



# Dramatic Sounds: Composing Perspective of Comparison Between Händel and Lachenmann

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**Abstract.** This article presents a new perspective on two different works from two different composers. We will compare two very different works- “Empio dirò tu sei”, HWV 17 (1724), from the opera “Giulio Cesare”, no. 3, and “Kontrakadenz” (1970–1971) for full Orchestra from Helmut Lachenmann. The study is analyzed in terms of technical analysis of the composition, meanwhile discussing the limitations of composing as well as the value of dissemination. Use critical and dialectical thinking to further compare the stylistic characteristics of Händel and Lachenmann’s work in the context of the material learned from the work.

**Keywords:** composing techniques · Händel · Helmut Lachenmann · orchestration

## 1 Introduction

The very new version of Giulio Cesare which the audience has been watching these days is the one performed recently by the Dutch National Opera on February 2nd in 2023, and although the actors sing in a serious manner, very expert indeed, they wear business suits with sunglasses, and there are even plastic bags on the stage. The contrast between the medieval Opera and the modern staging does create a comic effect. While the staging is always open to new ideas and changes, the libretto and the score are unlikely to change dramatically each time [1–3].

There is, however, no such thing as totally free, unconditional art. What appears to be a merry opera to the audience has in fact brought together the full commitment of many artists, especially the composer’s well-designed work for the orchestra and the vocal parts [4, 5]. Musical notation or signals on the paper could not be heard directly, but such scores in history can remain through time and space for study. This is the unique historical value of musical texts.

This paper will compare two very different works—“Empio dirò tu sei”, HWV 17 (1724), from the opera “Giulio Cesare”, no. 3, and “Kontrakadenz” (1970–1971) for full Orchestra from Helmut Lachenmann. The study is analyzed in terms of technical analysis of the composition, meanwhile discussing the limitations of composing as well as the value of dissemination. Use critical and dialectical thinking to further discuss the stylistic characteristics of Händel and Lachenmann’s work in the context of the material learned from the work.

## 2 Technical Analysis of the Composition

As people can see in Fig. 1, to show César's anger, Händel uses a rapid downward motive in the scale in c minor, as it can be seen the scale goes down straight forward, with continually dynamic rhythms, sustained ornamental 16th notes, and great leaping pitch intervals. These all create intense emotions.

The repetition of the same pitch material (in Fig. 2), as well as the repetition of the same pitch followed by moving up a second interval as if to propose an inquiry, and these phrases of repetition were specifically designed for displaying indignation even more profoundly. The technique of vocal singing in this piece tends to be more instrumental, which brings lots of technical requirements, highly skilled indeed, but at the same time gives it a dramatic effect in a way.

The orchestra, meanwhile, uses the same fast downward scaling material as the voice. The string parts, however, are more active and have a greater leaping of sustained 16th notes than the vocal parts, and the bass and violin tutti parts, which two are often in contrary motion, emphasize the tension of the music. When the vocalists sing sustained

The image shows a musical score for an aria. The top system features a vocal line in C minor with a red circle around a descending scale of sixteenth notes. The lyrics are: "Em-pio, di-rò, tu sei, to-gli-ti a gli oc-chi miei, sei tut-to cru-del-tà, sei tut-to cru-del-tà,". Below the vocal line is an instrumental part, likely for strings, with a yellow highlight under a section of sustained sixteenth notes. The lyrics for this part are: "sei tut-to cru-del-tà;".

**Fig. 1.** Aria from Giulio Cesare, “Empio dirò tu sei”, HWV 17 (1724), from the opera “Giulio Cesare”, no. 3, and “Kontrakadenz” (1970–1971) for full Orchestra from Helmut Lachenmann

The image shows a musical score for an aria. The top system features a vocal line with red lines under the lyrics: "em-pio, di-rò, tu sei, em-pio, di-rò, tu sei,". Below the vocal line is an instrumental part with red lines under the lyrics: "to-gli-ti a gli oc-chi miei, sei tut-to cru-del-tà,". The score includes a measure number '6' at the bottom of the first system.

**Fig. 2.** Aria from Giulio Cesare, “Empio dirò tu sei”, HWV 17 (1724), from the opera “Giulio Cesare”, no. 3, and “Kontrakadenz” (1970–1971) for full Orchestra from Helmut Lachenmann

ornamental 16th notes, the strings give a pause to make room for the singer, leaving only the Cello, Contrabass, and Cembalo, after then when the vocalists relatively calm down, the strings join in again to build the resentful atmosphere continuously [5].

