available on recording – many in a variety of fascinating versions – and many titles are to be seen in the rosters of houses the world over. The reason is not far to seek: Händel’s enormous store of musical invention which can in a phrase summon the full range of passions, extend the glory of an already glorious voice, and as it were ‘inject’ us with the Affekt of the moment directly, purely. Dulled as we ‘moderns’ have become by thoroughly psychologized characters, music which ‘leads us around by the nose’ between scenes using Romantic and post-Romantic harmonic (and lately cinematic) floods of tones, it isn’t always easy to adjust to the simpler elegance and spare intensity of the earlier style.

For those who stand at the gate, but have trouble stepping through, I hope in the following to provide a small primer. If you follow it truly, you may find your way into a world of musical/dramatic experience full of the greatest riches and rewards.

First: Read the synopsis. Better still, try to prepare beforehand by reading the libretto. Get a good grip on the characters, their names, and how they relate to each other (I used to write out all the names of the characters in Dostoyevsky novels on a card I’d then use as a bookmark until I got used to them). Immerse yourself in the story!

Second: Make special note of the division between Recitative and Aria. The Recitative, by and large, will bring the plot and explain why the characters feel what they do. The ‘recits’ have a free pacing – less stylized than what we understand about earlier performance – which depends on the flow of events and the feeling (Affekt, Händel would have called it) of the moment. At times of elevated intensity or special solemnity, the recitative is given a full orchestral accompaniment, in contrast to the small instrumental group (harpsichord, cello, theorbo, bass lute) that usually underpins the ‘narration’.

Third: Note the placement of the Arias in the story. Händel’s arias were written less to advance plot (something Mozart would do) than to give us an in-depth sense of a character’s being – what effect do the events have on her/him? Typically the aria is in three parts: A-B-A1, whereby in A the emotion of the moment comes straight to the fore, in B a nuance or even contrast is added (and the music and text change), before A is repeated, almost always with embellishments. These embellishments at once add to the character’s intensity (a simple repeat might not have the same effect) and give the performers a chance to display through extended runs or cadential fireworks (usually at the very end of the singing) the full range of their beautiful voices. The ‘ornaments’ should of course enhance and fit the mood of the piece.

As you become familiar with the text, you can begin to see why Händel placed a certain aria – why the emotion of the moment might require exploration in music. When I have not studied a Händel score, but am reading the libretto, I like to guess what sort of music he might have been inspired to write by the few lines which constitute the aria-text, before turning to his always astonishing invention. After some pre-occupation, one begins to recognize a vocabulary, a family of musical gestures, always with the Händelian immediacy and economy that so deeply impressed Beethoven, and which in their amazing variety encompass the world of human emotion with matchless range and sublime art.

The six wonderful singers performing this opera all bring specialized expertise to their roles. The many discoveries of past decades have created a sub-industry in classical music known as ‘performance practice’; mindful that every stylistic and technical choice involves more or less educated guess-work, with our colleagues in the Victoria Symphony we strive to bring you a *Rodelinda* with as much as possible of the spirit and lofty achievement of George Frederick Händel.

Timothy Vernon, CM
Artistic Director and Conductor

George Frideric Handel

Although Italian influence prevailed throughout the Baroque, historians tend, in retrospect, to see the culmination of the period in the works of two German-born composers, J.S. Bach (1685-1750) and George Frideric Handel (1685-1759). The international character of the Baroque was personified in Handel.

Born in Halle, Germany, to a family of no musical distinction (his father was a barber-surgeon), his own musical talent manifested itself so clearly that before his tenth birthday he began to receive, from a local organist, the only formal musical training he would ever have.

