

CHAPTER 2: JOHN BEARD AND THE LONDON THEATRE

1. HANDEL 1734-7

Beard's 'broken' voice must have matured remarkably quickly. The letter from Lady Elizabeth Compton which describes Beard as having 'left the Chappel at Easter'¹ may well have been partially correct, even though his discharge papers from the choir, issued by the Lord Chamberlain's Office, are dated 29th October 1734. Beard may have stayed on in the choir after leaving the trebles (and Bernard Gates' choir-school), and sung as a tenor for the next six months "on account of his general usefulness to the choir"². At this early stage the possibility of obtaining a permanent position in the back row of the choir may have seemed his most likely career-prospect. He was 19 years of age, and no English tenor had yet made a successful career as a concert or opera soloist without recourse to a back-up choral post. Any indication that this might be the direction in which his career would develop would have been unthinkable at this stage.

And yet, on November 9th, a mere ten days after being honourably dismissed from Royal service, he appeared at Covent Garden Theatre as *Silvio* in Handel's "*Il Pastor Fido*". It was the beginning of a relationship that would last throughout the remaining twenty-five years of Handel's life. Henceforward Beard would always be his tenor of choice. He was, in fact, the only singer who took part in performances of every single one of Handel's English oratorios. Beard was singing for Handel, as tenor soloist in '*Messiah*' on the 6th April 1759 - the last occasion that Handel would ever hear any of his music performed.

The tenor soloists that Handel used prior to Beard's appearance fall into three categories:

- English tenors employed by the Chapel Royal choir
- Italian opera singers, who sang subsidiary role in his operas
- English singing-actors, employed at the London theatres in plays and ballad operas

The principal tenor soloist at the Chapel Royal choir between 1716 and 1731 was Thomas Gethin. He had been a boy in the Chapel Royal, and is named as a treble soloist in an anthem by Croft. In a career that could so easily have been mirrored by John Beard he moved straight from Chorister (leaving in March 1716) to Gentleman in Ordinary (on 9th November the same year). During the 1720s he was Handel's tenor soloist whenever his anthems and Te Deums required one. Handel did not give him elaborate solos, but mainly employed him in solo 'verses' or trios with the alto and bass soloists. The minutes of a Chapter Meeting of 3rd May 1731 record that "Mr Thomas Gethin One of the Gentlemen of his Majesties Chapel Royal, having been frequently Admonished by the Dean of the Chapel, for his frequent Absence and Irregularities ...was (as incorrigible) turn'd out of his Place..." He decided to try his luck in the Barbadoes, "having received some encouragement from the Musical Gentlemen of that Island to come and settle amongst them". His unexpected departure left the field open for Beard.³

¹ Deutsch *Handel a Documentary Biography* p. 375

² Burrows *Handel and the English Chapel Royal* p. 336

³ see: Burrows, 'Thomas Gethin: a Handel tenor', *Musical Times* 116, 1975, pp.1003-6

The singers who had been employed in the opera roles that Beard took over in the years 1734-7 were: Signor Carlo Scalzi, a ‘second soprano’ according to Winton Dean⁴ in *Il Pastor Fido* and *Arianna in Creta*; and Signor Fabri, a tenor, in *Poro* and *Partenope*. The English singers that Handel had used from the London theatres – principally in oratorios and masques – were: Philip Rochetti, who went with Handel to Oxford in 1733 and sang Dorindo (*Acis & Galatea*), Mathan (*Athaliah*) and roles in *Esther* and *Deborah*; Thomas Salway, who also accompanied Handel to Oxford and sang Damon in *Acis & Galatea*, thereafter taking up a place as principal singer in John Rich’s theatrical company at his newly built Covent Garden theatre. Meanwhile Charles Stoppelaer, a Drury Lane singer, was taken up by Handel at the same time as Beard, and given small roles in *Ariodante* and *Alcina* – both in 1735, and the even smaller part of ‘An Amalekite’ in *Saul* (1739).

The first visible sign that Handel had extended an invitation to the nineteen year-old Beard to join his company could be a significant change in the way that Handel composed for one of the characters in the new opera *Ariodante*. “In the autograph score, ... begun in August 1734 and completed on 24 October, Handel wrote the music for the role of Lurcanio in the soprano clef for Acts I & II (which he completed on 9 September), but went over to the tenor clef in Act III”.⁵ Perhaps Handel originally had other plans for the performer of this role. When he thought of inviting Beard to sing it (the premiere was on January 8th 1735) he realised that the young singer could also be useful in the two revivals that preceded it: *Il Pastor Fido* and *Arianna in Creta*. Thus his debut with Handel’s company was brought forward to November 9th. An effective publicity machine was brought into play, because news of Beard’s debut even reached the newspapers in places as far-flung as Ipswich: “We hear ...that Mr Handell has got an extreme fine English voice, who will speedily sing at the Theatre in Covent Garden, and who never sang on any stage”.⁶

It was good that he could begin in secondary roles, and acquire the necessary stagecraft by watching and learning from the rest of the cast. Although his early performances must have been wooden in delivery, it probably helped that there was still a great reliance on stock theatrical gesture at this time. The movement towards a ‘natural’ style of acting would only gain momentum in ten years time, with the arrival of David Garrick on the theatrical scene. It is possible of course, that Handel had made the offer to Beard earlier in the year – presumably some time after Easter – and had given him several months to acquire some stage technique. Who Beard would have gone to for acting lessons is not easy to determine; but there must have been such people available in the theatre world, just as there were dancing-masters around to help teach another essential skill.⁷ Bernard Gates, who had produced the staging of *Esther* in 1732, may have given him his initial guidance. As he was on such good terms with Handel a plan could have been concocted between them both.

Elizabeth Compton’s letter is interesting for another reason. It was written on November 21st, by which time Beard would only have appeared a maximum of 4 times in *Il Pastor Fido*.⁸ She had presumably not been to see it yet, although she had spoken to Handel. So, after such few performances she was able to report on Beard’s surprisingly confident debut: “A scholar of

⁴ W. Dean, ‘Handel’s Dramatic Oratorios and Masques’, London, 1959, p.659

⁵ Burrows *Handel and the English Chapel Royal* p. 337

⁶ Ipswich Gazette, 9th November 1734, *Deutsch Handel a Documentary Biography* p. 374

⁷ Richard Charke was a singer, actor, composer, and – according to Burney – a dancing-master before he left England in 1735. He had all the right credentials to help Beard, including a great need to earn money. See: Fiske, ‘English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century’, Oxford, 1973, p.124-5

⁸ It was performed on November 9, 13, 16, 20 & 23.

Mr Gates ...shines in the Opera of Covent Garden & Mr Hendell is so full of his Praises that he says he will surprise the Town with his performances before the Winter is over”.⁹

Handel had needed to rewrite the role of ‘Silvio’ for Beard’s tenor voice, since it had been sung by castrati in the two previous runs: by Signor Valentini at the first performances in November 1712, and by Signor Scalzi in the performances that had taken place earlier in the year, between 18th May and 15th July. A comparison of the versions of Silvio’s arias composed in 1712 and 1734 shows that Handel made no concessions to his new singer’s youth and inexperience. He treated the rewrite as a simple logistical exercise of turning the music for one type of voice into something equally satisfying for the other.

Silvio’s Act 1 aria “Quel Gelsomino” was replaced with “Non vo’ mai seguitar”, newly composed for this revival.¹⁰ A lively *Allegro* in C major, it has many semiquaver runs, and takes the voice up to top A. The vocal line has wide leaps, and is very similar in mood to the wedding aria from *Athaliah* with which Beard had caught Handel’s attention back in March.

Allegro

non vo' mai se-gui-tar quel cie-co Nu-me-a-la
to, che sol del cac-cia-tor, del cac-cia-tor fe-li-ce il sta-to, fe-
li-ce il sta-to, che sol del cac-cia-tor fe-li-ce il sta-to.

In Act 2 Handel retained the castrato aria “Sol nel mezzo risona del core” in its original key of B flat; but - despite the necessary downward adaptation for a tenor - gave it a bravura vocal line, taking the voice up to top B flat within 4 bars, and repeating this phrase in the manner of a hunting-call. Handel very rarely wrote a top B flat for Beard’s voice, and never took him higher than top A in the oratorios which were written for his voice between 1736 and 1752.

Allegro

Sol nel mez-zo ri-so-na del co-re, non gia con a-mo-re, ma ne' cam-pi le bel-ve a pug-nar,
ma ne' cam-pi le bel-ve a pug-nar, le bel-ve a pug-nar, ma nei cam-pi le bel-ve a pug-nar;

The style of this aria is significant, because Beard made a feature of singing extrovert hunting songs during his theatrical career. He first came to popular fame and prominence with his performance of Galliard’s hunting song “The early horn”. As we shall see, it became one of his calling cards, and was frequently requested between the acts. Here, in his first appearance on stage, Handel had sensed this possibility in his voice. He was to use the facility with which Beard could go up to trumpet-like top notes many more times: in “Thou shalt dash them” (*Messiah*) and “Sound an alarm” (*Judas Maccabaeus*) to name but two of many instances.

The Act 3 aria, “Sento nel sen”, was a lilting 3/8 ballad, very lightly scored, with a highly decorated passage in unison with the violins. Thus Handel provided Beard with a decent length of role for his first stage-work, which included plenty of Italian recitative, and three very varied arias. Moreover, there was a possibility for his youthful voice to shine in each.

