

Sektion V

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### **Singers and Creativity in Orlando and Alcina**

Orlando (1733) and Alcina (1735), both of which draw on Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, were composed around two years apart but under different circumstances. Orlando was the penultimate opera of Handel's "second academy" period and his final opera created for the cast of first-rate Italian singers that Handel had worked with for several years, led by the castrato Senesino. At the end of the 1732–33 season all of Handel's Italian singers except the soprano Anna Maria Strada del Pò deserted him and moved to the new rival opera company the "Opera of the Nobility" to work with Nicola Porpora. Alcina was Handel's third opera to employ a new cast of singers, including three Italians, the castrato Carestini, contralto Maria Caterina Negri and soprano Anna Strada, and supplemented by the English singers John Beard (tenor) and Cecilia Young (soprano), amongst others. As both operas are based on episodes from *Orlando furioso* that revolve around magical rather than heroic themes, a comparison of the creative choices Handel made for the two different groups of singers yields insight into their role in his creative process. Using select examples, this paper therefore explores the ways in which Handel's creative decisions in *Orlando* and *Alcina* were influenced by the abilities of the available singers, whilst also taking in account their past and future Handelian roles, leading to a broader understanding of his creativity in the early 1730s.