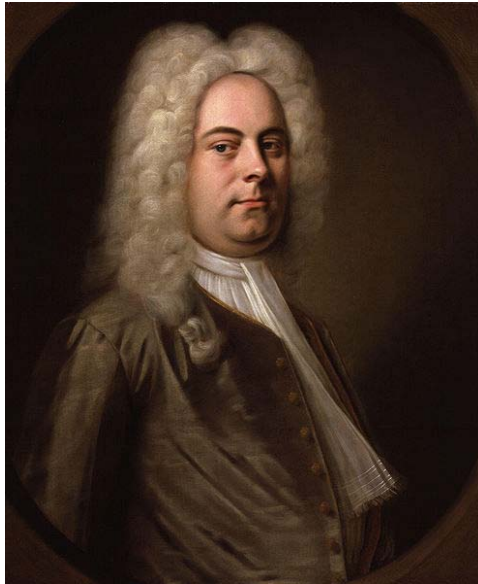
Although his first job, beginning just after his 17th birthday, was as a church organist in Halle, Handel's musical predilections lay elsewhere. Thus, in 1703, he traveled to Hamburg, the operatic centre of Germany: here, in 1704, he composed his own first opera, *Almira*, which achieved great success the following year.

Once again, however, Handel felt the urge to move on, and his inclinations led him to Italy, the birthplace of operatic style. He stopped first at Florence in the autumn of 1706. In the spring and summer of 1707 and 1708 he traveled to Rome, enjoying the patronage of both the nobility and the clergy, and in the late spring of 1707 he made an additional short trip to Naples.

In Italy Handel composed operas, oratorios (the oratorio is similar in many ways to the opera in that there are arias and choruses, but it is Biblical in nature – although nonliturgical in function – and is generally not staged), and many small secular cantatas; he ended his Italian sojourn with the spectacular success of his fifth opera, *Agrippina* (1709), in Venice.

He had become the quintessential composer of Italian opera, absorbing the style thoroughly, and learning to work idiomatically with Italian texts.

Handel left Italy for a job as court composer and conductor in Hanover, Germany, where he arrived in



the spring of 1710. As had been the case in Halle, however, he did not hold this job for long. By the end of 1710 Handel had left for London, where with the Italianate opera *Rinaldo* (1711), he once again scored an operatic triumph. At this time, England was thoroughly preoccupied with the Italian opera, and little of importance was being written in any recognizable “English” style.

After returning to Hanover, Handel was granted permission for a second, short trip to London, from which, however, he never returned. Handel was forced to face his truancy when in 1714 the elector at

Hanover, his former employer, became King George I of England. The reconciliation of these two men may well have occurred, as has often been said, during a royal party on the river Thames, during which at least some of Handel's celebrated and still popular *Water Music* was probably played.

By 1719 Handel had won the support of the King to start the Royal Academy of Music for performances of opera, which presented some of Handel's greatest operas, perhaps most notably *Giulio Cesare* in 1724 and *Rodelinda* in 1725.

In 1727 Handel became a naturalized British subject; in 1728 the Academy collapsed. He formed a new company the following year. Forced to move to another theatre by the Opera of the Nobility, a rival company, in 1734, he continued to produce opera until 1737, when both houses failed. Handel suffered a stroke and retired to Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle) to recuperate.

In 1738 Handel, as determined as ever, began yet another operatic endeavor, which ended with his last opera, *Deidamia*, in 1741. During the 1730s, however, the most important directions taken by Handel were first, the composition of English-language oratorios (which, while unstaged, were intensely dramatic in nature, and included, with the important exception of *Messiah*, soloists playing “named” characters), and second, a wealth of instrumental music including some of his greatest concertos.

What had happened was this: Handel had shrewdly assessed the changing English taste. Italian opera, with its heavy emphasis on spectacle and grandeur, and its reliance on historical and mythological stories, had begun to lose favour with the English public. In 1728, *The Beggar's Opera*, a ruthless social satire by playwright and poet John Gay (1685-1732) was mounted. This work, probably the first “musical” in an early 20th-century, vaudevillian sense, featured characters from the working and outlaw classes, sharp-edged social comment, and recognizable folk and popular tunes (including a couple by Handel himself) which were collected and arranged by Christopher Pepusch.