⁹ Deutsch *Handel a Documentary Biography* p. 375; and Norfolk Record Office BL/T/5/2/3

¹⁰ Dean and Knapp, ‘Handel’s Operas’, Oxford, 1987, p. 220

Larghetto

Sen-to nel sen di-strug-ger-si fra no-vi af-fan-ni'l cor; l'a-mor,e la_pie - ta, m'ac-cen - de_ l'al - ma. Sen-to nel sen di - strug-ger-si

fra no - vi af - fan-ni'l cor; l'a-mo-re,e la_pie - ta, m'ac-cen-de l'al-ma, m'ac-cen-de l'al

Adagio

ma, l'a-mor, e la pie - ta, m'ac-cen - de_ l'al - ma.

Handel now had no need of the likes of Signor Pinacci - his most recent Italian tenor, who had sung with him between 1731 and 1732. Beard had proved himself equal to the task. Handel was sufficiently satisfied to keep him on in his company. In the three years 1734 – 7 Beard's roles with Handel's opera company not only included secondary roles in revivals of existing operas: Silvio (*Il Pastor Fido*), Alceste (*Arianna*), Alessandro (*Poro*), and Emilio (*Partenope*); but also new operas in which the roles were specifically tailored to his voice: Lurcanio (*Ariodante*) and Oronte (*Alcina*) in 1735; Amintas (*Atalanta*) in 1736; Varo (*Arminio*), Vitaliano (*Giustino*), and Fabio (*Berenice*) all in 1737.

Thus the start of Beard's career coincided with the last period of Handel's career as an opera composer, when success was beginning to desert him. However, the singer was extremely fortunate to have emerged on the scene at the precise moment when Handel began to adapt his style to the composition of oratorios. During these years (1734-7) Handel's programmes swung wildly between opera and oratorio. When Handel engaged Italian soloists and decided to write opera Beard was always given a good subsidiary role. When the Italians left, or went across to the rival opera company, Handel was forced to use the group of English singers that he had started to build up. The roles in the English oratorios that Handel either revived or composed anew had increasingly important roles for the tenor soloist. At this period of his life Beard was in a win/win situation, whatever Handel decided to do.

Handel was falling back on previously-composed oratorios to make up for a shortfall in his operatic seasons. This was good for Beard, who appeared in *Esther* (now as a tenor) in March 1735, April 1736 and April 1737. He took part in the revival of *Deborah* in March 1735. Although detailed programmes for these do not exist, Winton Dean has suggested that his roles were likely to have been 'Habdonah' and 'Sisera' respectively. In *Athaliah* (April 1735) he sang the part of 'Mathan'. In both of these last two works, as we have already seen, Handel inserted the aria "Strength and Honour" that Beard had first sung at the 1734 Royal Wedding. Oratorio was such a new concept at this time that the public took a little time to get accustomed to the idea of hearing sacred works – without action – in London's theatres. In February 1732 Viscount Percival referred to *Esther* as an "oratoria or religious opera"; but by 2nd May he was writing the word in his diary as "oratory", and on May 6th he finally alighted on the spelling "oratorio".¹¹

Handel chose the word "Oratorio" to describe his miscellaneous programme of sacred music in March 1738 because there was no better word in existence in English at the time. There was a French expression, *Concert Spirituel*, and this was used more frequently as the century progressed (see Geminiani's Benefit Concert on April 11th 1750 which was called a 'Concert Spiritual' or 'Spirituale') to describe such miscellaneous programmes. Gradually the word 'oratorio' began to settle down in the English language with the meaning it has now. Towards

¹¹ Deutsch, op. cit. p. 288 & p. 290-1

the end of the century it even began to mean a concert of any kind, especially in country districts. There was always a difficulty when the subject matter was not biblical; and pedants tried to restrict the word ‘oratorio’ to those pieces by Handel and his followers that were on a sacred subject. They used the words ‘pastoral’, ‘masque’ and ‘serenata’ for such secular pieces as Boyce’s *Solomon*, Handel’s *Acis and Galatea*, and his quasi-opera *Semele*. But this problem is with us still, and the word ‘oratorio’ is frequently used today to cover the entire spectrum of choral works performed without stage action.¹²

The first oratorio that had a part specifically written for Beard’s voice was *Alexander’s Feast* (actually a Cecilian *Ode*). The premiere was on February 19th 1736, and it gave him his first considerable success. The first night saw a ‘capacity’ 1300 people crowding into Covent Garden theatre – as many as it could hold at the time – and it “met with general applause”.¹³ As Sir John Hawkins said: “Instead of airs that required the delicacy of Cuzzoni, or the volubility of Faustina to execute, he (Handel) hoped to please by songs, the beauties whereof were within the comprehension of less fastidious hearers than in general frequent the opera, namely, such as were adapted to a tenor voice, from the natural firmness and inflexibility whereof little more is expected than an articulate utterance of the words, and a just expression of the melody; and he was happy in the assistance of a singer possessed of these and many other valuable qualities.”¹⁴

One aria that Beard sang was “Happy Pair”, containing the famous Dryden line “None but the brave deserves the fair”, that was later plagiarised by W.S. Gilbert in the libretto of *Iolanthe*.¹⁵ It can be seen in this excerpt that Handel had changed his style of writing for Beard’s voice quite significantly. Instead of the fancy decorative fioritura of “Sento nel sen” there is a robust vocal roulade with less semiquavers and demisemiquavers. The overall ‘feel’ of the music is simpler and more direct. This was a style that he would use repeatedly in the more jovial music which he provided for Beard. Other examples feature prominently in *L’Allegro ed il Penseroso* and in *Semele*. Charles Dibdin described Beard’s voice, when he knew it 25 years later, as “sound, male, powerful and extensive. His tones were natural, and he had flexibility enough to execute any passages however difficult, which task indeed frequently fell to his lot in some of Handel’s oratorios; but, with these qualifications: where the feelings were most roused, he was, of course, the most excellent. If he failed at all it was in *acquired taste*, which I will venture to pronounce was a most fortunate circumstance for him; for I never knew an instance where *acquired taste* did not destroy natural expression; a quality self-evidently as much preferable to the other as nature is to art”.¹⁶

This aria - which demonstrates Dibdin’s comments about his voice being natural and flexible - quickly entered Beard’s miscellaneous repertoire of songs, and was frequently performed by him between the acts at Drury Lane and Covent Garden.¹⁷

¹² Orff’s *Carmina Burana* is a case in point. But what other word would be suitable: *Ode*, or *Cantata*?

¹³ The London Daily Post, 20th February, 1736

¹⁴ Hawkins A General History of the Science and Practice of Music, 1776, Vol. 2 p. 889

¹⁵ in the Act 2 Trio of *Iolanthe* “He who shies at such a prize”

¹⁶ Charles Dibdin, ‘A complete History of The English Stage’, London, 1797, p. 362

¹⁷ Although not originally specified in playbills in the 1730s, by April 1739 the titles of songs and ballads were sometimes given. On April 3rd that year Beard was advertised as singing “Happy Fair” from *Alexander’s Feast* and “Would you taste the noontide air” from Arne’s *Comus*.

Allegro ma non troppo, e staccato

Hap- py, hap- py, hap- py— pair! None but the brave, none but the brave, none but the brave de- serves the fair, none but the brave
 none but the brave, none but the brave de- serves the fair. Hap- py, hap- py, hap- py— pair, hap- py, hap
 py,

The other tenor aria in *Alexander's Feast*, “The princes applaud with a furious joy”, did not lend itself to being taken out of context. But it is another example of the extrovert *Allegro* arias that Handel would write for Beard throughout his career. As in “Non vo’ mai seguitar” from *Il Pastor Fido* it is liberally sprinkled with semiquaver runs and top As.

The Prin- ces ap- plaud with a fu- rious joy, the Prin- ces ap- plaud,
 with a fu- rious joy,

Soon there would be tenor arias like this in *Israel in Egypt*, *Samson*, *Belshazzar*, and *Judas Maccabaeus*. Because of Beard’s ease of delivery of the quick passages, and his trumpet-like top notes, Handel could see that his tenor voice was capable of more than a subsidiary role. As this list of oratorios shows, Handel would soon remove the castrato from his traditional position as the male hero: and it would be the tenor who would replace him.

Charles Burney writes frequently about Beard’s vocal qualities in his ‘*A General History of Music*’¹⁸, with the added bonus that he knew and liked Beard the man, who had done much to help him in the early stages of his own career. Although he never heard the young Beard sing, he knew his voice well from about 1750 onwards.¹⁹ Comparing Beard to his closest rival, the tenor Thomas Lowe, he says: “...with the finest tenor voice I ever heard in my life, for want of diligence and cultivation, he (Lowe) never could be safely trusted with any thing better than a ballad, which he constantly learned by his ear; whereas Mr. Beard, with an inferior voice, constantly possessed the favour of the public by his superior conduct, knowledge of music, and intelligence as an actor.”

This, then, was the voice for which Handel began to write increasingly important roles. Their music, and the variety of arias and recitatives which Beard undertook in them, is discussed in Chapter 13. A search through the Handelian correspondence will show that once he had discovered Beard, he was remarkably faithful to him - even when the singer had been unwell - and engaged him whenever he could:

“I have taken the Opera House in the Haymarket. Engaged as singers ... Beard, Reinhold, ... and I have some hopes that Mrs Cibber will sing for me ... I think I can obtain Mr Riches’s permission (with whom she is engaged to play in Covent Garden House) since so obligingly he gave leave to Mr Beard and Mr Reinhold.”²⁰

¹⁸ Burney *A General History of Music*, 1789

¹⁹ On 13th December 1750 Burney’s burletta *Robin Hood* was mounted at Drury Lane with Beard in the title role.

