PERFORMING HANDEL'S OPUS 4 ORGAN CONCERTOS

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Op./No.	***Key***	***HWV***	***approx. timing***	***Bärenreiter score and parts***	***minimal orchestral forces needed***	***remarks***
Op. 4 No. 1	g/G	289	16'	BA 8341	strings, 1 or 2 oboes	
Op. 4 No. 2	B-flat	290	10'	BA 8342	strings, 1 oboe	
Op. 4 No. 3	g	291	10'	BA 8343	strings (including solo violin and cello), 1 oboe	really a concerto grosso because of the solo strings
Op. 4 No. 4	F	292	14'	BA 8344	strings, 2 oboes	
choral ending to Op. 4 No. 4			+3'	BA 8348	additional SATB chorus and two horns	"Allelujah" ending great for a concert or festival service (Easter!)
Op. 4 No. 5	F	293	8'	BA 8345	strings, 1 or 2 oboes	
Op. 4 No. 6 (harp solo)	B-flat	294	11'	BA 8347	strings (viola not needed), organ continuo in lieu of recorders	tell your harpist friends about this first Urtext edition
Op. 4 No. 6 (organ solo)	B-flat	294	11'	BA 8346	strings (viola not needed; oboes not advisable because of the style of the concerto)	lighter style due to its original use in "Alexander's Feast"—great for weddings!

1. Which to learn: start with the solo version of a concerto (in mainly two parts, hands only!) as in the edition of the Walsh version of the concertos: George Frideric Handel, Six Concertos for Harpsichord or Organ (Walsh's Transcriptions, 1738), Recent Researches in the Music of the Baroque Era, Volume 39. [Madison, Wisconsin, A-R Editions, 1981] (available currently only as unbound POD). No. 5 is the shortest, easiest to put together (obvious orchestral ritornellos) and always effective. Next do one of the "big three": No 1. was originally a representation of St. Cecelia's powers at the organ; Nos. 2 and 4 are from Handel's first season of successes with the organ concerto (1735). All three of these need minimal improvisation (just a little ornamentation here and there), unlike many of the "Opus 7" concertos which require entire movements and many final solos to be improvised. So unless you improvise as well as Handel, ….. start with Opus 4.

2. Bassi: a cello is minimal, an additional cello or bassoon can be added; a double bass is most advisable since the 16' sound of this instrument contrasts nicely with the organ solo which is based on 8' (manuals only!). The Bärenreiter parts also include a realization for harpsichord continuo, which is useful if you have a harpsichord near your organ (and the harpsichord player could serve as conductor). If there is no harpsichord continuo the organ solo might occasionally do a little filling in on a subsidiary manual. In calculating bass instruments for your acoustic, remember that the organ left hand is also doubling the bass line, and that the more oboe sound you have on top the more you might want the bassoon in your bass group. Get your bass players

to play rather detached (compared to usual American orchestral standard), and they will need to add few additional slurs to their parts.

3. Upper instruments: 2 violins minimally, plus viola (viola can be omitted in No. 6 where it doubles the bass line throughout). A third violinist, playing Violin I, is the next person to add, due again to the large number of times Violin I and II are in unison (and three players can tune together better than just two). Handel sometimes writes a Violin III which doubles viola and can be omitted. The chart above suggests how many oboes, based on whether the two oboe parts Handel always uses are mainly in unison or are more independent. If the two oboes are having trouble playing in tune, let them trade around; or omit the oboes to get an echo effect (as in the last 4 bars of No. 2). Nos. 2, 5, and 6 work fine without oboes.

4. *Tutti* passages: My best educated guess is that Handel played along with the outer parts (left and right hands) during these as a method of assuring ensemble. There are other possibilities: play the left hand, conduct with the right; play the left hand and be a chordal continuo player with the right; or conduct with both hands and omit the organ entirely during these passages (especially the first and last ritornellos). This last possibility is more likely if you have a large ensemble (including harpsichord continuo) that sounds sufficient on its own.

5. *Adagio* cadences: These come at the end of the slow movements, and the implication is an *attacca* into the next movement. These need to be rehearsed separately, so as to coordinate any ornaments in the solo organ and/or the violin I/oboe I in the orchestra. In working with professional players, these are the passages I do most often; the soloist needs to lead here and the conductor needs to get out of the way, or just assure that the orchestra makes it cadence in sync with the soloist.

6. Additions to the *Urtext:* Edit your parts before giving them to the players! Remember that these are *Urtext* parts with even the most common cadential trills missing. Have pencils at the rehearsal: a good plan with professional players from your local orchestra is to demonstrate the style of the main motives of each movement, agree on articulation (a good oboe player can often demonstrate better for a violinist than the other way round), and rehearse any sections which need special attention (staggered entrances, etc.) before running the whole movement.

7. Organ registration: Handel used a slight variant on the standard British registration. "Soft organ" = "Diapasons" was Open and Stopped Diapasons 8' (plus optionally Flute 4' as in the second movement of Op. 4 No. 4); "Loud organ" add to the Diapasons the following stops in order: Principal 4', Fifteenth 2', Twelfth 2 2/3', Tierce 1 3/5'. The more mutations you have the more likely you are to be able to dispense with the oboes. Be careful that tuning problems do not result in the conflict between your organ mutations and the oboes if you have both; in that case, good old 8', 4', 2' is often the best solution.

8. Bärenreiter parts: are available from the usual suspects, including SheetMusicPlus.com and the Organ Historical Society. Be sure to use both the number within Opus 4 as well as the HWV number to be sure you get the right music (2 concertos each are in G minor, F, and B-flat!). There is a separate organ solo part which requires few page-turns. If you have access to the *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe* [HHA] (Series IV, Vol. 2: Orgelkonzerte I, ed. Terence Best and William D. Gudger; available as BA 4069) you might not need a full score. (Be sure you look at the revised volume for Opus 4, not the old Matthaei edition, one of the first volumes of the HHA to appear, and not a critical Urtext.) The separate scores for each concerto have a useful introduction (in both English and German) with information about the edition and how to use it.

9. Problems? Questions? Contact me! gudgerw@yahoo.com