Thus the highly stylized Italianate opera gave way to a musical style that seemed to belong to the English public. The text was also in English, which must have been especially welcome to the growing middle-class audience. Gay was later to create a sequel entitled *Polly* (1729) which was sufficiently inflammatory to be banned from the stage, although it was published and widely read.

Throughout his life, Handel avoided the rigorous contrapuntal writing of his compatriot and exact contemporary Johann Sebastian Bach and achieved his effects through the simplest of means, trusting always to his own innate musicianship. The music of both composers, however, sums up the age in which they lived. After them, opera took a different path; the favorite Baroque genres of chamber and orchestral music – trio sonata and concerto grosso – were largely abandoned; and the development of the symphony orchestra and the pianoforte led into realms uncharted by the Baroque masters.

Handel's legacy lies in the dramatic power and lyrical beauty inherent in all his music. His operas move from the rigid use of conventional schemes toward a

more flexible and dramatic treatment of recitative, aria, and chorus. His ability to build large scenes around a single character was further extended in the dramatic work of composers such as Mozart and the Italian Gioacchino Rossini.

Handel's greatest gift to posterity was undoubtedly the creation of the dramatic oratorio genre, partly out of existing operatic traditions and partly by force of his own musical imagination; without question, the oratorios of both the Austrian composer Joseph Haydn and the German composer Felix Mendelssohn owe a large debt to those of Handel.

But perhaps his greatest contribution to operatic history is his ability to transcend the stereotypical in his characters, imbuing them with total humanity and exposing the entire spectrum of their emotions in recitatives and arias of great variety.

Handel was one of the first composers to have a biography written about him (by John Mainwaring in 1760 – within a year of his death); to have centennial celebrations of his birth (1884-86); and to have a complete edition of his music published (40 volumes, 1787-97) – Ludwig van Beethoven cherished his set, declaring Handel *the greatest composer that ever lived ... I would uncover my head and kneel down on his tomb*.

Although today, Handel is best known for only a few of his works, such as *Water Music* and *Messiah*, more and more attempts are being made to bring his other works, particularly the operas, which are being produced with increasing frequency, before the public. Handel's rich and unique musical genius deserves to be remembered in the extraordinary fullness of its entirety.

Robert Holliston, Principal Coach

Handel's London

The year before Handel arrived in London, Sir Christopher Wren's St. Paul's Cathedral had been completed; Sir Isaac Newton was still at work and the country was well into a century of commercial and cultural prosperity. Despite their ingrained dislike of foreigners – particularly successful ones – Londoners had developed a seemingly insatiable appetite for fashionable Italian opera, and to an ambitious and entrepreneurial young composer like Handel the

English capital must have seemed like the one place in Europe where fortune and fame awaited.

As elegant and prosperous as London appeared, however, it was also squalid, filthy, crowded and disease-ridden. The sanitary conditions would horrify today's urban dwellers. Smallpox was a constant fear and infant mortality was as high as 75%. Prosperous Londoners could escape by ferry to Vauxhall Spring Garden (London Bridge was the only bridge across

the Thames until Westminster Bridge opened in 1750) but ordinary city-dwellers turned to gin as an anaesthetic to their daily horrors. Hogarth's famous engravings, such as "The Rake's Progress" and "Gin Lane" depict a life that was brutal and all too short.

If 18th-century London was a bastion of free enterprise, so was it a magnet for every conceivable kind of crook. Fortunes were made and lost with bewildering rapidity; even Handel was not immune from the temptations of easy money through shady investments, and lost a tidy sum in the South Sea Bubble speculation of the 1720s. Political and social unrest smoldered under the city's fashionable veneer, and to maintain a semblance of law and order the authorities dangled the noose. Throughout the 18th century well over a hundred felonies were punishable by death, and the criminal law of England was as inconsistent as it was ferocious in its administration of capital punishment. Prisoners were not given access to evidence or council, and trials lasted on average only eight and a half minutes. Handel lived close enough to the Oxford Road, along which the condemned were taken from Newgate to Tyburn Hill, that the roar of the crowd attending the eight hanging days each year would have been within easy earshot of his house.