²⁰ Handel to Jennens, 9th June 1744, quoted in *Deutsch Handel a Documentary Biography* p. 591

“I have a good Set of singers ...Mr Beard (who is recovered) [is] *Belshazzar* ...”²¹

“I asked him what singers he had got: he said he was very well provided, having Champness, Beard, Frasi, Cassandra Frederick and Miss Young; upon which I asked him if he was quite full so as to want no other assistance: he answered somewhat hastily, quite full, and that he wanted no more voices. I had intended to mention young Norris²²; but upon his being so positive, I could not do it.”²³

Another existing role that Beard took on at this stage was ‘Acis’ in *Acis and Galatea*. Although Handel had written the delightful music for this pastoral character in 1718 for an unspecified tenor, the *serenata* remained unknown until Philip Rochetti undertook it for his Benefit in 1731. It was well written for the tenor voice and for Beard’s tessitura. When Handel began writing specifically for him in the oratorios of 1736 onwards, this was the model that he must have kept in mind:

Larghetto

Love in her eyes sits play - ing, and sheds de - li - cious death; love on her lips is stray - ing, and warb - ling in her breath; love on her lips is stray - ing, and warb - ling in her breath.

Beard possibly sang Acis’s arias more often than those of any other Handelian hero, since the *serenata* was popular with musical gatherings of every type. It was often chosen for Benefit concerts at Hickford’s Rooms and Ranelagh Gardens, as well as being popular at the music festivals springing up in the Cathedral cities. Beard was frequently engaged to sing the role throughout London and the provinces. He sang it for Handel for the first time in March 1736, and thereafter excerpts often featured in his miscellaneous programmes.²⁴

Handel’s operatic success seemed to have deserted him by the end of June 1737. The season had involved Beard in every month since November 1736, and ended with the now very popular *Alexander’s Feast*. Handel had given Londoners a mixture of operas and oratorios in one of his longest-ever seasons. But he cannot have grasped that the oratorios, using a cheaper cast of English soloists, were doing better business for him than the operas with the expensive Italians. He must simply have considered the oratorios as stop-gaps – and cheap ones at that, since they required no elaborate costumes, scenery or stage business. They were fitted in amongst the opera performances irregularly. At this point Handel had not realised that they would make suitable material for the Lent Season, when normal theatrical performances were forbidden. That would happen later. Nor did he yet see that his long-term future lay with this repertory.

It was also at this time that Handel’s death began to suffer, leading him to take an extended cure at Aix-la-Chapelle during the Summer of 1737. This must have been a blow to Beard: Handel had clearly made no decision about a 1737-38 season by the time he left England in July. Beard had endured a similar bleak time during the Autumn of 1735 when, once again, Handel’s season had started late. It was obvious that he could not totally rely on Handel to

²¹ Handel to Jennens, 2nd Oct. 1744, quoted in *Deutsch Handel a Documentary Biography* p. 596 The illness from which Beard had recovered was a recurrent problem with his hearing.

²² Thomas Norris, tenor, 1741-90, who would sing in the Handel Musical Commemorations in 1784-90.

²³ Thomas Harris to James Harris, 7th January 1758, reporting on a meeting with Handel, quoted in *Burrows & Dunhill Music and Theatre in Handel’s World*, p. 328

²⁴ for example, in the items he sang for the Annual Concert in aid of Decayed Musicians

provide employment and, with no other singing dates in his diary, he would need to look elsewhere for work. So it was to the theatre impresarios that he took his talent. Without guaranteed work from Handel, Beard knew that he had to find a position as a singer in their farces, pantomimes and after-pieces.

2. AD HOC WORK AT COVENT GARDEN THEATRE: 1736-7

At this time, Handel used whichever theatre was available for his seasons. When the King's Theatre Haymarket, (the best for sound) was not available, he rented either the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre or Covent Garden Theatre from the impresario John Rich. Thus it was that Beard made his operatic debut in the theatre that Rich had built. Rich must have noticed something appealing in Beard's performances of Handel's extrovert arias whilst they were wooing the audiences in his own theatre. Perhaps his ear, too, had caught the strong virile sound of his young tenor voice, which was so rare in those days. Rich's problem was that he was well-provided with a singer for his farces. Thomas Salway was contracted for all the pieces that would have suited Beard. It was one of the unwritten rules of the theatre that a performer hung on to his or her roles, unless they wished to relinquish them, or they moved from one theatre to another.

The only possibility for engaging Beard was to give him a new role if one should come along. And so, at the beginning of 1736, three months after the theatre season had started, he was given a loose invitation to do occasional work in new afterpieces and as an interval singer. This seemed to work well enough. Although Beard's diary became incredibly full, he managed to combine performances for Handel's short oratorio season (February – April 1736) and the even shorter opera season (May – early June) with new afterpieces for Rich.

John Rich – who has a very important role to play in John Beard's story – was himself a pantomime actor. He was the foremost Harlequin of his day, performing under the stage name of 'Lun'. Covent Garden was famous for these spectacles. One suspects that Rich thought they were the most important works on offer in his theatrical repertoire. He spent more money on their costumes, scenery and special effects than on any other of his shows.

insert portrait of Rich as Harlequin 'Lun'

By tradition there was always a new pantomime early in the New Year. In January 1736 it was *The Royal Chace* with music by John Ernest Galliard. A small role, the 'Royal Chasseur', had a hunting song, but did very little else in the action. There was no spoken dialogue. It was an inspired choice of role for Beard. It also brought him into the regular Covent Garden company, where he would meet the actors who normally had a day off when he was there with Handel. In his first show he not only worked with his future father-in-law (Rich) but his future mother-in-law Mrs Stevens (Rich's third wife) and James Bencraft, his future brother-in-law. Somewhere in the wings he would have occasionally seen the girl who would one day become his second wife – Rich's daughter Charlotte.

The pantomime *The Royal Chace* was advertised in the daily press as "...a new dramatic Entertainment. The characters new Drest. With new Scenes, representing the exact views of the Hermitage, and Merlin's Cave, as taken in the Royal Gardens of Richmond".²⁵ Charles Burney was aware of Beard's unexpected success in it when he wrote in his history of music:

²⁵ The London Stage, ed. Arthur Scouten, Part 3, p.546

“...This year Mr Beard who had his musical education in the Chapel Royal, first appeared on the stage at Covent Garden in the dramatic entertainment of the Royal Chace or Merlin’s Cave, and instantly became a favourite of the town, by the performance of Galliard’s most agreeable of all hunting-songs, “With early horn”.²⁶ Hawkins similarly recounts in his History of Music that it was due to this famous song that “...for some hundred nights, Mr Beard first recommended himself to the public”.²⁷

Whether Beard’s performance had anything to do with the pantomime’s success or not, the work had staying power. It was given as the afterpiece on most evenings for the rest of the season. Only on June 3rd did a vocally tired Beard need to ask his understudy (a Mr Roberts) to go on for him. Meanwhile he had also managed to perform twenty times for Handel. He was assisted in this by reason of Handel’s performances being held, once again, in the same theatre. So there was never any danger of Beard being double-booked, as happened later in his career.

The Royal Chace would now become a stock repertory piece at Covent Garden. Beard was still singing the ‘Chasseur Royal’ in it as late as 1748 - before he changed houses for an 11-year contract at Drury Lane. It was still in the Covent Garden repertoire in Beard’s last season as manager there, in 1766-7, by which time he had passed the role on to the next generation of young singers.²⁸ Also this season John Rich found him a role in another pantomime which would stay for a long time in the repertoire. On March 6th, by which time nearly every member of the theatre-going public had seen *The Royal Chace*, Rich decided to resurrect a 1730s pantomime - *Perseus and Andromeda* - that was last seen at Lincoln’ Inn Fields theatre. Beard was given a major role as ‘Perseus’ himself; although the main protagonist was, as always, taken by Rich in his impersonation of Harlequin. Tom Davies, Garrick’s biographer, gives us an idea of what these shows must have been like:

“To retrieve the credit of his theatre, Rich created a species of dramatic composition unknown to this, and, I believe, to any other country, which he called a Pantomime: it consisted of two parts, one serious, the other comic; by the help of gay scenes, fine habits, grand dances, appropriate music, and other decorations, he exhibited a story from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, or some other fabulous history. Between the pauses of the acts he interwove a comic fable, consisting chiefly of the courtship of Harlequin and Columbine, with a variety of surprising adventures and tricks, which were produced by the magic wand of Harlequin; such as the sudden transformation of palaces and temples to huts and cottages; of men and women into wheelbarrows and joint stools; of trees turned to houses; colonnades to beds of tulips; and mechanics’ shops into serpents and ostriches... There was scarce one which failed to please the public, who testified their approbation of them forty or fifty nights successively”.²⁹

The 1736-7 season was one of Beard’s busiest for Handel. He appeared with him in opera from November till June, and gave 34 performances of leading roles in *Alcina*, *Atalanta*, *Porro*, *Arminio*, *Partenope*, *Giustino* and *Berenice*. Handel also mixed in some oratorios amongst this stimulating collection of new works and revivals. Beard sang in performances of *Alexander’s Feast*, *Il Trionfo del Tempo e della Verita* and *Esther* a further 11 times. But he does not seem to have been required for the performances of *Il Parnasso in Festa* on March 9th and 11th, or for the pasticcio *Didone Abbandonata* on April 13th, 20th, 27th and June 1st.

²⁶ Burney, ‘A General History of Music’, London 1935, vol. 2, p.1003

²⁷ Sir John Hawkins, ‘A General History of the Science and Practice of Music’, London 1776

²⁸ On 25th October 1766, and for the subsequent run, the singer was Squibb, who joined the company in 1764.

²⁹ Thomas Davies, ‘Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick, Esq’, vol. 1, London, 1780, p. 92-3

This is probably just as well, as his diary was further complicated by revivals of the Pantomimes *Perseus and Andromeda* in November and December 1736, and *The Royal Chace* in February and March 1737. Throughout the next two months, April and May, he sang interval songs on every day that he was not loaned out to Handel. One of these was the satirical ballad which had recently been published in Bickham's "The Musical Entertainer" – '*The Ladies Lamentation for the loss of Senesino*'³⁰:

I gently requested the cause of her moan,
She told me her sweet Senesino was flown...
'My sweet Senesino for whom I thus cry
Is sweeter than all the wing'd songsters that fly...'

