

SOME GREAT COMPOSERS

by
ERIC BLOM



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PURCELL

IN the world of music England is supposed to be a mere province. If she produces an indifferent composer or performer, that is regarded elsewhere as perfectly normal and natural; but if foreign students of musical history have to acknowledge a British musical genius, he is considered a freak.

Such a freak is Henry Purcell. Yet if we make a choice of fifteen of the world's musical classics, as here, we find that we cannot omit this English master. He presents himself inevitably as the earliest whose music endures as an artistic achievement of vital importance to the world at large—if that world will only admit the indisputable fact. To be sure, there are earlier composers who matter considerably. Palestrina is one of the main musical pillars of the Roman Catholic Church. Lully is a pioneer in opera. Byrd is perhaps the greatest creative musician ever produced by England. But their work has to be explained as being important practically or historically. Not so Purcell's, which is still current, or at any rate has all the vitality to make it so. To speak of 'Fairest Isle' to any English person who can sing a little is to name the kind of thing 'Heidenröslein' means to any Austrian and German, or 'La donna è mobile' to any Italian. The difference is that Schubert's and Verdi's tunes are known also to the rest of the world; but the fact that Purcell's on the whole are not is merely due to that long-standing prejudice against English music.

If Purcell's work is still to a large extent unknown to the wider world, his life remains something of a mystery even to us. Its earliest stages, at any rate, emerge out of a fog. Tradition has it that he was born in St. Anne's Lane, a narrow alley off Great Pye Street, in Westminster; but the house no longer stands, and although he spent his infancy there, it is by no means certain to have been his birthplace. For he was born the year before the Restoration, some time between June and November 20th 1659. We are not sure that London is his native place at all, for although his father was there once Charles II had re-established the monarchy, he may have been

in exile before. However, Westminster was the scene, not only of Purcell's childhood, but of the whole of his short life—not much longer than Schubert's and only a little longer than Mozart's.

Until recently Purcell was not even considered to have been his father's son, so to speak. He was always supposed, on quite insufficient evidence, as it turned out, to have lost his father, an elder Henry Purcell, when he was five years of age and to have been adopted by his uncle Thomas. But Thomas spoke of him as his son. To take it calmly for granted that the uncle must have meant 'son by adoption' would have been reasonable only if there had been other grounds for the supposition that the elder Henry was his father. Since there are more arguments in favour of Thomas's parenthood, we are justified in thinking that he meant by 'son' exactly what he said and what the word obviously suggests.

Another fable is that Henry entered the Chapel Royal as a chorister at the age of about six. We may confidently place his entry there in approximately his tenth year, for even that would, according to the usual practice, have been quite early. But then he was uncommonly gifted, even if it is not certain that he composed an ode for Charles II's fortieth birthday in 1670 and if the three-part song, 'Sweet Tyranness', published in Playford's *Musical Companion* in 1667, was a work left by the elder Henry and not the remarkable early achievement of a boy of eight.

The Master of the Children in the Chapel Royal was Henry Cooke, a man in his early fifties and a good disciplinarian, having been a captain in the royalist army during the Civil War. Captain Cooke, as he was called for the rest of his life, was suitably rewarded with this post not merely because he had been loyal to the dynasty which revived the Chapel Royal with the rest of the court, but because, though not an exceptional musician, he was an admirable choir-trainer and, according to Pepys, had 'the best manner of singing in the world'. We hear of 'brave musique' from the diarist.

The boys were taught the usual school subjects, including Latin. Their musical instruction took in the lute, the violin and keyboard instruments, as well as singing and composition.

The most talented practised their gifts by writing anthems, much encouraged, as one of them, Thomas Tudway, said later on, by the king, who indulged 'their youthfull fancys'. They produced new works at frequent intervals. It cannot be doubted that Purcell took his full share in these exercises, surpassed the comrades of his own age and outdid even those older than himself.

Cooke died in 1672 and was succeeded by Pelham Humfrey, his son-in-law, who was created a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, a distinction that had been conferred on both Purcell's father and uncle. No doubt the boy of thirteen learnt something about French and Italian musical styles from Humfrey, who had been sent to study abroad at the expense of the court. But he too died, in July 1674, aged only twenty-seven. Purcell, who had left the choir the previous year because his voice broke, seems to have remained connected with the chapel for theoretical instruction, and perhaps as a musician who proved exceptionally useful when new music was wanted at short notice. And the king, after his long exile in France, did like music to be new and fashionable. He cared nothing for the old English church tradition, which made a virtue of solid textures of elaborately interlaced vocal parts, but liked anthems to be lightly tuneful, strongly rhythmic and richly accompanied by an orchestra of string instruments.