Handel's Best Known Music

Handel wrote over 40 operas, over 30 oratorios, and a variety of church music, odes, cantatas, orchestral suites, keyboard works, concertos for various instruments, and concerti grossi (instrumental works in which a small group of instruments alternates with a larger group).

Among his most familiar works are these:

Water Music, so called because it was performed for a royal concert on the River Thames in 1717. The musicians played on a barge close to the royal barge.

Zadok the Priest, an anthem for the 1727 coronation of King George II, which has been performed at every British coronation since.

Music for the Royal Fireworks, commissioned by King George II for a celebration of the 1749 Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle.

Ombra mai fu, an aria from from the opera *Serse* (*Xerxes*); (often just called Handel's *Largo*)

The theatres in which Handel operated were in what we might call the red light district, full of "thieving shops for the reception of highwaymen, bullies, and common assassins." London was the worst-lit capital in Europe, and although "linkmen" were employed to help pedestrians avoid potholes and dunghills, they had a bad reputation for taking their customers down dark alleys and robbing them. Handel himself probably hired a hackney coach or sedan chair to go home after an opera performance – he did not keep his own carriage.

In 1723 Handel took an annual lease on 25 Lower Brook Street, a relatively modest house in a prosperous district near Grosvenor Square. He was to live here until his death 36 years later. The Handel House Museum at 25 Brook Street displays rooms which have been carefully reconstructed; they are remarkably small, considering evidence that the composer held rehearsals in the house, to which a select number of patrons were invited. This museum is open to the public and often features a harpsichordist in one of the upstairs rooms; the house next door was also inhabited by a celebrated musician – albeit for a much briefer time and many years later – named Jimi Hendrix.

Robert Holliston

Where'er you walk, the beautiful love song Jupiter sings in *Semele*.

Messiah, Handel's best known work, a famous oratorio which we hear frequently around Christmastime. Handel actually composed *Messiah* for Easter; it was first performed in Dublin in April, 1742. Beginning in 1750 Handel gave regular Easter performances of *Messiah* in London, in support of the Foundling Hospital, an organization for underprivileged children, which still exists today as the Thomas Coram Foundation. Handel was so committed to this charity that he left a copy of *Messiah* to the Hospital in his Will. The tradition of using his music to raise money continues today with a fundraising concert every February, celebrating Handel's music and his contribution to helping disadvantaged children.

Handel's ability to capture not only the poetic surface of a text, but also the recesses of underlying meaning is second to none. His music not only fits the text like a glove, but often elevates and deepens the meaning and characterization.

John Andrews, British conductor and musicologist

Handel is the greatest composer that ever lived... I would uncover my head and kneel down on his tomb
Beethoven

[Handel] is the only person I would wish to see before I die, and the only person I would wish to be, were I not Bach.

J. S. Bach

POV's Production of *Rodelinda*

Milan in the 7th century was a dangerous place, and Director Oriol Tomas and designer Nancy Bryant are well aware of this as they create a production for Pacific Opera Victoria that brings alive the disquieting emotions and shifting alliances of the characters, and the perilous situation in which they are living.

The set features stairs suggestive of the power and sophistication of the Lombards (Longobardi or Longbeards), a Germanic tribe that dominated northern Italy and adjoining areas from the 6th to 8th centuries. Though their enemies called them barbarians, they ruled in Northern Italy for two centuries, establishing a code of laws, but remaining mired in chaos, conquest, tyranny, and turbulent alliances.