Beard performed this on most evenings in May 1737. But witty Henry Carey was soon writing his riposte when the next haughty castrato to be taken to the public's heart, Farinelli,³¹ left England in the summer. This was entitled '*The Beau's Lament for the loss of Farinelli*', and included these lines, which must have pleased the young English singer who had now made such a significant mark:

Come, never lament for a singer, said I,
Can't English performers his absence supply?
There's *Beard* and there's *Salway*, and smart *Kitty Clive*,
The pleasantest, merriest mortal alive.

After this thoroughly marvellous season, in which he had skilfully combined the high art of opera with the low art of pantomime, Beard was once again at the mercy of Handel's faltering health and lack of managerial acumen. He could foresee that there would be lean pickings in the coming season of 1737-8. But, when he approached Rich for a continuation of the *ad hoc* arrangement that he had enjoyed for the previous two years, he must have been tempted by an improved offer from Charles Fleetwood, the manager of Drury Lane. Fleetwood was keen to poach him as he suddenly found himself without a singer for the musical afterpieces at his theatre. The thing that must have clinched the deal for Beard was that Fleetwood was now offering him the chance to be a real actor, with speaking roles. Beard must have aspired to playing the glamorous role of 'Macheath' in *The Beggar's Opera* one day. This was the pinnacle of all ambitions for a male singer at the theatre. But 'Macheath' was a real actor's role: there was as much dialogue as there was song, including long soliloquys for which a real talent in acting was required. 'Macheath' had to hold the stage at all times, and slip effortlessly from speech to song and back again.

Moreover, it was a 'mainpiece'; so it was customarily undertaken by a leading actor with an adequate singing voice, rather than the other way round. The role had originally been conceived for the legendary tragedian James Quin, who balked at the amount of singing that was expected. The first interpreter in 1732, therefore, was Thomas Walker, who is seen standing centre stage in leg-irons in Hogarth's famous painting of the Newgate Prison scene:

insert the Hogarth picture of The Beggar's Opera

³⁰ Senesino (Francesco Bernardi, c. 1690- c. 1750) sang for Handel's Royal Academy from 1720-8, returning to London in 1730 for Handel's revived company. In 1733 he was poached by the Opera of the Nobility. He left England at the end of 1736 and returned to the opera houses of Europe.

³¹ Farinelli (Carlo Broschi, 1705 - 1782) was in London from 1734 singing for the rival company to Handel's, the Opera of the Nobility. He left England in the summer of 1737, and took up a position at Court in Spain.

The possibility of playing this role may have been dangled in front of Beard as a carrot by Fleetwood, to get him to leave the company where he was beginning to put down roots. Initially he would be expected to work his way up to *The Beggar's Opera* by learning his craft in the shorter ballads operas that were the staple fare at Drury Lane, such as *The Devil to pay*, *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*, and *The Virgin Unmasked*.

Fleetwood tied him into a three-year contract. We know this, because – many years later – when Beard was encouraging the young Charles Dibdin at the beginning of his career, he suggested that he would take him on for three years at an increasing yearly salary, and: “...if I approved it, order an article to be prepared for [the annually increasing salary of] three, four, and five pounds a week, which, he assured me, were the terms on which he commenced his own career”.³²

Thus, by the time that Handel eventually put together a company to perform *Faramondo* in 1738, Beard had been obliged to secure employment elsewhere. It was going to mean that his relationship with Handel would be endangered. Handel was now going to be performing at the King's Theatre Haymarket with a strong cast of Italians headed by Caffarelli. There were no tenors engaged to replace Beard and no tenor music was written for the opera. Instead, Handel filled Beard's place with William Savage, five years his junior, who had sung in the 1735 - 6 oratorios as a 'boy', and was now probably a counter-tenor.³³

3. THREE-YEAR CONTRACT AT DRURY LANE THEATRE, 1737-40

Beard landed on his feet at Drury Lane. Fleetwood needed a singer, and he had plenty of work to offer. He gave his new acquisition a part in every piece that came along. How Beard learned all this material in time seems quite incredible. There were sixteen shows in which he was employed in the first season, and they were all new to him. The first to come his way was the ballad opera *The Devil to Pay*, which was very stock fare at both theatres. It was a farce, created out of an earlier play *The Devil of a Wife* by Charles Coffey, into which a succession of popular ballads had been inserted. For the first two nights, August 30th and September 1st 1737, Beard played it as it had been performed by his predecessor, Thomas Salway, and enjoyed a modest success. The prompter kindly wrote into his record: “the first night of Beard's playing – his success great”.³⁴ This was the first occasion on which Beard had delivered any lines of spoken dialogue in the theatre, and he was clearly worried. The prompter wrote, after the second performance, “Sir John [Loverule]: Beard – the second time of his appearing on that stage in any speaking character”. The speaking role was not particularly arduous – in fact there was probably more singing than speaking involved; and as he was such a likeable character in real life the role of ‘Sir John’, described in the scenario as ‘an honest Country Gentleman, belov'd for his Hospitality’, seems to have been a gift. Before his first entry the Butler says

“Our master indeed is the worthiest Gentleman – nothing but Sweetness and Liberality”.³⁵

³² Charles Dibdin, ‘The Professional Life of Charles Dibdin’, vol. 1, 1803, p.46

³³ “There is much confusion over his ...vocal compass, soprano, alto, tenor, and bass parts all having been ascribed to him”. W. Dean, ‘Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques’, London, 1959, p.659

³⁴ from a diary of Benjamin Griffin, BL Egerton 2320. The London Stage, Part 3, p.681

³⁵ All lines taken from Charles Coffey, ‘The Devil to Pay, or, the Wives Metamorphosed’, London, 1748

At Beard's first appearance this description is borne out by the character's affable manner – much like a latter-day Sir Roger de Coverley - of reproving his new and shrewish wife, who has earlier started to beat and berate their servants as they noisily carouse:

“For shame, my Dear. – As this is a time of Mirth and Jollity, it has always been the custom of my house to give my servants Liberty in this season, and to treat my Country Neighbours, that with innocent Sports they may divert themselves”.

When he was offstage in Act 2, out hunting, there was a music cue for the sounds of a hunt – “*Horns wind without*” - at Jobson's line:

“Hark! the Hunters and the merry Horns are abroad. Why Nell, you lazy Jade, 'tis break of day; to work! to work!” – which must have given him a brilliant idea: the public at Covent Garden had clamoured for his performance of “The early horn” all last season. Why not insert it into the action at this point? And so that was what happened at the third performance, September 3rd, when the playbills advertised the song as ‘by particular desire’. The ‘desire’ could well have been Beard's own, to increase the impact he made in the role. Anyway, it worked. As had previously happened, the song became a favourite of the new public, and Beard's success in the speaking and singing role was now assured. George Bickham included the song in “The Musical Entertainer” (published in 1737) where it is entitled ‘The Meeting in the Morning’, and subtitled “*Sung by Mr Beard with Universal Applause*”.

insert reproduction from Bickham of ‘The Meeting in the Morning’

The other roles that Beard had to play before Christmas were ‘Quaver’ in *The Virgin Unmasked*, Rovewell in *The Contrivances*, Damon in *Damon and Phillida* and Leander in *The Mock Doctor*. After twenty-four performances of these five works Fleetwood felt confident enough to try Beard out in the part he most wanted to play. And so, on 25th October Beard got to play ‘Macheath’ for the first time.

In all of these pieces he was working with the best players in the Drury Lane company. The company's leading actress/singer was Kitty Clive who played opposite him in every show, and was the ‘Phillida’ to his ‘Damon’, in the ballad opera by Colley Cibber. She was also famous as ‘Nell’ in *The Devil to Pay*. Beard had to work hard to achieve a success like hers in this piece – which may explain why he inserted his favourite ballad into it. As Burney says, “In this farce Miss Rafter first acquired celebrity, and after she was Mrs Clive, to the end of her theatrical life, she never received more applause, or earned it better in any part she acted, than in that of ‘Nell’. Her singing, which was intolerable when she meant it to be fine, in ballad farces and songs of humour was, like her comic acting, every thing it should be”.³⁶ The leading dramatic actor and actress were Charles Macklin and Mrs Hannah Pritchard. All of them came together in Beard's first *Beggar's Opera*, with Charles Macklin as ‘Peachum’ and Mrs Pritchard and Kitty Clive as the squabbling wives ‘Lucy’ and ‘Polly’. At the climax of the story ‘Macheath’ has to decide which wife to choose. The music for this ballad is known as ‘Lumps of Pudding’, and takes the singer up to a high A within the melodic line:

³⁶ Burney, ‘A General History of Music’, ed. Frank Mercer, London, 1935, p.1000

Thus I stand like the Turk, with his Doxies a-round; From all sides their Glances his Passion con-found; For, black, brown and fair, his In-con-stan-cy burns; And the
 dif-ferent Beauties sub-duce him by turns. Each calls forth her charms, to pro-voke his desires; Tho'
 willing to all, with but one he retires. But think of this Maxim, and put off all Sor-row: The Wretch of to-day may be happy to-mor-row.