Humfrey was succeeded by John Blow, who was a year younger and already organist at Westminster Abbey. Blow was greatly interested in the gifted youth of fifteen, who by this time had become assistant to the keeper of the king's instruments, and charged him with the tuning of the Abbey organ. These two functions gave Purcell a special insight into the nature of musical instruments, even if only through such mechanical tasks as the stringing of viols and violins, the re-hairing of bows, the tuning of harpsichords or the mending of organ pipes and bellows. He also copied organ parts for Blow's use, and perhaps for his own when he deputized; but it is not true, as all but the most recent biographers have impressively stated, that he received the appointment of Copyist to Westminster Abbey, for the simple reason that there never was such an office. He was paid £5 for the copying. For tuning the Westminster organ he

received £2 a year. Musicians were poorly paid, when indeed they could obtain their money from the royal treasury at all, which was as notoriously lax in paying as it was extravagant in planning expenditure. The purchasing power of money, however, was enormously greater than it is to-day.

In August 1677 died one of the composers who had made their mark during the Commonwealth: Matthew Locke. Purcell, whose family was on friendly terms with that original and disputatious character, wrote an elegy to his memory and was appointed to succeed him as Composer in Ordinary for the King's Violins: that is to say the string orchestra Charles had established in imitation of the 'Vingt-quatre violons du Roi' he had known at the French court. At eighteen the youth had thus placed himself, by sheer surpassing talent, in one of the most coveted musical posts of the time, usually attainable only by musicianship seasoned by a long term of humbler service. Little more than two years later he succeeded Blow as Abbey organist, the elder musician having made way for him of his own free will.

Purcell's music now began to be published, too. Songs of his appeared in such collections as *Choice Ayres*—one when he was only sixteen—and *New Ayres and Dialogues* (duets). In 1680, when he came of age, he was first commissioned to write incidental music for a play, Nathaniel Lee's tragedy, *Theodosius, or The Force of Love*, which began a series of nearly fifty similar scores containing an almost inexhaustible treasury of melody in the form partly of songs and duets and partly of orchestral dances and 'act-tunes'. The same year he also turned out the first of his Welcome Songs, addressed to the reigning sovereign. They contain splendidly festive and often very artfully wrought music, but are set to grossly flattering doggerel written by inferior poets on the slightest provocation. The king's return from Newmarket, for instance, would be quite good enough an excuse for one of those fulsome effusions. All through the three reigns of Charles II, James II and William and Mary, Purcell also wrote a large number of odes, similarly laid out for solo voices, chorus and orchestra, designed for royal birthdays and suchlike occasions, and he anticipated the era of the queen he did not live to serve by setting an ode on the marriage of Princess Anne to Prince George of Denmark in 1683. Some

of his finest music of this kind is to be found in his Odes for St. Cecilia's Day. He had to write for royal patrons whether he was in the mood for flattery or not, but the patron saint of music could not fail to inspire him.

By 1681 Purcell was married, to a shadowy person of whom we know little more than that her Christian name was Frances. There were numerous children, many of whom died before they knew their parents, as usually happened in the seventeenth century. Professionally his life went on without any great changes until he was twenty-five. Then, in 1685, the king's death drew a song from him: *If prayers and tears (Sighs for our late Sovereign King Charles II)*; and the coming to the throne of James II occasioned the magnificent coronation anthem—rather questionably named, as things turned out—*My heart is inditing of a good matter*. Also there was an ode on the frustration of Monmouth's rebellion, as there had been one in 1683 on that of the Rye House Plot.

All through the 1680's Purcell was particularly busy with the composition of anthems, which made splendid and exciting concerts—'brave musique' indeed—in church. Most of them were verse anthems, i.e. interspersed with solos written for highly accomplished singers in a manner approximating to that of Handel's operatic airs half a century later. But there were also some full anthems, which are purely choral and as a rule written much more in accordance with the older church traditions uninfluenced by Charles II's preference for brilliant display and laying stress on great elaborateness and beauty of texture. To hear these full anthems, with their intricately entwined vocal lines, is to imagine how often Purcell must have looked at the wonderful fan-tracery in Henry VII's chapel at the Abbey. His almost unbelievable skill in polyphony or counterpoint—to use the technical terms for such writing—also became apparent in the fantasies for strings he wrote when he was twenty-one in imitation of the 'fancies' for consorts of viols, rather in a style of madrigals for instruments instead of voices, by Elizabethan and Jacobean masters. For Purcell's genius faced two ways: it could look back to them as well as forward to so modern a composer—from his point of view—as Handel, who was only ten years of age at Purcell's death.

