

CHAPTER I.

COMPARISON OF PASSAGES FROM WORKS BY HANDEL WITH EXTRACTS FROM
COMPOSITIONS BY GOTTLIEB MUFFAT, AND WITH MANUSCRIPT COPIES MADE
THENCE BY HANDEL.

GOTTLIEB MUFFAT (1690-1770), of Vienna, was one of the best composers of his time for the harpsichord. His chief work, entitled "*Componimenti Musicali per il Cembalo*," is a collection of overtures, fugues, fantasias etc., and of movements in dance-forms, minuets, rigaudons, sarabandes, giges and the like. The resemblances between eighteen of these and passages in Handel's works which have been specified by Chrysander are of such a kind as to make it manifest either that Handel copied from Muffat or Muffat from Handel. We have, therefore, to decide between these alternatives. Unfortunately the date at which Muffat's '*Componimenti*' were published is so uncertain that it cannot be relied on as an element of comparison. The late Herr C. F. Pohl, in an article on Muffat in Grove's Dictionary of Music,¹ stated that the work in question was published at Vienna in 1727, and he made a memorandum to that effect in a copy of the '*Componimenti*' in the Library of the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* at Vienna, of which he was then Librarian.² On the other hand Chrysander in his edition of the '*Componimenti*' reproduces the original title-page which states that the work was printed at Augsburg, but bears no date. In the German³ preface Muffat describes his good fortune in having met with his famous "engraver and publisher" ("*Kupferstecher und Verleger*") who had produced ("*verfertigt*") the work to his entire satisfaction. According to this evidence, therefore, the '*Componimenti*' were printed and published at Augsburg, not at Vienna as stated by Pohl. The fact that the date is wanting on the original title-page affords, of course, no proof that Pohl did not possess some independent evidence capable of establishing it. For us, however, the date which he assigns, 1727, rests on his assertion only. Chrysander, on conjectural grounds, considered the work to have been published "about the year 1735,"⁴ but, as this view depends on the assumption that "Handel had the '*Componimenti*' in his hand in 1739 or perhaps a year earlier,"⁵ no weight can, without circular reasoning, be assigned to it at the present stage of our enquiry.

¹ First edition.

² This fact was kindly communicated to me by Dr. Mandyczewski, the present librarian of the *Gesellschaft*, who added that he was unable to ascertain on what ground Pohl, who was generally very accurate in statement, based his fixation of the date and place of publication of Muffat's work.

³ The preface appears also in Italian, but in the corresponding passage mentions the *printer* ("*Inpressore*") only.

⁴ Preface to his edition of Muffat's '*Componimenti*.'

⁵ *Ibidem*.

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So far, then, the external evidence is inconclusive, but an appeal to that supplied by the Fitzwilliam Handel autographs will prove much more fruitful. These contain certain disjointed musical scraps, of from 3 to 5 bars each, which so experienced a Handelian scholar as Dr. A. H. Mann has not been able to recognize as appearing anywhere in Handel's published works, but which he and I between us have identified as agreeing in minute detail with passages in Muffat's '*Componimenti*.' This renders it very improbable that Muffat took these passages from any Handelian source, as he certainly had no access to Handel's private note-books; and therefore establishes a strong probability that Handel copied them from Muffat's published volume. A detailed comparison between the forms in which these passages are presented in the note-books and in the '*Componimenti*' will, I think, make it clear that Handel was here the copyist. To this comparison we now proceed.

Ex. 1.

Handel.
F. W. Auto-
graphs.
(12. p. 62.)
Staves 8 & 9.

Muffat.
Prelude.
p. 27.
bars 3-7.

(sic)

75 Frag-
ment
ends.

etc.

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3

The occurrence in Handel's version of only one tie (bar 3) as against six in Muffat (bars 3 and 4) is an indication that Handel is here copying, not composing. The absence of a flat before E (H. bar 4, Bass, first note) shows that a tie should have been inserted as in Muffat. In the same bar the second B ought to have a flat before it as in Muffat. The absence of a flat before E (H. bar 2, Treble) and of a 'natural' before the second F (H. bar 3, Bass) tells the same tale.

Ex. 2.

Handel.
F. W. Auto-
graphs.
(12. p. 62.)
lines 6 & 7.
(Upper stave
transcribed
from Sopr.
clef.)

Muffat.
Allemande.
Part I.
bars 4-7.
p. 6.

At the beginning of Handel's autograph here he has first written in the Treble clef and then crossed it out and replaced it by the Soprano clef, which was doubtless that used in Muffat's original edition. The upper stave in the autograph opens thus

, which is equivalent to

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and not consistent with the Bass. I conjecture that Handel made the change of clef *after he had written in the opening chord*, and forgot to alter it correspondingly when he replaced the Treble by the Soprano clef in which therefore it reads as the chord of E minor instead of as that of G major.

Immediately after Handel's "etc." comes a further fragment corresponding to a passage in Part II. of the same Allemande by Muffat, the Treble clef being this time used by Handel.