Beard's debut was auspicious, and the piece was played five times in a fortnight. This was unusual. The work was always popular with the public, and could be guaranteed to do well at the box office if it received the customary arrangement of one performance a month. But it was risky to try too many performances in close proximity, as – at 3 hours long – it was normally played without an afterpiece at this time. A long run would have kept the normal repertoire off the stage and a lot of 'straight' actors idle. Beard's success was cut short by the death of Queen Caroline on November 20th. This closed the theatres until January 2nd 1738. When Drury Lane reopened the *Beggar's Opera* resumed its place in the repertoire and was played once a month.³⁷

When the theatrical season started up again it was time for the traditional pantomimes. These were mounted at Drury Lane in competition with the better-known and more established offerings at Covent Garden. In 1738 Fleetwood was determined to provide even stronger competition by engaging a new Harlequin of his own, Henry Woodward, who proceeded to adopt a version of John Rich's trademark by calling himself 'Lun junior'.³⁸ Beard was engaged in the musical part of these productions at the beginning of the year, playing 'Poudre' in Woodward's *Ridotto al Fresco or the Harlot's Progress*, the 'Conjuror' in *Harlequin Restored*, and 'Mercury' in *The Fall of Phaeton*. More traditional ballad opera entered his repertoire too, and much of it would be the mainstay of his work in the afterpieces for the rest of his career. Pieces like *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*, in which he played 'Joe', *The Lottery*, in which he played 'Lovemore', and *The Intriguing Chambermaid*, in which he played 'Valentine', would be his stock works for the next 30 years. Only one other mainpiece came his way in this season, and it was another work that would find a permanent place in the repertoire at both theatres. Thomas Arne was beginning to make a mark in the theatre with incidental music for plays, having had a flop with his first opera *Rosamond* in 1733. When he turned his attention to Milton's masque of *Comus* he wrote his first 'hit'. It opened on March 4th 1738, and Beard had the best music in it as an unnamed 'Bacchanal'. 'Not on beds of fading flowers' and 'Now Phoebus sinketh in the west' are still highly delightful to sing today, and are in many contemporary singers' repertoires. Sounding a little Handelian, they are even fresher than that composer's sometimes stilted arias.

Allegro
 Now Phoebus sinketh in the west, Welcome song and welcome jest, Mid-night shout and revelry,
 Tip-sy dance, and jollity, Mid-night shout and revelry, Tip-sy dance, and jollity.

As Burney, who always seems to put his finger on it, says: "Arne ...furnished the whole kingdom with such songs as ...improved and polished our national taste".³⁹ There was also

³⁷ Jan 25th, Feb 4th, April 27th, May 31st. There was no performance in March as Arne's *Comus* had a long run.

³⁸ Woodward's first performance in the role of Harlequin was on October 22nd 1737.

³⁹ Burney, 'A General History of Music', ed. Frank Mercer, London, 1935, p.1015

good music in *Comus* for a couple of sopranos too, including a charming ‘Echo’ aria. In no time at all the songs became enormously popular. Extracts – including the aria ‘Would you taste the noontide air’⁴⁰ – entered Beard’s miscellaneous repertoire and were regularly sung between the intervals. *Comus* had a long run of eleven nights in its first season, and then entered the repertoire, where it stayed successfully for the whole of Arne’s life and Beard’s career. Fortunately it had some good dramatic roles for the principal actors too. But it was Arne’s delightful music that propelled it into the ranks of a ‘classic’. Beard programmed it in every season at Covent Garden during his time as manager there in the 1760s. The number of performances averaged out at three a year, apart from 1759 when it was played twelve times.

Not all of the plays that were mounted at Drury Lane in Beard’s first season enjoyed the same success as these thirteen. The other three pieces that make up the total of sixteen that he played in 1737-8 were more ephemeral. *Sir John Cockle at Court*, in which he played ‘Sir Timothy Flash’, was a sequel to *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*; and *The Lover’s Opera* was a ballad opera from 1729 that was cast in the same mould as the *Beggar’s Opera*. But neither were as successful as the originals. *The Coffee-house*, in which he played ‘Bawble’, was a satirical piece by Henry Carey (author of ‘Sally in our Alley’) that only lasted one night. Despite using the whole galaxy of Drury Lane stars, and providing the Poet Laureate Colley Cibber with a cameo role as himself, Carey’s star was on the wane. From all accounts it was a witty look at contemporary life as seen from the audience’s standpoint – as frequenters of the local coffee-houses. But they missed the point, and thought that Carey was ridiculing their favourite haunts and their popular landladies. The London Evening Post, reviewing the performance and reminding its readers that the Lord Chamberlain’s Licensing Act of 1737 had very recently rid the theatre of the worst excesses of political satire, wrote: “It’s remarkable that the new farce called “The Coffee-house” – the first performed since the Act of Parliament took place – [was] damned by the Town”.⁴¹

Two other important things happened for Beard towards the end of his first season at Drury Lane. In April he took his first Benefit night, and found himself quite low down in the pecking order at number 20.⁴² His programme was an arduous one that was chosen to show off all of his skills. Since the artist was entitled to select the repertoire for their individual Benefit Night it is always very revealing to see what they chose. Beard is no exception. He chose his best roles, and played in both halves of the evening: the mainpiece was *The Beggar’s Opera*, and the afterpiece was *The Devil to Pay* with “...‘*The Early Horn*’ introduced into Beard’s part”. Since *The Beggar’s Opera* was normally played without an afterpiece this not only made for a very substantial evening’s entertainment, but put a lot of strain on him as the principal actor in both halves. His fellow actors included the principals who had joined him earlier in the season: Mrs Pritchard, Mrs Clive, and Charles Macklin. He would have been bound to make a handsome profit with this cast and this repertoire. Sadly that sort of information is missing from the first few years of his career; but four years later, when the records are available, it is clear that he was one of the highest grossing artists on Benefit Nights. The first sum that we know of was the £207 that he made in 1742. His repertoire choices that night were *Comus* and Fielding’s *The Mock Doctor* – another couple of popular works – and it is clear from the size of the profit that he drew a full house. In 1737 he seems to have started as he meant to go on.

⁴⁰ For example, it is advertised in playbills on April 7, 9, 12, 25, 27, 28, & May 3 1739

⁴¹ London Evening Post, 28th January 1738

⁴² After 6 actors, nos. 7 & 13 in the order were the dancers Nivelon and Lalauze; Thomas Salway, the tenor from whom Beard eventually took over was at no. 15; and Richard Leveridge, the famous bass who had sung for Purcell, was at no. 18. Beard’s Benefit was on April 22nd 1737. The London Stage, Part 3, p.661

The second important event for Beard at this time was the invitation from Handel to join him, once again, as tenor soloist in a concert of oratorio music. Beard must have been delighted to learn that he had not queered his pitch with Handel by taking the Drury Lane contract. Handel, for his part, was granted a benefit night by the managers of the opera company at the King's Theatre Haymarket; and – having failed to put on any oratorio performances in Lent when the theatres were closed – decided to present a mixed programme of excerpts from recent oratorios, Chandos Anthems and Coronation Anthems. As he was without a tenor in his opera company Beard was the logical choice for any tenor solos that might be required. A letter from the 4th Earl of Shaftesbury, written a fortnight before the concert on March 14th, is very helpful in outlining the programme and explaining that “Beard [will have] two songs. But I do not know exactly where and what songs...”⁴³ Handel's ‘Oratorio’, as it was called in the press, brought him an estimated £1000 profit⁴⁴. As it turned out, Beard was the soloist in some items from *Deborah*, which included his Handelian party-piece ‘Strength and Honour’. The current stars of the Italian opera - Caffarelli, Montagnana and Signora Francesina - sang arias from the operas; and the Chapel Royal singers continued their long association with the Handel choral works.

The season 1738-9 was to prove an enormously successful one for Beard, in public and in private. Things had worked out well at Drury Lane. As a result of his growing success and reputation there Charles Fleetwood was prepared to make some concessions regarding the time that Beard would need off in order to join Handel again. Handel himself must have let the young tenor know that he would be needing him in some new oratorios – as long as he could make himself available. The two new works that he was composing in the summer and autumn of 1738 were *Saul* and *Israel in Egypt*.⁴⁵ Both were composed with Beard's voice in mind for the principal tenor roles; so it was important for Beard to clarify matters with Fleetwood before the new season started at Drury Lane on September 7th. Fleetwood could see that Beard's popularity was approaching the sort of status associated nowadays with ‘pop-stars’. He was too valuable a commodity to lose. So an arrangement was made whereby Beard would be released for Handel's dates, accompanied by a proportional drop in salary. But he would have to work doubly hard on all of the other days. We can see, from a quick glance at his diary, that he had some very arduous weeks of singing ahead of him. But his new-found fame was also beginning to attract the ladies. At some time during 1738 he met Lady Henrietta Herbert, a young widow of twenty-one with aristocratic relations. It is not too fanciful to suppose that she first caught sight of Beard onstage at Drury Lane. How their romance was carried on thereafter cannot be satisfactorily explained. Some have suggested that it would have been possible for them to have met, politely, at Court, on the occasion when Beard sang the King's Birthday Ode there.⁴⁶ That took place on October 28th;⁴⁷ but the timing seems rather impractical in view of his hunt for a priest willing to marry them in November (see the next chapter for fuller details). It is more likely that Beard was employed by Henrietta as a singing teacher, or even a harpsichord teacher, and had therefore known her for a longer period. The fact that they both lived in the Red Lion area of Holborn must also have played a part in enabling them to meet without drawing undue attention to themselves.

⁴³ Burrows & Dunhill *Music and Theatre in Handel's World*, p. 44

⁴⁴ “In the evening I went to Handel's Oratorio, where I counted near 1,300 persons besides the Gallery and Upper Gallery. I suppose he got this night £1,000.” Earl of Egmont's Diary, 28th March 1738

⁴⁵ *Saul* was composed between July 23rd and September 27th. *Israel in Egypt* was begun on October 1st.

⁴⁶ Robert Halsband made this suggestion in ‘The Noble Lady and the Player’, *History Today*, July 1968, p.467

⁴⁷ There was an ode “performed before His Majesty in the Great Council Chamber at St James’”, *The Daily Gazetteer*, 30-31 October 1738.

