

UNISON SINGING

The “simple” things of life, after closer examination, are those things from which we often learn the most. This paradox is especially true in music, for the word “simple” is often unfortunately assigned to music with the fewest number of parts. Mature singers and conductors know all too well that fine unison singing is difficult and teaches musical discipline in so many areas. It is with that frame of mind that the idea of combining these two wonderful Handelian pieces came into being.

ABOUT “OMBRA MAI FU”

“Ombra mai fu” is from *Serse* (or *Xerxes*), an opera in three acts premiered in London in 1738. The opera takes place in Persia and serious, even tragic scenes alternate with those of farce and comedy. When the opera begins, Serse, the King of Persia, and his brother are both in love with the same girl, Romilda. Unfortunately for Serse, she loves his brother, Arsamene. But, being a tyrannical man and not above using his power to remove all human obstacles, Serse banishes Arsamene from the kingdom (and from competition with Romilda). [This is beginning to sound like opera.] Finally, after much trial and tribulation (and the near death of Romilda), Serse asks forgiveness for his outrageous behavior, and the opera ends.

“Ombra mai fu” is one of opera’s most famous arias. Once known as Handel’s celebrated “Largo” (because of the beautiful tune), the aria is sung by Serse, who whimsically talks of his love for the beautiful tree in his palace garden. Sung immediately following the overture, this aria has no real textual relevance to the overall plot. The greatness of the work lies in its utter simplicity, beautiful melodic line, and stunningly expressive sonority.

IPA & Translation

Ombra mai fu di vegetabile, cara ed amabile, soave più

ombra mai fu di vedgetabile kara ed amabile soave più

Shade there never was from a plant, dear and lovable, gentle more (more gentle)

Note: The letter “r” is flipped in Italian. (The avoidance of an “American r” is paramount.) Also, care should be taken in dentalizing consonants and avoiding aspirates.

Editorial note: The original key for “Ombra mai fu” is F major, and that has been preserved here. (Many other editions have been transposed down a step.) The string accompaniments in both arias in this edition are represented in the keyboard reduction, with minimum interruption or adjustment to the original. There has been no attempt to make the reduction sound more “pianistic” or to “fill in” chords to make a fuller sonority.

ABOUT "LASCIA CH'IO PIANGA"

"Lascia ch'io pianga" is from the Italian opera *Rinaldo* (1711). This was Handel's first production in England, and it made him an overnight star. *Rinaldo* is a feast for the senses and a theatrical treasure of the Baroque. The opera tells of the legendary Christian warrior Rinaldo and his adventures as he attempts to liberate Jerusalem from the Saracens and to win, against all odds, the fair Almirena's hand in marriage. The opera was a spectacle of visual entertainment, including an enchanted palace, a fiery chariot, black clouds, "fatal" wand weapons, "ugly" spirits, and loads of sorcery.

"Lascia ch'io pianga" is set in a palace garden in Jerusalem during the Crusades. It is sung by Almirena, daughter of Goffredo, who has been abducted by the sorceress Armida and imprisoned in the palace. She is lamenting her fate.

IPA & Translation

Lascia ch'io pianga la cruda sorte, e che sospiri la libertà!

laʃa kjo pjaŋga la kruːda soʁte, e ke sospiri la libeɾta

Let me weep of my cruel fate, and my longing for freedom

Il duolo infranga queste ritorte, de' miei martiri sol per pietà.

il dwɔlo infranɡa kweste ritɔrte, de mje:i martiri sol per pjeta

The duel infringes these images of my sufferings, I pray for mercy from my suffering.

Note: The letter "r" is flipped in Italian. (The avoidance of an "American r" is paramount.) Also, care should be taken in dentalizing consonants and avoiding aspirates.

String parts (AMP 0607P) for both works are available from the publisher.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Z. Randall Stroope conducts choirs and orchestras in the United States, Canada, and abroad on a regular basis. He is the Artistic Director of annual festivals in England and eastern Europe. His principal composition teachers were Normand Lockwood and Cecil Effinger, both students of Nadia Boulanger. Of the eleven compact discs he has recorded, two CDs (*Passages, Volume I* and *Volume II*) are exclusively his own works. (See www.zrstroope.com for a complete list.)

Ombra mai fu

from the opera *Serse*
unison with keyboard*

George Frideric Handel
edited by Z. Randall Stroope

Act I, Scene I
Setting: In the King's
beautiful palace garden

Larghetto (♩ = ca. 76)

Keyboard

vln I
vln II
via
vc/db

p

F major: original key

6

f
p
tr

12

Serse (King of Persia) *p dolce*

Om - bra mai -
(divide "ma-i")

tr
tr
p
vln II

18

fu di ve - ge - ta - bi - le,

vln I

3
3
3

* String parts available from
the publisher (AMP - 0607P)

AMP - 0607

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23

ca - ra ed a - ma - bi - le, so - a - ve più, Om - bra mai

28

fu di ve - ge - ta - bi - le, ca - ra ed a - ma - bi - le,

33

so - a - ve più, ca - ra ed a - ma - bi - le, om - bra mai

vln II vln I

p *p* (h)

38

fu di ve - ge - ta - bi - le, ca - ra ed a - ma - bi - le,

mf *mf*

Lascia ch'io pianga

from the opera *Rinaldo*

unison (with 2-part ending) and keyboard *

Act II, Scene II

Setting: Palace garden
in Jeresalem

George Frideric Handel
edited by Z. Randall Stroope

Largo $\text{♩} = 66$
mp

Voice

Almirena: La - scia ch'i-o pian - ga mi - a cru - da

Largo $\text{♩} = 66$
mp

Keyboard

F major: original key

*Measures 1-8 of the keyboard part may be used as an optional introduction.

4

sor - te, e che so - spi - ri la li - ber -

8

-tà! E che so - spi - ri, e che so -

* String parts available from
the publisher (AMP - 0607P)

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AMP - 0607

12 *pp*

spi - ri la li - ber - tà! La - scia ch'i-o

16

pian - ga mi - a cru - da sor - te, e che so -

20 *mf*

spi - ri la li - ber - tà! Il duo - lo in -

24

fran - ga que - ste ri - tor - te, De' miei mar -