Oriol points out that the opera is steeped in espionage. On several occasions, either because they are hidden or because they arrive at an appropriate time, the characters hear the confessions of others. And always, the reaction is emotional – love, suspicion, melancholy, hate.

A structure inspired by the tower of Babel hints at the constant striving for power and the impossibility of achieving it for long. Semi-enclosed interior spaces suggest that at any moment a character may be caught unawares, overheard, or spied upon, adding a sense of uneasiness and reinforcing the desire of characters to know what others are thinking or doing. The towering set gives the impression that the characters stagger on the brink of an abyss; they can fall at any moment.

The costumes reflect the turbulent historical influences of the time: the centuries-long decline of the Roman Empire, endless waves of invading tribes through the early Middle Ages, religious turmoil in the Lombards' conversions from paganism to Arianism and Christianity (in fact the real Bertarido, named Perctarit, was Catholic, while his assassinated brother Godebert, and the killer Grimoaldo were Arian – considered heretics by Catholics).

The costumes in POV's production contain elements of the early Middle Ages, with antique drapery and barbarian elements such as animal bones, leather, and furs.

Maureen Woodall



At left, examples of Nancy Bryant's costume sketches for Bertarido, Rodelinda, and Eduige.

Links for Further Reading

Rodelinda

<http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0001/bsb00016913/images/index.html?seite=7&pdfseite=>
Orchestral score of the opera. (Pages are slow to load.)

<http://www.baerenreiter.com/html/vosco/rodelinda.htm>

Historical information on the opera and a short summary of the principal source for the story

<http://www.northvegr.org/histories%20and%20chronicles/history%20of%20the%20lombards/029.html>

History of the Lombards (Historia Langobardorum)

by Paul the Deacon, aka Paulus Diaconus (c. 720 –799)

Translated by William Dudley Foulke, LL.D. Published 1907 by the University of Pennsylvania

This book is the main historical source for the story of the opera *Rodelinda*. *Historia Langobardorum* is an incomplete history in six books, which was written late in the 8th century by a Benedictine monk and historian named Paul the Deacon. It tells the story of the ruling families of Lombardy between 568 and 743 and is one of the most important literary sources for the early history of Europe.

The events recounted in the opera (starting at Book 4, Chapter 51, and continuing through book 5, chapters 1 to 33) took place beginning in 661 AD. The names of some characters in *Historia Langobardorum* are different from the more Italian names used in Handel's opera, and of course, Handel and his librettist Nicola Haym changed some details of the story. But it is quite easily recognized as the source for the opera *Rodelinda*.

According to Paul the Deacon, King Aripert left his kingdom to his two sons, Perctarit (named Bertarido in the opera) and Godepert (Gundeberto). The two brothers went to war, and Godepert enlisted the support of Duke Grimuald of Benevento (Grimoaldo in the opera), promising Grimuald his sister as a reward. But through the treachery of the evil Garipald (Garibaldo in the opera) Grimuald killed Godepert. The wife of the rightful king was named Rodelinda in both *Historia* and opera, and her son (Flavio in the opera) was named Cunipert (sometimes Cunibert or Cunincpert). Cunipert eventually ruled as king of the Lombards from 688 to 700.

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Frideric_Handel

Wikipedia article on George Frideric Handel, with many links.

<http://gfhandel.org>

Website devoted to all things Handel (even Handel postage stamps)

http://books.google.ca/books?id=1r4QcCH-0W0C&pg=PA59&dq=francesca+cuzzoni&hl=en&ei=EnPTJf2Jom6sQPQqen7AQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&it=result&resnum=6&ved=0CDwQ6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q=francesca%20cuzzoni&f=false

Five centuries of women singers by Isabelle Putnam Emerson.

This link is to the chapter on Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni.

Pacific Opera Victoria

<http://www.pov.bc.ca/rodelinda.html>

Discover more about the opera and the production. Here you will find artist bios, YouTube links, the POV Newsletter, and more.