At the beginning of the new 1738 season he was about to be twenty-three. He was young and fit, and well able to cope with the workload. He was also increasingly famous. His songs were not only being anthologised in collections like “The Musical Entertainer”, but were available from ballad-sellers in the street.

insert ballad sheet of A New Song in praise of Old English Roast Beef; but also used on p.96

Fleetwood was finding it useful to have him singing between the acts on every occasion that he was not otherwise involved on stage. Sometimes he had to combine both jobs, as when he sang Purcell’s ‘Mad Dialogue’ with Kitty Clive on the nights that he was in the new pantomime *Colombine Courtesan*. Other favourite songs that were programmed repeatedly this season, and featured heavily on the playbills, were ‘Caelia that I once was blest’, ‘See from the silent groves’, ‘Would you taste the noontide air’, and ‘The Protestation’. There must have been many others that were never recorded on the playbills at all. Occasionally, for a special evening, Beard would fulfil specific requests. Thus, in May 1739, when he had recently joined a local Masonic brotherhood – the Free and Accepted Masons – the entertainment in the interval of their fundraising programme at the theatre was ‘On, on, my dear Brethren’, ‘Thus mighty Eastern Kings’ and other songs in Masonry sung by ‘Brother Beard’.

"On Masons and Masonry"

By Ma-sons' Art the as - pi - ring_ Dome, in_ va - rious Co - lumns shall a - rise; All Cli - mates are their na - tive_ home, their

God - like_ ac - tions reach the skies. He - roes and Kings_ re - vere_ their Name, and po - ets_ sing_ their death - less fame.

Having learned sixteen shows the previous season Beard was well set up for the current repertoire. Nearly all his pieces were repeated again. He played ‘Macheath’ a further seven times (again at the rate of once a month); but as there were no further performances of *Comus* this season, his other mainpieces were revivals of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and Sir John Vanbrugh’s *The Provok’d Wife*. In the 18th century *Macbeth* was played in a version that we would scarcely recognise today. The scenes for the Witches were elaborated, and music played an important part. The main witch, ‘Hecate’, was given extra scenes with some splendid music by Richard Leveridge, especially when “Heckat goes into the Machine to fly”. ‘Her’ lyrics at that point are “O what a dainty Pleasure’s this to sail in the air / when the moon shines fair”. Another of Hecate’s songs is “Let’s have a dance upon the Heath, / We gain more life by Duncan’s Death”, which is beautifully placed in the best part of the tenor’s voice, rising naturally to a high G at the climaxes. Burney, in describing this music, which he thought had been composed by Matthew Locke, wrote: “its rude wild excellence cannot be surpassed”. Beard had already played opposite the old trouper Richard Leveridge when he worked for Rich at Covent Garden in 1736. Now he was to sing the music which the singer, who had known Henry Purcell and been in the cast of *The Indian Queen* in 1695, had made obligatory in contemporary performances of the play. Mollie Sands, quoting from a contemporary source, says that Beard and his fellow cast-members “appeared as the singing witches, wearing mittens, plaited caps, laced aprons, red stomachers, ruffs, etc”.⁴⁸ ‘Hecate’ was a role that Beard played for a further twenty years, and in which he would witness the extraordinarily powerful performances of David Garrick, in the title role.

⁴⁸ Mollie Sands, ‘Invitation to Ranelagh’, London, 1946, p. 84

In the Vanbrugh play *The Provok'd Wife* Beard's role was 'Colonel Bully', whose main reason for being on stage was to sing "the songs proper to the play". One of these was the ever-popular 'Bumpers 'Squire Jones' - later anthologised in *The Gentleman's Magazine*:

insert page of 'Bumpers 'Squire Jones' from Gentleman's Magazine; but also used on p.140

The play was a perennial favourite, and stayed in Beard's repertoire up until the end of his career.⁴⁹ This was a type of mainpiece that kept him busy at the theatre, without being terribly arduous. There were other roles that were principally included in a play so that songs could be sung on stage. In a few years Beard would begin his long relationship with the songs that Thomas Arne provided for Shakespeare's comedies. In these Drury Lane performances, for which Arne wrote his evergreen melodies, Beard appeared in the role of 'Amiens', or 'Balthazar', or suchlike, to sing the songs and speak a few lines of dialogue, without being enormously integral to the plot.

There were several new pantomimes this year. *Colombine Courtesan*, in which he played 'the Spaniard' was followed by *Robin Goodfellow* by his old fellow-chorister at the Chapel Royal, Samuel Howard. Fiske writes of Howard that "...he seldom puts himself to the strain of writing anything longer than a simple ballad, and it is strange that he should have given up theatre music so young, when his first attempts had been so auspicious. Of his pantomime *Robin Goodfellow* only one song survives."⁵⁰ Beard's role in this was 'Squire Freehold', the first of a long line of Squires that his avuncular looks and comfortable girth would destine him to play. The song, and others that Howard wrote for Beard to sing at the Pleasure Gardens, owe a large debt to Handel – probably as a result of the good schooling he received in composition from Bernard Gates and Maurice Greene. But they also have the easy fluency of Arne. Burney perceptively noted that Howard "preferred the style of his own country to that of any other so much, that he never staggered his belief of its being the best in the world by listening to foreign artists or their productions".⁵¹

4. BACK WITH HANDEL AGAIN

Handel's 1739 oratorio season was presented at the King's Theatre Haymarket. He had finished the two new oratorios with major roles for Beard, who was available for the performances, despite being contracted to Drury Lane theatre. Handel's line-up of soloists included 'La Francesina' (Elisabeth Duparc), Cecilia Young, Savage, Waltz and Reinhold. The Earl of Shaftesbury, reminiscing many years later on the lack of Italians in the company, appears to have been unimpressed by the home-grown talent that Handel was nurturing:

"But his singers in general not being capital, nor the town come into a relish of this species of music, he [Handel] had but a disadvantageous season."⁵²

The two new oratorios were *Saul*, and *Israel in Egypt*. There was a dress rehearsal for *Saul* on January 8th 1739. Mrs Pendarves wrote to her sister on January 7th: "Tomorrow I go to hear Mr Handel's Oratorio rehearsed." On the 9th of January Lord Wentworth wrote to the Earl of Strafford: "Mr Handel rehearsed yesterday a new Oratorio call'd Saul..." So it is indisputably

⁴⁹ His last performance as Colonel Bully, 'with songs in character', was on May 7th 1765.

⁵⁰ Fiske, 'English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century', Oxford, 1973, p.167

⁵¹ Burney, 'A General History of Music', ed. Frank Mercer, London, 1935, p.1014

⁵² Earl of Shaftesbury's Memoirs of Handel, 1760, quoted in *Deutsch Handel a Documentary Biography* p. 847

clear that this rehearsal took place on the 8th. But John Beard, rehearsing for the role of *Jonathan*, had other matters to attend to on that day. As will be shown, in the next chapter, this was the day in which he married his first wife, Lady Henrietta Herbert of Powis (née Waldegrave). The liaison was a scandalous one, and was the talk of the town. Giacomo Zamboni wrote to his employer, Prince Antioch Cantemir, in February 1739 to report on life in London. Having discussed the lack of culture that Europeans would find there, he goes on:

“There remain of course the two English theatres, but for some time now the brawls in them have been so numerous and so frequent that one could not go there without some risk of exiting with a battered head. Yet that of Drury Lane is always full, and Beard, who has become a son-in-law of the British Ambassador to France, continues to sing there after having married the daughter of His Excellency, which makes many curious to go there. O tempora! O mores! Oh liberty and property! O che bel mondo!”⁵³

And so, on the 8th January 1739 John Beard sang the role of *Jonathan* in the morning rehearsal of Handel’s *Saul* at the King’s Theatre Haymarket; married Henrietta in the afternoon; and took his customary role in *Colombine Courtesan* at the Drury Lane Theatre in the evening. One of his Handel arias had a most applicable text for a commoner who had just furtively married into the aristocracy:

“Birth and Fortune I despise! From Virtue let my Friendship rise.
No titles proud thy stem adorn; Yet born of God is nobly born.”:

Chapter 3 will tell the story of the commoner who wed above his station in more detail.

There was no time for the luxury of a rest or a honeymoon. Beard was busy enough at this point in the season singing just for Handel. He appeared in his concerts thirteen times in four months (*Saul* Jan 16, 23, Feb 3, 7, March 27, April 19; *Alexander’s Feast* Feb 17, 24, March 20, *Il Trionfo del Tempo* March 3; *Israel in Egypt* April 4, 11, 17). But this was not his main employment. Fleetwood was still requiring his services. In order to understand the pressures that Beard was under at this time, it has to be remembered that he appeared at Drury Lane on virtually every single day of the week that he had not been given dispensation to work for Handel.

As we can see, from the list of engagements below, he sometimes had to rush from one venue straight to the other. From a useful little book published in 1767, John Brownsmith’s ‘The Dramatic Time-Piece’, it can be discovered that main-pieces at Covent Garden and Drury Lane started at 6pm and usually lasted for approximately 2½ - 2¾ hours. Therefore the after-pieces started between 8.30pm and 8.45pm. Handel’s Oratorio performances started at 6.30pm. With each Act lasting a little under 1 hour Beard would not have exited the Haymarket much before 8.20pm when he left *Saul* at the end of Act 2. Thus he had very little time in which to reach Drury Lane and prepare himself!

