

Sektion IV

Leitung: Matthew Gardner (Tübingen)

Carlo Lanfossi (Mailand)

Orlando in Analysis: Modern Performances as Textual Treatment

At the end of Act II of Handel's *Orlando* (1733), the protagonist – driven by madness – drags the once beloved princess Angelica offstage. Her lover Medoro then briefly enters in an attempt to rescue her, but he immediately rushes off. Finally, Orlando and Angelica come back on stage. In a 2013 production of *Orlando* at Stony Brook University (directed by Guillaume Bernardi), this sequence misfired. The singer interpreting Medoro did not make it onstage in time to declaim her short recitative, bringing together the exit and the consequent reappearance of Orlando and Angelica. The involuntary removal of this scene – a seemingly uneventful glitch – had the effect of accomplishing a more fluent sequence of events, indeed respecting the convention of unity of action of the *liaison des scenes*. In this paper, I begin by exploring the 1711 Italian libretto by Carlo Sigismondo Capece from which *Orlando* is drawn. The comparison between the two librettos highlights the process by which Handel's anonymous librettist created this scene and eventually led to the aforementioned performative issues. Secondly, I examine three different modern productions of Handel's *Orlando* (Carsen, Herzog, Audi) to show how directors have dealt with this particular scene. The dynamic relationship between opera's textuality and performative strategies unveils in all its tension in this scene from *Orlando*, where a textual issue of the libretto is "drastically" exploited and reveals new meaning in performance, as an instance of theatrical *Nachträglichkeit*. Drawing from the field of performance studies and psychoanalytic theory, my paper proposes an approach to the study of operatic performances that seeks to reverse the traditional "from page to stage" paradigm. By focusing on the modern reception of *Orlando*, a title at the same time emblematic of Baroque theater aesthetics and peculiarly innovative in the history of the genre, I highlight the role of directors and staging in visualizing textual issues to retroactively make sense of Baroque librettos, especially those – such as *Orlando* – which showcases a peculiar inclination for deferred acts of re-textualization.