For the coronation of William and Mary, Purcell wrote no anthem, but he played the organ, and incidentally got into some trouble for making a little extra money by admitting visitors to the organ-loft. The dean and chapter, however, made no further complaint about this once they had compelled him to hand over these not quite well-gotten gains to them. For the new queen, whose consort reigned jointly with her only by her own wish (or his), he seems to have had a profound affection. That he wrote a birthday ode for her each year until she died in 1694 might have meant nothing in particular, if the music were less fine in quality; but he also composed an anthem for her funeral and two elegies on her death, the heartfelt expression of which is as humanly sincere as it is artistically superb.

On the stage Purcell was as much at home as in the church. Many of the songs and duets he set for the production of plays by authors of the day, the most eminent of whom was Dryden, as well as for some exceedingly odd perversions of Beaumont and Fletcher and even Shakespeare, were published in a periodical collection entitled *The Tbeater of Music*. Operas in the proper sense of the term he wrote few—some people would say only one. Such works as *King Arthur* (1691), *The Fairy Queen* (1692) and *The Indian Queen* (1695) have been called semi-operas, because the music is intermittent and there is a great deal of dialogue. But if they are not full operas, is it possible, allowing for the difference in period-style, to maintain that Mozart's *Magic Flute*, Beethoven's *Fidelio* and Weber's *Freischütz* are? They too contain spoken dialogue.

The one stage work by Purcell to which nobody could deny the name of opera is *Dido and Æneas*, one of the great musico-dramatic masterpieces of all time, in spite of its small proportions and Nahum Tate's lamentable words. It was written for a girls' school at Chelsea, probably in 1689, but it fired Purcell to an incomparable feat of melodic invention, dramatic truth and effectiveness, harmonic eloquence, originality and sharp characterization. The music combines the highest technical skill with the greatest expressive beauty in a way only genius of the first order can achieve.

Such a genius was Henry Purcell, and his creative force was in full spate when he died—probably of the consequences of a

mere chill—on November 21st 1695. He had been immensely productive during the last few years, and he remained so to the end. There was nothing he could not turn a master-hand to, so far as it lay within his experience, and one can imagine no sort of greatness he could not have reached. Had he linked up with Handel, at whose coming to England he would have been only fifty-two, and induced the younger master to abandon Italian librettos, the two in succession might have established a school of great English opera long before there was a German one.

HANDEL

ANY one who hears Handel mentioned at once thinks of him as the best-known of all the great composers. Indeed none is more familiar by name. But is he really so very well known by his music? Asked to enumerate those works of his with which they are most intimate, most people would at once confidently begin with *Messiah*, add the *Largo*, and then—so soon—begin to falter. Another oratorio, another tune, possibly an organ concerto, one of the coronation anthems, the *Water Music* or more likely *The Harmonious Blacksmith* may occur to somebody or other; but the list will not be an impressive one, considering how very imposing a figure Handel is in music and in everyone's estimation. What should we think of a man who claimed to admire Shakespeare and then proved himself acquainted with little more than *Hamlet* and one of the 154 sonnets?

In Handel's case worse would be sure to follow if one insisted on further particulars. What exactly is the *Largo*? Where does it come from? What was it written for? Does not the fact that it is simply an air in one of at least forty Italian operas Handel wrote for London surprise many people? And do they not wonder why he should have supplied London with Italian operas at all? As for this particular tune, Handel wrote innumerable slow songs and movements in 3-4 time marked with the tempo direction '*largo*', and many of them are so like 'Ombra mai fù (Shade never was [sweeter than the plane-tree's])'—as the song from *Serse* (*Xerxes*) had now better be called—that it seems difficult to imagine why just this one out of a possible 154 or more should have acquired such unique popularity. It is a very fine tune: so are most of the others.