⁵³ ‘The correspondence of Gio. Giacomo Zamboni’, RMA Research Chronicle 24, 1991, p.171

The King's Theatre Haymarket was quite a distance away from Drury Lane, and so this arrangement was far from ideal. But Beard was helped by the fact that 'Jonathan' dies before Act 3 of *Saul*, enabling him to make an early exit from the theatre. On those nights he would not have been able to take a customary obeisance at the end. Here is the period in question:

<u>Jan / Feb 1739</u>	<u>Drury Lane</u>	<u>Haymarket</u>
Mon 15 th Jan	The Mock Doctor (a/p)	
Tues 16 th	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p) +	<i>Saul</i>
Wed 17 th	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p)	
Thurs 18 th	The Lottery (a/p)	
Fri 19 th	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p)	
Sat 20 th	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p)	
Mon 22 nd	The Devil to pay (a/p)	
Tues 23 rd	The Virgin unmasked (a/p) +	<i>Saul</i>
Wed 24 th	The Provok'd Wife (m/p) + The Lottery (a/p)	
Thurs 25 th	The Intriguing Chambermaid (a/p)	
Fri 26 th	The Intriguing Chambermaid (a/p)	
Sat 27 th	Damon and Phillida (a/p)	
Mon 29 th	The Devil to pay (a/p)	
Tues 30 th	- [presumably expecting to sing for Handel, who moved to Saturday performances]	
Wed 31 st	The Mock Doctor (a/p)	
Thurs 1 st Feb	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p) + singing between the acts	
Fri 2 nd	The Intriguing Chambermaid (a/p) + singing between the acts	
Sat 3 rd	Damon and Phillida (a/p) +	<i>Saul</i>

From this it can be seen that, although he valued his work with Handel, it had to be sandwiched in between his other contractual obligations. It was not until April, when his involvement in *Israel in Egypt* would have made a quick dash for the exit less seemly,⁵⁴ that he managed to obtain complete clearance from the Drury Lane management on the dates that Handel required him. Thus his April diary, whilst appearing slightly more merciful on the face of it, still required a fit and healthy singer – especially when he followed the arduous role of 'Macheath' in *The Beggar's Opera* with a further role in the afterpiece:

<u>April 1739</u>	<u>Drury Lane</u>	<u>Haymarket</u>
Mon 2 nd	--	
Tues 3 rd	The Devil to pay (a/p) + interval songs: Beard's 'Benefit'	
Wed 4 th	--	<i>Israel in Egypt</i>
Thurs 5 th	The Beggar's Opera (m/p) + The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p)	
Fri 6 th	--	
Sat 7 th	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p) + singing between the acts	
Mon 9 th	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p) + singing between the acts	
Tues 10 th	The King & Miller of Mansfield (a/p) + singing between the acts	
Wed 11 th	--	<i>Israel in Egypt</i>
Thurs 12 th	The Lottery (a/p) + singing between the acts	

⁵⁴ The performers made their bows and curtain calls to the audience at the end of oratorio performances, according to Burney, who describes the blind Handel being "conducted towards the audience to make his accustomed obeisance". Burney, 'An Account of the Musical Performances ...', London, 1785, p.29-30. Also: see William Coxe *Anecdotes of G.F. Handel and J.C. Smith*, 1799, p. 25

5. THE 1739 - 40 SEASON

Beard had his most complicated Season yet in 1739-1740. Handel invited him to sing in his Oratorios as usual – this time at the Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre – and another invitation had arisen, to take part in a regular series of concerts at Hickford’s Rooms. After a normal autumn devoted to his standard roles in the mainpieces *Comus* and *Macbeth*, and the afterpieces *The Lottery*, *Colombine Courtesan* and *The Fall of Phaeton*, he somehow contrived to get Charles Fleetwood, the Drury Lane manager, to give him leave of absence in January and February. But he would be required thereafter. Beard was playing a dangerous game by asking for so much time off. But as he was coming to the end of his 3-year contract, he may have indicated his desire to leave the theatre at the end of the season. This was undoubtedly bound up with his marital affairs. Whether he thought that his marriage – once some unresolved financial matters were sorted out - would lead to a comfortable life of luxury and idleness living on his wife’s dowry, or whether he foresaw that his wealthy father-in-law, the First Earl Waldegrave, was terminally ill, he certainly made a decision not to return next year for the 1740-41 season.

Fleetwood prepared for a season without Beard by reallocating some of his smaller roles in the after-pieces as early as January 8th 1740: Berry took over the role of ‘Joe’ in *The King & Miller of Mansfield*; James Raftor (Kitty Clive’s brother) sang ‘Quaver’ in *The Virgin unmasked*; Stoppelaer played ‘Valentine’ in *The Intriguing Chambermaid*; and Oliver Cashell took over ‘Colonel Bully’ in the main-piece *The Provok’d Wife*.⁵⁵ This was a risky move on Beard’s part, because roles were highly prized, and once performed by an actor were held to be their prerogative.⁵⁶ By yielding up these roles Beard was making it difficult for him to retrieve them, if he ever needed to return to Drury Lane in the future. One role which he was determined to cling on to was ‘Sir John Loverule’ in *The Devil to Pay*. This was the first speaking and singing role that he had ever performed,⁵⁷ and was a fine character part with plenty of good arias. He had enjoyed a great success with it now for three seasons. And so, on March 17th 1740, it was undertaken by Stoppelaer on the understanding that Beard could return to it later. This he did on March 27th, and again – for his annual ‘Benefit’ – on April 9th. *The Beggar’s Opera* was another work that was particularly associated with Beard at this time. So Fleetwood simply refrained from slating it for performance until Beard was available. After a performance on January 29th it wasn’t programmed again until the 12th of April, by which time the Handel and Hickford’s Rooms seasons were both over. Fleetwood also bent over backwards to meet Beard’s needs by deliberately withholding some new pieces until he was more available. Thus the revival of Arne’s 1733 opera *Rosamond*, in which Beard was going to be required, was delayed until March. The new satirical afterpiece *Lethe* which David Garrick had recently written was similarly held back until April 15th: unbelievably late in the season. *Lethe* would gain a regular slot in the Drury Lane repertoire when Garrick took over as Manager. Beard would sing it regularly from January 1749 onwards. For this season there would only be the one performance. Into a slim plotline, that has various London society creatures coming to drink the waters of forgetfulness at a bar run

⁵⁵ Information provided by *The London Stage*, Part 3 [1729 – 1747], ed. Arthur H. Scouten

⁵⁶ Kitty Clive outlined ‘a receiv’d Maxim in the theatre’ in her 1736 struggle to retain the role of ‘Polly’ in *The Beggar’s Opera* at Drury Lane: “no Actor or Actress shall be depriv’d of a Part in which they have been well receiv’d. until they are render’d incapable of performing it either by Age or Sickness”. BDA entry ‘Clive’ p.347

⁵⁷ 30th August 1737 “... the first night of Beard’s playing – his success great.” From a diary of Benjamin Griffin [British Library, Egerton 2320]

by Aesop, Arne had fitted several quite elaborate songs for Beard as 'Mercury' and Mrs Clive as 'Mrs Riot'.⁵⁸

One can see the attraction of these two Spring concert series to Beard. After several years of endeavouring to give good performances for Handel under increasingly trying circumstances, Beard knew that he could now make ends meet, at least temporarily, without the need for his £5 a week salary from Drury Lane. For these few months in the Spring of 1740 he was completely free-lance: - and was possibly the first tenor to manage to survive in this way. The repertoire that he was asked to perform was all of a highly exciting and challenging nature. At Hickford's Rooms he performed the role of 'Garcia' in J. C. Smith's all-sung opera *Rosalinda*⁵⁹ (not to be confused with *Rosamond*). Cecilia Young, now Mrs Thomas Arne, sang the title role. The lyrics were by John Lockman, who also wrote the text for Smith's oratorio *David's Lamentation over Saul and Jonathan*, which was the next work to be given in the series.⁶⁰

Coincidentally Lockman was the librettist for Thomas Arne's opera *Rosamond*, which he had been continually recomposing since its disastrous performances in 1733. This was now mounted (in a revised version) as an after-piece on March 8th. In it Arne had added a long Italianate aria 'Rise, Glory, rise', running to 36 pages of music, for Beard. It is scored for oboes, trumpets, drums and strings and was much admired by musicians like Charles Burney. Stylistically it foreshadowed the opera that he would write for Beard in the 1760s. Beard must have remembered Arne's success in writing opera seria when he commissioned *Artaxerxes* from him twenty-five years later.

Rosamond ran for 13 performances. Quite how Beard always managed to be available to every one in this season is almost impossible to work out! A study of the entries in *The London Stage* would often suggest that he was in two places at the same time. However, on those occasions when it appears from the newspaper advertisements that he should have been singing for both Handel and at the concerts at Hickford's Rooms, it appears that he put in a 'deputy' at the latter. Thus, on 14th and 21st March 'Mr Salway'⁶¹ was advertised as his late replacement. Beard obviously considered Handel's engagements as the more important ones.

For Handel he sang *Acis* in *Acis and Galatea* in a season which started late (due to illness) on Thursday 21st February. Perhaps it was Beard himself who was ill: he performed at Hickford's Rooms on 8th February, a time which is known to have been remarkably cold. Handel's own performances on the 4th and 7th were put off "in consideration of the weather continuing so cold".⁶² Neither venue was able to go ahead with performances on the 14th or 15th. After only one performance of *Acis and Galatea* Handel produced his newest oratorio. *L'Allegro ed Il Penseroso* was given on 27th February, March 6th, 10th, 14th, and 23rd April. Beard was well for all of these performances, and shared the solos with Elisabeth Duparc, Russell and Reinhold. *Esther* received one performance on 26th March (with Beard back in the role of *Ahasuerus*)⁶³, and *Acis* was repeated, with the *St. Cecilia Ode* on March 28th, as a

⁵⁸ see: Fiske, 'English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century', Oxford, 1973, p.206. Several of the songs are contained in a manuscript at the Royal College of Music, RCM m/s 2232.