Ex. 3.

H. Ib.

M. Ib.
Part II.
p. 7.
bars 6-8.

Fragment ends.

326
(sic)

etc.

The musical score consists of three systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The first system is labeled 'H. Ib.' and the second 'M. Ib. Part II. p. 7. bars 6-8.'. The third system is labeled 'Fragment ends.' and the fourth 'etc.'. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings. A specific measure in the third system is marked with the number '326' and '(sic)' below it.

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5

Here the difference of barring makes Handel's version much the better of the two. We cannot suppose that Muffat had it before him and deliberately worsened its vigorous accentuation, and therefore must here see Handel copying from Muffat and improving on him while doing so.

Ex. 4.

Handel.
F. W. Auto-
graphs.
(12. p. 62.)
lines 1 & 2.
Sopr. clef
used in
the MS.

Muffat.
Overture.
p. 107.

Handel's version here looks on the face of it anything but like a bit of original composition. It begins with a chord in four parts followed by another in three, both provided with Thorough-Bass figuring from which we learn nothing but what the chords themselves tell us. Next come five notes of Treble and Bass only, with incomplete figuring, then six unfigured chords in five parts and one in four. Bars 3 and 4 show wrong notes, A and A \flat appearing in one and the same chord in Bar 3, and B and B \flat in bar 4.

It is hardly possible to imagine Handel putting his own ideas on paper in this fashion, but quite easy to suppose him jotting down these notes and scanty figures if his object was to produce, not a copy of what Muffat had written, but a rough memorandum sufficient to recover its salient features if he should subsequently have occasion to make use of them. So far it has, I think, been established that Handel copied out, or made memoranda of, passages from Muffat's '*Componimenti.*'

I place next an example showing Handel at work elaborating a fine accompanied recitative out of apparently unpromising materials taken from the same quarry.

6

DEVELOPMENT FROM MUFFAT

Ex. 5.

Accompanied Recitative from the *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day*.

Tenor Voice.

When Na-ture un-derneath a

Accomp.

Adagio.

Muffat.
Adagio.
p. 124.
(Original
Key-sig-
nature G.)

heap of jar-ring A-toms lay, When

DEVELOPMENT FROM MUFFAT

7

Na - ture un - der - neath a heap of jar - ring A - toms

lay And could not heave her head.

The musical score is presented in two systems. Each system includes a vocal line (Soprano) and a keyboard accompaniment (Harpsichord/Violin and Cello/Bass). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The first system shows the vocal line with the lyrics 'Na - ture un - der - neath a heap of jar - ring A - toms'. The second system shows the vocal line with the lyrics 'lay And could not heave her head.' The instrumental parts feature rhythmic patterns and chordal accompaniment.

8 DEVELOPMENT FROM MUFFAT

The tune-ful voice was heard from high

H.

M.

M.

etc.

etc.

An argument already used above, is equally applicable to this case. Had Muffat seen Handel's unaccompanied recitative he could not by any possibility have reduced it to the dead level of his *Adagio*. Therefore it must have been developed by Handel on the skeleton supplied by Muffat. It is immediately followed in the *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day* by short unaccompanied recitatives, alternating with two instrumental interludes identical, save for slight alterations, with passages from a 'Fantaisie' by Muffat, as is shown in the next example :

Ex. 6.

Handel.
Strings.

Muffat.
Fantaisie.
p. 76.
(Transposed
a Major
Third up.)

MUFFAT COPIED FROM

9

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system shows Handel's original arrangement for strings, with a treble clef (H.) and a bass clef (M.). The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The music consists of a series of eighth-note patterns. The second system is labeled 'Ex. 6 (continued.)' and shows the original Muffat piece, transposed a semi-tone down, with a treble clef (H.) and a bass clef (M.). The key signature has one sharp (F#). The music features a similar eighth-note pattern but includes trills (tr) in the treble part. The third system shows Handel's strings again, with a treble clef (H.) and a bass clef (M.). The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The music includes trills (tr) in both parts. The score concludes with 'etc.' in both the treble and bass staves of the third system.

MUFFAT COPIED FROM

The superiority of Handel's part-writing in Ex. 6, bar 2, and of his distribution of parts in the second part of that example suffice, as in previous instances, to show that he must here, too, be regarded as copying from, and improving on, Muffat.

The comparisons made above suffice, I think, to establish the fact that Handel borrowed from Muffat. I add three more, however, before passing away from this composer, on account of their possessing special points of interest; the first and second as being, with the exception of judicious excisions, slight modifications of key and filling in of harmonies, entire movements simply 'lifted off' Muffat; the third as showing where Handel got the stirring subject of the allegro in his well-known overture to *Samson*.

Ex. 7.

Handel.
Trio
in the
Overture
to
Theodora.

Muffat.
Trio.
p. 40.

H.

M.

1. 2.

1. 2.