There are more mysteries connected with Handel's music, even some of the most familiar. We know that the *Water Music* is so called because it was most probably played on the Thames to entertain George I on a pleasure trip in a state barge; but we are not at all sure that the story is true according

to which the king was reconciled to Handel—we shall see presently what their difference was—by the great liking he took to these fresh, sane, and exhilarating pieces. The tale attached to *The Harmonious Blacksmith*, which is certainly untrue, is better known than the piece itself, simply a movement in one of Handel's suites for the harpsichord: a set of variations on a French tune, known to him for some reason, but certainly not because he heard a blacksmith at Edgware sing it at the anvil. There is no evidence that this workman ever existed, though he was confidently given the name of Powell, nor for that matter the anvil, which did not prevent an auctioneer from selling it—more than a century after the composition of the suite.

But the greatest mystery of all is Handel himself. We know a great deal about his life and have a very fair idea of his character, but seem to be far more uncertain about his mind than we are about that of any other great master. It is quite impossible to form the least notion, for instance, of his attitude towards women. We cannot just say that he never married because he was never earnestly enough in love with any woman we know of, for the fact is that we cannot even tell whether he was ever in love at all, or assert that love meant nothing to him. So far as biography informs us we can only see that he seems always to have dealt with women exactly as he did with men, as professional colleagues, as acquaintances, as friends, and sometimes as enemies, or at least nuisances.

Some German biographers, more remarkable for racial jealousy than for common sense, have hinted that Handel could never have been happy in England, and they might quite readily have concluded from this that he could not have conceived happiness with any Englishwoman as lying within the bounds of possibility. There is a tendency among these good people to represent eighteenth-century England, and London in particular, as a sink of corruption in which an honest German could not be expected to live comfortably. It is quite true that a good deal of iniquity of all sorts was rampant at that time, and we know that it roused pictorial and literary satirists like Hogarth and John Gay (in *The Beggar's Opera*) to indignation; but this was by no means peculiar to London or to England, for the goings-on abroad, not least in the small German duchies and palatinates,

were at least as bad and did not meet with such honest and outspoken condemnation, which in itself shows the presence of a better element.

To suggest that Handel felt himself to be a misfit in England is sheer nonsense. A man who at the age of twenty-five visits a foreign capital and likes musical life there so much that he decides to return and to remain, at the risk of seriously displeasing an exalted employer; who is still there fourteen years after his settling down and becomes naturalized at his own wish; who among a number of rogues (a good many of them foreigners) finds plenty of fine, high-minded characters with whom to make friends: such a man need hardly be pitied for having stayed in what, for all his trials and disappointments, were evidently the most congenial surroundings he could possibly have discovered. From 1712 to his death in 1759 Handel never thought of any other home for himself than London, and after 1726 he never regarded himself as anything but an Englishman. He even anglicized his name into George Frideric Handel.

At his birth, which occurred at Halle in Saxony on February 23rd 1685, his name was Georg Friedrich Händel. He dropped the diaeresis on the a in his surname as unnecessary, though in German ä has a less open sound than that with which we pronounce his name, which no doubt is the reason why his contemporaries in England, who never cared very much about orthography, even in their own names, often wrote 'Hendel' or 'Hendell'. This seems to indicate that he went on pronouncing it so, and indeed we may well believe that he never lost his foreign accent, as hardly any German ever does completely, whatever spy stories and films may tell us. But there is no need to think that he talked anything like the atrocious jargon shown in various anecdotes where his alleged sayings are often so crazily spelt as to be all but unintelligible ('You tog!' 'The tefill' &c.: a Saxon would in fact be much more likely to soften the hard consonants and talk about a 'dea gup' rather than a 'tog pasket'.) What we do know for certain is that Handel sometimes slightly mismanaged English prosody in his setting of words, even in so mature a work as *Messiah*, where he wrote cadences that turned 'have seen a *great* light' and 'imagine a *vain* thing' into 'have seen a great light' and

'*imagine a vain thing*', so that these phrases have to be deliberately altered by the singer.

As a child Handel showed musical talent quite early, at the age of about four. His father did not encourage it, perhaps because he thought music hardly respectable and quite unprofitable as a profession, and possibly because he at first wished his son to succeed him in his own calling, which at any rate was safe. It is sometimes said that Handel came of very humble parentage; but the street in which he was born was not at all a mean one, and although it is correct to describe his father as a barber, it must be remembered that the surgeon's profession was connected with that humbler one in those days. Moreover, Georg Händel, who was old enough to be the composer's grandfather, being sixty-three in 1685, was a 'district surgeon': he worked in an official capacity, which surgeons still sometimes do with considerable distinction.