⁵⁹ January 4, 11, 18, 25, February 1, 8. February 15th was probably cancelled due to a performer's ill-health.

⁶⁰ February 22, 29, March 7, [14], [21], [27], April 2, 11

⁶¹ Thomas Salway, c.1706-1743, a singer on contract to Rich at Covent Garden Theatre. He had sung occasionally for Handel in the 1730s before the composer started using Beard regularly.

⁶² London Daily Post, 6th February 1740

⁶³ Winton Dean *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques* p. 212

Benefit Concert for the Fund for the Support of Decayed Musicians (later the Royal Society of Musicians).

The two new oratorios from the previous year were revived for one performance each: *Saul* on March 21st, and *Israel in Egypt* on April 1st. Thus Beard sang for Handel in a total of ten performances this season.

His full diary was further complicated by returning to his contractual duties at Drury Lane in March, April and early May. This is what he undertook in these four months. It will be seen that he did not appear at Drury Lane at all between January 10th and March 8th. On March 27th he was able to appear at Hickford's Rooms and at Drury Lane when the Hickford's Rooms concert was advertised as starting early and lasting from 6pm to 8pm: thus allowing Beard enough time to get back for his starring role in the afterpiece *The Devil to Pay* which would have begun at about 8.45pm. He had a similar rush across town on April 11th, 18th and 25th. On March 3rd and 19th he made time in this mad diary to fit in appearances at two Benefit concerts for musician-friends:

<u>Jan / May 1740</u>	<u>Drury Lane</u> <i>Afterpieces</i> <i>start at c. 8.45pm;</i> <i>Mainpieces at 6pm</i>	<u>Hickford's Rooms</u> <i>"to continue for 20</i> <i>consecutive Fridays"</i> <i>at 6.30pm except for</i> <i>March 27th (6pm)</i>	<u>Lincoln's Inn Theatre</u> <i>Handel's oratorios started</i> <i>this year at 6pm.</i> ⁶⁴
Fri Jan 4 th		Rosalinda (1)	
Tues Jan 8 th	[Edward Berry deputises]		
Thurs Jan 10 th	Comus (m/p)		
Fri Jan 11 th	[Edward Berry deputises]	Rosalinda (2)	
Fri Jan 18 th		Rosalinda (3)	
Fri Jan 25 th		Rosalinda (4)	
Tues Jan 29 th	Beggar's Opera (m/p)		
Fri Feb 1 st		Rosalinda (5)	
Mon Feb 4 th			[Acis – cancelled: cold weather]
Wed Feb 6 th	[James Raftor deputises]		
Thurs Feb 7 th			[Acis – cancelled: cold weather]
Fri Feb 8 th		Rosalinda (6)	
Thurs Feb 14 th			[Acis cancelled: two singers ill]
Friday Feb 15 th		[Rosalinda - cancelled: singers ill]	
Tues Feb 19 th	[Oliver Cashell deputises]		
Thurs Feb 21 st			Acis & Galatea + St Cecilia Ode
Fri Feb 22 nd		David's Lamentation over Saul and Jonathan (8)	
Wed Feb 27 th			L'Allegro ed Il Penseroso
Fri Feb 29 th		David's Lamentation... + songs (9)	
Mon March 3 rd		<i>Benefit for Brown. 'Vocal by Beard'</i>	
Thurs Mar 6 th			L'Allegro ed Il Penseroso
Fri Mar 7 th		David's Lamentation... + songs (10)	
Sat Mar 8 th	Rosamond (a/p)		
Mon Mar 10 th	Rosamond (a/p)	+	L'Allegro ed Il Penseroso
Tues Mar 11 th	Rosamond (a/p)		
Fri Mar 14 th		[Salway deputises (11)]	L'Allegro ed Il Penseroso
Sat Mar 15 th	Rosamond (a/p)		
Mon Mar 17 th	[Michael Stoppelaer deputises]		
Tuesday Mar 18 th	Rosamond (a/p)		
Wed Mar 19 th		<i>Benefit for Valentine Snow. 'Vocal by Beard'</i>	
Fri Mar 21 st		[Salway deputises (12)]	Saul
Sat Mar 22 nd	The Mock Doctor (a/p) + interval songs		

⁶⁴ see Deutsch, op. cit. pp 490-1

Mon Mar 24 th	Rosamond (a/p)	
Tues Mar 25 th	interval songs	
Wed Mar 26 th		Esther
Thurs Mar 27 th	The Devil to Pay (a/p) +	David's Lamentation (13) <i>to begin at 6 & end at 8</i>
Fri Mar 28 th		<i>Beard doesn't do Hickford's Rooms</i> Acis + St Cecilia Ode
Sat Mar 29 th	interval songs	
Tues April 1 st		Israel in Egypt
Wed Apr 2 nd		David's Lamentation... (14)
Mon Apr 7 th	Rosamond (a/p)	
Tues Apr 8 th	Comus (m/p)	
Wed Apr 9 th	The Devil to Pay (a/p) + interval songs:	Beard's 'Benefit'
Thurs Apr 10 th	The Virgin unmasked (a/p) + interval songs	
Fri Apr 11 th	Rosamond (a/p) +	David's Lamentation... (15)
Sat Apr 12 th	Beggar's Opera (m/p)	
Mon Apr 14 th	The Provok'd Wife (m/p) + The Mock Doctor (a/p) + interval songs	
Tues Apr 15 th	Lethe (a/p) - first performance of Garrick's satire	
Wed Apr 16 th	interval songs	
Thurs Apr 17 th	interval songs	
Fri Apr 18 th	Columbine Courtesan (a/p) + interval songs + Rosalinda (16) at 7pm	
Sat Apr 19 th	interval songs	
Monday Apr 21 st	interval songs	
Tuesday Apr 22 nd	The Devil to Pay (a/p) + interval songs	
Wed Apr 23 rd		L'Allegro ed Il Penseroso
Thurs Apr 24 th	interval songs	
Fri Apr 25 th	interval songs +	David's Lamentation... (17)
Sat Apr 26 th	interval songs	
Mon Apr 28 th	interval songs	
Thurs May 1 st	Comus (m/p)	
Fri May 2 nd		<i>Beard doesn't do Hickford's Rooms</i>
Thurs May 8 th		Handel Wedding Anthem <i>[at the Chapel Royal]</i>

I have included Beard's engagements up to May 8th, as that was the last occasion on which he sang prior to taking a year and a half's rest from the theatre and concert hall. It was not that he was tired – although after that daunting schedule he deserved to be. Nor does the list include the numerous rehearsals that he must have undertaken for such a varied, and new repertoire. As well as seeing out his Drury Lane contract he must have felt honoured and obliged to sing for Handel, to whom he owed so much, before he could entertain any notions of accompanying his wife on the various urgent visits abroad which she had planned.

As events turned out he was required to sing at the wedding of Princess Mary, George II's fourth daughter on the 8th May. The nuptials had been announced in the press in early March,⁶⁵ and so Beard would have had some prior warning that he would be required to stay in London at least until they had taken place. The anthem for which Handel required him was a pasticcio of movements from the two previous wedding anthems. He may have sung once more the aria 'Strength and Honour' against which his name ('Bird') had been pencilled in the manuscript of the 1734 Wedding Anthem "This is the day which the Lord has made".⁶⁶ He would also have been required for the virtuoso concluding section taken from the 1736 Wedding Anthem "Sing unto God" – itself a reworking of a castrato aria in *Parnasso in Festa* - which he had sung on April 27th of that year, and with which Handel now concluded the pasticcio. There was a newspaper report on Tuesday 6th May of a rehearsal taking place at Bernard Gates' house on the previous day. From Beard's diary it can be noted that it was an otherwise free day: "Yesterday, at Mr Gates's, was a practice of a fine new Anthem compos'd by Mr. Handel, for her Royal Highness the Princess Mary's Marriage; the vocal parts by

⁶⁵ Daily Advertiser, Friday 7th March 1740

⁶⁶ Burrows *Handel and the English Chapel Royal* p. 358

Mess. Abbott, Chelsum, Beard, Church of Dublin, Gates, Lloyd, and the Boys of the Chapel Royal...”⁶⁷

On the 10th of May Thomas Harris wrote to his brother about the music (“there was nothing new in the anthem...”) and gave a most intriguing addendum:

“I hear that Beard is gone off together with his lady, who I believe had contracted debts before her marriage.”⁶⁸

Beard had indeed gone abroad at the earliest possible moment. Strictly speaking he was obliged to play at Drury Lane until the end of the season, which was not until May 30th. But the leeway that he had been given in January and February may have been shown to him once again by a kindly disposed Charles Fleetwood. It was now the benefit season, and actors were free to choose their own repertoire and performers. It was only at this time, and on these limited occasions, that actors could try their talents in roles that were normally the well-guarded province of others. Stoppelaer and Raftor continued to play the roles that they had taken over from Beard, and others such as Ridout and Ray (who may have been the official understudies) were tried out in his other parts. Only the role of *Macheath* really mattered, and this was certainly not going to be given by the management to an untried actor. When *The Beggar’s Opera* was performed on May 17th the original interpreter Thomas Walker,⁶⁹ who had created the role in 1728 (and is depicted in Hogarth’s famous painting), was invited back to replace the absent Beard. This was casting from strength indeed!

insert Thomas Walker’s Benefit Night invitation



Harvard Theatre Collection
Benefit ticket for THOMAS WALKER
engraving by Simpson, after Hogarth

⁶⁷ Daily Advertiser, Tuesday 6th May 1740

⁶⁸ Burrows & Dunhill *Music and Theatre in Handel’s World*, p. 97

⁶⁹ Thomas Walker, 1698-1744, created the role of *Macheath* at Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre on 29th Jan. 1728