

Sektion VI

Leitung: Graydon Beeks (Claremont)

Colin Timms (Birmingham)

Sorcery in Orlando

Ariosto's monumental epic poem *Orlando furioso*, centred on the exploits of the mediæval paladin Roland, proved a rich source of texts for madrigals in the first century after its composition in the early sixteenth century and of subjects for operas in the second. Most of the opera librettos involve one of two groups of characters – either Orlando, his beloved Angelica and her beloved Medoro, or the female warrior Bradamante, her betrothed Ruggiero and the sorceress Alcina. The "Orlando" libretto most frequently set in the eighteenth century, Grazio Bracciolini's *Orlando furioso* (1713), combines both groups of characters. Handel's *Orlando* (1733), to a version of a libretto by Carlo Sigismondo Capece (1711), concentrates on the first group but compensates for the absence of Alcina by the introduction of the sorcerer Zoroastro, a bass. It seems that the only precedent for Bracciolini's combination of the two groups of characters or for a bass sorcerer is Steffani's *Orlando generoso* (1691), with libretto by Ortensio Mauro. With this in mind, I plan in this paper to examine the libretto of Handel's *Orlando*, to consider the role of the sorcerer or sorceress in some "Orlando" operas and to discuss the distinctive nature of composition for the bass voice in music of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.