Without any teaching or the least encouragement this old and unmusical father's son learnt to play the clavichord, a keyboard instrument which, unlike the more aggressively toned harpsichord, touched its strings so gently that it could not be heard in the next room. This was fortunate, for the boy could practise undetected, which he did until he was about seven, when one day his father found him out. What he discovered at the same time was so outstanding a talent that he relented so far as to allow lessons. During a visit to relations at Weissenfels, then the capital of a small duchy, the reigning prince as well as the Händels' family council advised the old man to let his son, who had played the organ most admirably at the Saxe-Weissenfels court, take up the musical profession. This was refused, but lessons were continued, from 1694 on under Zachau, the best organist at Halle and a composer and theorist of some standing. In addition to the keyboard instruments the boy learnt the violin and the oboe.

His father, after disallowing a musical court appointment offered during a visit to Berlin in 1696, died the following year, a few days before the son's twelfth birthday. But he had expressed a wish that the boy should be trained, not for a surgeon-barber after all, but for a lawyer; and that desire was so far respected that the young genius was sent to the Latin

school and entered the University of Halle in February 1702. He had already composed a good deal of music, however; he also frequently deputed for the cathedral organist, Leporin, who seems to have been only too ready to hand over his duties to the gifted lad. Indeed he began to make such a habit of staying away from the services that he was dismissed in March 1702, early in Handel's first university term, and the young law student, at the age of seventeen, was appointed his successor. But he gave up this post, together with his legal studies, the following summer, being anxious to try his luck in a larger musical centre.

His choice fell on Hamburg, where he made himself known as a performer, but where the main attraction was the opera. In order to gain a foothold there he joined the orchestra as violinist. This theatre, the manager and chief composer of which was Reinhard Keiser, differed from all others in Germany by making an attempt to introduce operas in the native tongue. At all the German courts the operas produced were Italian, even when composed or (much more rarely) sung by Germans. But the free Hanseatic town of Hamburg had no court, and the opera relied for support on the townsfolk, who not unreasonably demanded to understand what was being sung. So a repertory of translations and of local operas specially composed by resident musicians, such as Mattheson and Keiser himself, had to be kept in supply. This was Handel's opportunity. As early as 1704 he had begun an opera of his own, *Almira, Queen of Castile*, and it was produced before he was twenty, in January of the following year. A second, *Nero*, followed in the incredibly short time of seven weeks. In form and style, of course, in fact in all but language, these Hamburg operas were indistinguishable from foreign models, so that it was here that Handel, though composing German operas, learnt how to write Italian opera. He continued to cultivate it unchanged until 1741: it was he, not any Italian, who was the leader of a thirty years' vogue of Italian opera in England and the originator there of a fashion that was to persist for more than two centuries.

How different a career this visit to Hamburg meant for him from that which he could so easily have pursued at Halle! He had begun there by writing church cantatas and organ works

exactly as Bach did at Leipzig, and if he had remained at home there is every reason to suppose that he would have become a musician very much like the master who was not only his equal in genius but his nearest contemporary, for the two were born within a month of each other. In temperament, however, they were very different. Bach, members of whose family had served their home towns as professional musicians for generations, had no thought beyond doing the same at some place not too far distant where he could make a decent living. Handel, with no such tradition behind him, was not rooted in German musical life. Nor, for that matter, in German musical art: he shares with Mozart an artistic internationalism which none but Germans would think of denying.

Before long Hamburg satisfied his ambitions as little as Halle had done. The opera had sadly deteriorated by 1706. He was off to Italy, then the musician's land of promise. The next four years were spent there, by turns at Florence, Rome, Venice and Naples, under the patronage of art-loving princes and cardinals and in touch with the eminent composers of the day. He heard the church music of Lotti, the operas of Alessandro Scarlatti, the concertos of Corelli, to mention only a few of the influences through which he absorbed the Italian style of the time, and there is evidence also that he knew the chamber duets which were the speciality of Steffani, for he wrote twenty vocal pieces of the kind himself. He produced psalms in Rome, his first opera composed to an Italian libretto, *Rodrigo*, at Florence, and also wrote an oratorio, secular cantatas and a pastoral play, *Acis, Galatea e Polifemo*, a forerunner of his later *Acis and Galatea*. The second Italian opera, *Agrippina*, was produced at Venice.