Händel did make good use of different musical vocabularies to bring out the characters and the psychological activities of the moment. The audience even can feel extreme anger of Cesare through the music alone, without seeing the performance. That's the power of Händel's music. It has to be said that their talent of Händel to synthesize the form and content of music is splendid, exquisite, and brilliant. He did give Cesare a lively personality.

### 3 The Limitations of Composing

Händel's place among the listed composers in the history of music is unquestionable, but of course, as an outstanding composer of the 17th-18th centuries, he naturally suffered from a certain degree of historical limitations. Händel certainly could not have foreseen how the notation requirements of composers would develop in the future. Throughout the history of musical development, the requirements for the notation of musical works have become increasingly detailed and concrete. For the serious orchestra conductor, Wagner's Ring of the Nibelungs could not be rehearsed without Wagnertuba. From Piano Concerto No. 5 onwards, Beethoven strictly required the pianists to play the cadence according to the score, and no more improvisation was allowed. Time turned to the 20th century, avant-garde composers used a large number of words and graphics in their scores to ensure that the music they played met their requirements. The precise and detailed notation of the above-mentioned works often facilitates the performer to stay as close as possible to the composer's requirements when the composer is not present. Composers became increasingly adept at exact notation to describe the musical work being constructed, something that composers of Händel's time were not skilled at.

Time or back to the days of Händel, in the score of *Empio dirò tu sei*, there is no signature of dynamics and weight, no slur breaks to divide the phrases, and no sign of the instrument parts to guide the performance. This may be a test for the performers and conductors. In the Tutti Bassi part, there is only one line of notation, with no expansion to indicate which instruments are used. In the rest of the general score and the performance video, it can be seen that the Bassi part includes Cembalo, Cello Contrabass, and so on, among others. In the Bassi only a single part is written, with a figured bass as a simple cue, there is no specific harmonic texture to guide the keyboard player on how to participate in the performance. The Brass and Woodwind groups are also lacking in this work, and the orchestra is arranged more like chamber music than orchestral music.

It is perhaps a regret for modern analysts of music theory that if the scores of Händel had been more comprehensive and concrete, we might have been able to learn more about his work and his artistic merits. But now there is no possibility to make such a proposal to Händel. The issues identified during the analysis of the work will of course be discussed further in the next two sections.

## 4 The Value of Dissemination

Under certain circumstances, viewed from a different perspective, the disadvantages may be converted into advantages. Although the music of the Baroque period was relatively simple in terms of composition and performance techniques, it also facilitated the dissemination of musical works. The composer's "tolerance" provides room for later rehearsal, performances, and even dispersion of the work. For instance, if double row Cembalo is not available at the rehearsal site, we can use normal one or other type of keyboard instruments instead. After all, the composer only needs the broad Bassi function and does not strictly demand which playing technique on which instrument is necessary. The score does not indicate how many of each instrument in the orchestra should be arranged. This means that in rehearsals and actual performances, the score can be played relatively according to the "economic" conditions of the moment. There are no absolute requirements for the type or number of instruments. It has to be admitted that Händel in the 18th has no clearer and more explicit requirements for the overall acoustics of the orchestra. While the question of how modern performers can play Baroque works in a more relevant way is another matter, and this paper will not dwell on it here.

Since the Baroque period, the figured bass was an integral part of the score, requiring a Cembalo or some other chord-playing instrument to fill in the harmonies above the figured bass. Sopranos and basses were heavily emphasized, while the middle parts were often played by the figured bass alone. The orchestra at this time was always quite small, some composers used only a dozen or so players in their religious works, whereas Händel usually used around 30. When numbers and instrumentation are limited, the composer's lenient, flexible demands on the work facilitate orchestras and conductors in different regions, and of course, provide more opportunities for the dissemination of the work itself.

If Händel uses a fully detailed "musique concrète instrumentale" of technique to compose, as Helmut Lachenmann does, it will make it difficult to spread his work to more areas and he won't necessarily get a lot of concerts. Although the two composers lived many years apart from each other.

"This is the only reason for me to make music—to hear, in a new way, what you knew before, to remember the human mind and what we could call 'spirit', or 'creative intensity'" [6].

