John Walsh, Händel's publisher

When Ottaviano Petrucci asked the Doge of Venice in 1498 for the right to be the exclusive music printer for the next twenty years, the history of music publishing was only just beginning. Petrucci's printing technique was still primitive and quite complex, although it still provided excellent results in terms of clarity and elegance. Three different impressions were needed to complete a page: with the first impression the lines were printed, with the second the musical notes and finally the third impression added the lyrics to be sung.
The process was gradually perfected, achieving great progress in the 18th century. Improvements in techniques, resulting in time and cost savings, contributed to the expansion of an industry that spread rapidly from Italy to northern Europe and the United Kingdom.

The Walshs were one of the most important families of music publishers in England. Most likely of Irish origin, John Walsh the elder appears to be in London as early as 1690, at the age of twenty-five. Here he started his publishing business in 1695, the year of composer Purcell's death. Walsh had already been in business in the capital for a few years with a lucrative venture making and selling musical instruments. Getting into music publishing turned out to be a very happy decision: John Playford, who had dominated the market between 1651 and 1684 had already been dead for eight years and Walsh had few competitors at the time. He thus succeeded in quickly taking the circulation of printed music in England to an unprecedented level. In order to increase the buyer base, he decided to print, alongside editions of English composers, the most famous works of continental composers, including Corelli's sonatas, which were enjoying great success everywhere. In the early 18th century, he replaced the expensive copper plates with the much cheaper pewter plates, an innovation that allowed him to further expand his business. Business was booming and when Händel went to England in 1710 to stage *Rinaldo*, he unhesitatingly turned to Walsh for the musical printing. From 1716 he entered into an important partnership with the famous Amsterdam publisher Estienne Roger and became the exclusive distributor of his editions in England. Ever proactive and resourceful, Walsh also edited two music magazines: *The Monthly Mask of Vocal Music* and *Harmonia anglicana*. In the course of his eventful life he even experienced prison, in 1726, for opposing the payment of a tax he considered unjust.

Walsh ultimately proved to be an excellent businessman, who could seize the right moment to innovate sales methods and adopt new strategies, such as subscriptions that enabled and secured him the publication of major works. Not all sales techniques used at the time seem so fair to us today: sometimes misleading advertisement, low prices to thwart competition, and obtaining scores from theatre copyists or directly from competing publishers were common expedients at the time. However, we must not forget that in those days there were no laws to adequately protect copyright, let alone the authorship of music editions, therefore all this seemed normal and legitimate.

Walsh's most popular publication was *Favourite Songs*. This was an anthology of arias and instrumental pieces (mainly symphonies) from London theatre productions. Each time a new opera was staged and proved to be a success, Walsh published a collection of the arias that had impressed audiences the most, also providing details of the singers who had performed them. So it was that the greatest hits by Farinelli, Senesino, Cuzzoni or Bertolli came to the general public thanks to accurate prints, mostly drawn directly from the scores circulating in theatres.

Walsh's business flourished and knew no breaks or recession. Very few competitors could challenge his business. John Cluer published some beautiful Händel scores around the 1720s, hand-engraved and in small format. So did Richard Meares and Benjamic Cooke. James Oswald, William Thomson and John Neale published mainly Scottish music in London and Dublin, but none of them ever really managed to compete with Walsh's editions.

Around 1730, his son, also named John, took full control of the publishing firm. Under his management, despite growing competition from other printers, Walsh publishing maintained a position of absolute leadership, thanks in part to the excellent quality of the printing and of the paper they used. Approximately half of the catalogue available for sale was Händel's music and John Walsh the younger further consolidated the relationship between the publishing house and the composer. Walsh's editions became de facto Händel's official editions, also due to the monopoly that granted exclusivity for 14 years from 1739, ensuring lasting economic success.

Händel's six Concerti Grossi Op. 3 came into being through Walsh's resourcefulness. Piecing together compositions written at different times and for different purposes, the publisher assembled and printed, in 1734, a group of concertos for which he almost certainly had neither the composer's approval nor permission. The result was a series of concertos with an uneven structure (between two and five movements each), and although the label read “Concerto Grosso”, in fact the music hardly ever followed the typical structure of alternating Concertino and Ripieno. Nonetheless, the title *Concerto Grosso* ensured the publisher a definite audience response, in the wake of the exceptional success of Corelli's concerti grossi that had revolutionised the musical scene. From 1713 onwards, reprints had indeed multiplied, leading to a widespread circulation of Corelli's Opera 6 and influencing many composers who could not help but measure themselves, more or less consciously, against the concerti grossi he composed.

In support of the argument that Händel was completely uninvolved in Walsh's operation are the numerous errors in the scores and the fact that most of the music dates back to the days of Händel's arrival in London, some twenty years before the release date. The Opera Terza turned out to be one of the most interesting commercial operations of the time, demonstrating how sometimes publishers, if endowed with entrepreneurial flair and business acumen, were able to exploit the most famous composers to their advantage. Walsh's example was certainly one of the most brilliant.

Concerto No. 1 is probably the earliest in the collection. In addition to the strings, the score features two oboes, two recorders and two bassoons. The violas are divided into two parts, a common feature of many compositions from the first decade of the 18th century. The first movement alone is in the key of B flat major, while the other two movements are in the relative G minor. This might suggest that the concerto was actually part of a larger composition. Händel's autograph manuscript is lost, but the similarity in the double-viola writing to concertos by Francesco Venturini (a violinist and composer active in Hanover in the early 18th century) suggests that the concerto may have been composed by Händel during his years in that city.

Concerto No. 2, in the key of B-flat major, may originally have been an overture for the theatre. The first and third movements bear traces of musical material related to the *Brockes Passion*, an oratorio that was probably composed around 1716. Two dance movements complete the concerto: a minuet and a gavotte. The winds that flank the strings in the score are two oboes and a bassoon.

Concerto No. 3, in G major, is derived from the hymn *My song shall be away*, from the “Chandos” Te Deum and from a harpsichord fugue. The time of composition dates back to 1717-18. Walsh indicates in the score that the obbligato oboe can be replaced by a flute, if preferred. Bassoon and strings complete the ensemble.

For Concerto No. 4, Walsh drew on the overture from the opera *Amadigi di Gaula*. The piece was in fact the opera's second overture in the performance of June 20, 1716, possibly performed before the second act. In some manuscript sources, the concerto also appears as the overture to the *Queen Anne Birthday Ode*. The concerto, in F major, features two oboes, bassoon and strings.

Concerto No. 5 (in D minor, featuring two oboes and strings) is the one among the six that most closely follows the model of the Concerto Grosso, although it lacks the traditional clear-cut division between the Concertino and the Tutti orchestral pieces. The musical material is taken from the Chandos anthems *In the Lords put I my trust* and *As pants the hart*.

Walsh included only the first two movements in the first printed edition, but since the concerto was known in its entirety as early as 1727, he decided to publish it in its complete form in the later reprint.

The final concerto in the collection was compiled by Walsh with only two movements, a Vivace in D major and an Allegro in D minor. The latter features the organ in the score. The Vivace is taken from the opera *Ottone* (1723) while the Allegro is a re-orchestration of the overture from *Il pastor fido* (composed in 1712 and performed again in 1734). Of all the movements, this last one is closest in time to when the Opera 3 was printed. The organ's appearance in the last movement is a sort of anticipation of what Walsh was to publish a few years later: Händel's 6 Concertos for Organ, Op. 4, printed in London in 1738.

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