There he had already met the younger Scarlatti, Domenico, who was born the same year as he. The two played the harpsichord in friendly rivalry, which means that Handel must have shown remarkable skill to hold his own against the greatest Italian player of the day, who was also to become the most original composer for the instrument. It was in Venice, too, that he was discovered by visitors from Hanover and from England, who in 1710 persuaded him to seek his fortune at their homes. Deciding to try both, he first of all went to Hanover

with Steffani, who was musical director and some sort of envoy at the electoral court there. The Elector Georg Ludwig appointed him Steffani's successor, apparently at that composer-diplomat's own suggestion, and this postponed the visit to England until the autumn. However, he did obtain leave to go to London, where Queen Anne received him graciously and he was at once engaged to write a work for the Italian opera in the Haymarket. This was *Rinaldo*, produced on February 24th 1711, the day after his twenty-sixth birthday. It was given fifteen times. Handel was made much of by society and met many musicians. It must thus have been with some reluctance that he returned to Hanover, where musical life was narrowly confined to the court. At any rate he soon asked for leave to revisit London, which was granted him in the autumn of 1712, on condition that he should not outstay a reasonable time. As it turned out, the time he judged reasonable was a lifetime. Once he had got away again he stayed away indefinitely. He continued to turn out new operas and wrote a *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* for the celebration of the Peace of Utrecht, highly approved of by the queen. He was invited by the youthful Earl of Burlington to live at his palatial house in Piccadilly, where he met many distinguished leaders of society and of the arts, including Pope. All went well with him. There could be no doubt that London was the place for him.

But Anne died in 1714, and Handel must have been not a little dismayed to find Georg Ludwig, whom he had forsaken, succeeding her on the English throne as George I. However, after a year or so of strained relations between him and the court, a reconciliation was brought about, perhaps by a ruse on Geminiani's part, who insisted on being accompanied there by Handel, perhaps by the *Water Music* incident already mentioned. At any rate London was safe for him once more, and but for a few visits abroad in search of singers for the opera or renewed health after illness, he never left it.

At least he never left its neighbourhood. For in 1718 the Earl of Carnarvon invited him to go and live at his magnificent country mansion, Canons, near Edgware, to conduct the band, play the organ and compose to his heart's content. There he wrote twelve anthems for performance in his patron's private

chapel, now known as the *Chandos Anthems* because the earl was created Duke of Chandos in 1719. There too the new *Acis and Galatea* was written, in the form of a semi-scenic pastoral cantata, to a charming poem by John Gay.

Handel was now as much a composer of English as of Italian music, although his contribution to what Addison called 'an exotic and irrational entertainment' went on steadily. The influence of Purcell was clearly evident in the *Te Deum* and *Jubilate*, the anthems showed his acquaintance with Anglican church music and some of the tunes in *Acis* have an open-air freshness about them which makes them unmistakably English songs, as distinct from Italian arias. He also wrote his first English oratorio, *Esther*, at Canons, although for the moment it appeared in the form of a masque entitled *Haman and Mordecai*. Instrumental as well as vocal music occupied him there, for his first suites for harpsichord and most of the first set of *Concerti grossi* for strings date from 1720.

Although the Opera, pompously styled Royal Academy of Musick on the Parisian model since 1719, continued to produce works by Handel and others—Bononcini being the important newcomer—it began to decline in its appeal to high society and, being 'exotic', it had of course never attracted the general public. Sometimes a passing sensation helped to draw attention to it where the music as such failed to do so: the formation of two parties which artificially turned Handel and Bononcini into fierce rivals in 1721 or the tale of the former's threatening to throw the prima donna, Francesca Cuzzoni, out of the window because she would not sing an aria as he had written it. On the other hand the financial panic created by the bursting of the South Sea Bubble did it much harm, and so, no doubt, did the growing dissatisfaction, stirred up by Addison, with an art that remained rigidly stereotyped in its musical form and conventional in its stilted librettos based on mythological or heroic themes too remote from ordinary human life to move anybody, quite apart from the fact that few people understood the Italian words.

Then, in 1728, Gay dealt the species a further blow by making cruel fun of it in *The Beggar's Opera*, where the quarrel between Polly and Lucy is a direct allusion to the hand-to-hand fight that broke out at a performance between Cuzzoni and another prima