Helmut Lachenmann is one of the most active composers of the orchestral avant-garde in Germany today. He does produce several sounds that differ from traditional classical orchestral music, using a large number of instruments or tools outside the orchestra to participate in the performance, and sometimes using compatible electro-acoustic instruments. Yet no matter how much Lachenmann created and invented his ideal sound, he never departed from the orchestra, the grand instrument he knew so well. As mentioned above, the works of Lachenmann are often too detailed in their technique of performance, especially for large orchestras, and are not intended for amateurs, so Lachenmann's works are limited in their ability to be disseminated. The next section focuses on the analysis and discussion of the compositional features and limitations in Händel's work, which is then compared with Lachenmann's work.

## 5 Technical Analysis of the Composition

As Lachenmann says in his music, the sound produced the most is as important as the process of production. To record more precisely the sound design he created, his scores are not without a great deal of symbol, graph, and text description. In his orchestral writing, Lachenmann requires a particular instrument to play in detail to his instructions to create a particular acoustic effect, thus highlighting the contrast between the individual instrumental sounds of the individual types of the instrument [7, 8]. Certainly, he can also use different groups of instruments with their characteristics to create a particular texture of sound. In the sound event constructed in Fig. 3, Lachenmann uses both woodwind, brass, and string groups to echo the dotted monophonic grouping.

One flute double-spits (t-k) to play airflow sounds without a specific pitch, with the breath bursting from the tip or root of the tongue soundlessly and directly into the pipe, as long as the breath is kept continuous during the required time value (Tonlos direkt ins Rohr/etc. solange der Atem reicht). The four horns likewise double-spit as quickly as possible to play air vibes without a specific pitch. Occasionally, at bar 73, the percussive airs of the three trumpets are broken into short bursts; the double-spitted, pitchless, rapid airs of the three trombones are played simultaneously, and here, although the pitch positions of the three trombones are recorded in three lines, Lachmann also uses the text as an aside to remind him that the pitch is determined only to control any intonation that may accidentally arise, that is “Die Bestimmung der Tonhöhen dient nur der Kontrolle evtl. Doch versehentlich entstehender Töne” [9, 10]. The double exhalation sound of the winds is a dotted sound, but the frequency of the double exhalation cannot be fully unified by the multiple voices playing at the same time, creating a flat background of a web of bursting air sounds when played in uneven multivocal dotted sound.

The piano restrains the strings with the left hand and uses the thumb for slow scraping. (mit der linken die Saiten völlig die dämpfen/gliss.langsam mit Daumen-nagel); the electric guitar punctuates the overtone pizzicato strings at the end of this pattern played by the piano, amplifying the resonance effect. The marimba uses a tool to scrape quickly over the resonance tube, followed by a soft hammer in the very high register. (mit fingern gliss. Presto über Röhren/weicher Schlg. Auf Mar. Platte.); the vibraphone is embellished with a metal hammer (mit Stiel), which, like the electric guitar, is only slightly modified at the beginning of the first note of the group with the marimba. The four instruments - electric guitar, piano, marimba, and vibraphone - also do not use the typical instrumental colors at this point.

This section of the double cello can be played on a single instrument and is much more convenient; unsurprisingly, Lachenmann has chosen to use six double cellos to play the rapidly plucked overtone strings in turn, and as each instrument has only one single note plucked at different points in time, the effect sounds more like a monophonic sound; of course, with the six double cellists sitting in six positions, it is perhaps easier to hear the “three-dimensional” sound of a live performance. However, the short and irregular intervals between these six short pizzicato notes make it difficult for the players to play them in practice; at the same time, the strength of these six notes is weak (p), and the different penetrating sounds of the other instruments are played at the same time as the strong ones. The fact that the six notes are weakly played (p), and that they can be heard at the same time as the different penetrating sounds of the other instruments in the strong

The image shows a page of a musical score for full orchestra, numbered 17. The score is arranged in systems for various instruments. Several sections are highlighted with red boxes, containing specific performance instructions:

- 4 Fl.** (Flute): *tonlos, direkt ins Rohr* (mute, direct into the instrument) and *etc. solange der Atem reicht* (etc. as long as the breath lasts).
- 6 Hr.** (Horn): *prestissimo pass.* and *fff tonlos* (fortissimo, mute).
- 3 Tr.** (Trumpet): *fff* (fortissimo).
- 3 Pos.** (Posaune/Trumpet): *tonlos v)* (mute), *f k r k etc.* (dynamic and articulation markings), and *die Bestimmung der Tonhöhen dient nur der Kontrolle evtl. doch versehentlich entstehender Töne* (the determination of the pitches serves only for the control of possibly, but accidentally, occurring tones).
- Git.** (Gitarre/Guitar): *erstickt* (dies/strangles).
- Hfe.** (Hörnchen/Horn): *erstickt wie zuvor* (dies like before).
- Pfte.** (Pflöckchen/Plectrum): *erstickt wie zuvor* (dies like before).
- (Mar.) I** (Marsch/March): *mit Fingern* (with fingers), *mit Stiel* (with stem), *plizz. presto über Böhren* (pizzicato, presto over the reeds), and *weicher Schlagl. auf Horn-Bläsern* (softer attack on the horn players).
- Schlag.** (Schlagzeug/Drum): *Tomben (möglichst 2) Stoppschlag* (Toms (if possible 2) stop attack).
- Viola** (Viola): *plizz.* (pizzicato).
- Kb.** (Kontrabaß/Double Bass): *plizz.* (pizzicato) and *plizz. (secco)* (pizzicato, secco).

Fig. 3. Aria from Giulio Cesare, “Empio dirò tu sei”, HWV 17 (1724), from the opera “Giulio Cesare”, no. 3, and “Kontrakadenz” (1970–1971) for full Orchestra from Helmut Lachenmann

group, is a potential problem and poses a challenge to the orchestra conductor and the live audience. It is worth noting that in the final bars of this page, Lachenmann arranges for the orchestra to come to a full stop at the same time for some ten seconds, leaving

the aftershocks of the instruments to decay in the air during this period of relatively complete stillness, perhaps a form of instrumental ‘concrete’ performance required.

## 6 The Limitations of Composing

From the point of view of performance practice, although Lachenmann is in a position to work with professional orchestral players and conductors in the composing process, to discuss the implementation of the idea to a reasonable performance method, and to negotiate a notation that allows for detailed and concrete reproduction of the performance. However, an orchestra piece for the ‘instrumental concrete music’ technique is not at all the same level of difficulty as a solo instrumental piece for the “instrumental concrete music” technique. The work in ‘Kontrakadenz’ is full of fast and irregular patterns for each instrument or group of instruments, large areas of phrasing without specific pitch or key, complex rhythmic counterpoint, constant changes of tempo, beat and even accompanying changes of unit tempo. Under these conditions, it is highly unlikely that any one part of a large orchestra will have an accident during a performance. Perhaps, of course, Lachenmann is aware of the possibility of these situations and does not require perfect consistency from one performance to the next. At the same time, as an experienced fan of Lachenmann’s music, before going to a concert to hear his works, you should study the score carefully and do your homework with a dictionary of terminology in several languages, so that you can quickly read the score and follow the development of the music when listening to it live, and consider the abstract and figurative relationship between notation and performance, back and forth between the score and the performer. Lachenmann’s ‘instrumental concrete music’ does indeed require the listener’s visual and aural abilities to be ‘concrete’. Such music is not an easy experience for listeners who are not familiar with Lachenmann’s orchestration techniques to appreciate the aesthetic values inherent in his works.

### Comparison

Although it is far-fetched to compare the works of Händel and Lachen, a temporal dialogue between works of completely different genres can set off their respective stylistic identities in terms of compositional technique and musical aesthetics. While Lachenmann, in the process of notation as exhaustively as possible, may seem to be asking for work that is as close to his creative vision as possible, there are more possibilities for the performance to get out of hand in the various demands made by himself. In contrast to Händel perhaps we can say that Lachenmann went from one extreme to the other. They are two composers who live in completely different dimensions. Händel’s writing uses tonal music and relatively simple orchestration to portray the character traits of the play, while Lachenmann uses different orchestral writing techniques to create only the sound he envisages. Händel was in a period when orchestral writing was in its infancy, while Lachenmann used orchestras—the same tool—to pioneer an atypical instrumental sound. If the tools determine the style, then furthermore using the same tools in different ways is bound to produce different artistic effects.

## 7 Conclusion

Perhaps each composer has a spiritual statement of their own, preserved through their scores. What we need to do is to deconstruct the work to uncover its limitations and merits. Ideally, these findings should be replicated in a study where people want to use a longitudinal and historical perspective to analyze and compare. In the past, it was customary to analyze works in the context of the technical and artistic genre of the composer at the time. In this article, the criteria of values of different historical periods and arts are used to interrelate, which means the advantages and disadvantages of a work of opera can be switched with the change of viewpoint. Interesting research questions for future research that can be derived from Re-valuation. Art criticism and commentary do need to be updated to find more creative information. It is another task of later music theorists to give new life to musical works that have long been dormant in history.

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