

Female Alto Roles in G.F. Handel's 39 Operas

compiled by Jennifer Peterson, operamission

NOTE to singers: This chart includes only the 24 roles of female characters composed for female alto singers. Please be informed that there are over 150 additional roles in Handel's operas that *may* be appropriate for you and are worth considering.

Depending on your voice type and nature, it is suggested you also consider "soprano" roles (both female and male characters) and the "alto" roles of male characters. All are frequently cast as mezzo-sopranos.

As you will see from the ranges on this chart, the "female alto" roles are generally quite low.

Additional NOTE: Current historical pitch standard for Handel is A=415, which is a half-tone lower than the pitch in common use by modern orchestras. Period instrument orchestras generally tune to this lower pitch.

Opera, HWV (Händel-Werke-Verzeichnis)

a recommended online source for [plot synopses](#)

Agrippina, HWV 6

Giunone

range: B^{b3}-C⁵

tessitura: D⁴-B^{b4}

character: the Roman goddess of marriage

aria

Act III – "*V'accendano le tede*"

Il Pastor Fido, HWV 8

Dorinda

range: B³-F^{#5}

tessitura: E⁴-D⁵

originated by: Jane Barbier

character: in love with Silvio (a shepherd of divine descent)

arias

Act I

"Mi lasci, mi fuggi, e m'abbandoni"

Act II

"Se in ombre nascosto"

Act III

"Ho un non sò che nel cor"

"Se m'ami, oh caro"

Radamisto, HWV 12

Zenobia

range: B^{b3}-E^{b5}

tessitura: D⁴-D⁵

originated by: Anastasia Robinson

character: wife of Radamisto (son of Farasmane, King of Thrace); object of Tiridate (King of Armenia)'s love

arias

Act I

"Son contenta di morire"

Act II

Arioso: "*Quando mai spietata*"

"Già che morir non posso"

"Troppo sofferse già questo mio petto"

Arioso: "*Empio, perverso cor!*"

Duet with Radamisto: "*Se teco vive il cor*"

Act III

"Deggio dunque, oh Dio"

"O scema mi il diletto"

Muzio Scevola, HWV 13

Irene

range: B^b3–D5

tessitura: C[#]4–C5

originated by: Anastasia Robinson

character: daughter of Porsenna (King of Etruria); secretly pledged to Orazio (young Roman officer)

arias

"Con lui volate, dolce pensieri"

"Ah dolce nome! in van ti chiamo"

Duet with Orazio: *"Mà quell'amore, oh caro"*

Floridante, HWV 14

Elmira

range: B^b3–F[#]5

tessitura: D4–D5

originated by: Anastasia Robinson

character: supposed daughter of Oronte (King of Persia); promised in marriage to Floridante (Prince of Thrace)

arias

Act I

"Dimmi, oh spene!"

"Mà pria vedrò le stelle"

Duet with Floridante: *"Ah mio caro, se tu parti"*

Act II

"Barbaro! t'odio a morte"

Arioso & Recit: *"Notte cara, deh!"*

"Mà che vuoi più da me"

Act III

"Vivere per penare"

"Sì, coronar vogl'io"

Ottone, HWV 15

Matilda

range: B^b3–E5

tessitura: D4–C[#]5

originated by: Anastasia Robinson

character: cousin of Ottone (King of Germany); promised in marriage to Adelberto (son of Gismonda, who is the widow of Berengario, tyrant of Italy)

arias

Act I

"Diresti poi così?"

Act II

"Ah! tu non sai, quant'il mio cor sospira"

"All'orror d'un duolo eterno"

Duet with Gismonda: *"Notte cara!"*

Act III

"Nel suo sangue"

Flavio, HWV 16

Teodata

range: B3–D5

tessitura: C4–C5

originated by: Anastasia Robinson

character: daughter of Ugone (counselor to Flavio, the King of Lombardy); secret lover of Vitige (the King's adjutant)

arias

Act I

Duet with Vitige: *"Ricordati, mio ben"*

"Benchè povera donzella"

Act II

"Con un' vezzo, con un' riso"

Act III

"Che colpa è la mia, se Amor vuol così?"

Giulio Cesare, HWV 17

Cornelia

range: B3–D5

tessitura: D4–C#5

originated by: Anastasia Robinson

character: wife of Pompeo (Roman general defeated by Cesare); mother of Sesto

arias

Act I

"Priva son d'ogni conforto"

Arioso: *"Nel tuo seno, amico sasso"*

Duet with Sesto: *"Son nato a lagrimar"*

Act II

Arioso: *"Deh piangete, oh mesti lumi"*

"Cessa omai di sospirare!"

Act III

"Non ha più che temere quest' alma"

Tamerlano, HWV 18

Irene

range: A3–E5

tessitura: D4–D5

originated by: Anna Vicenza Dotti

character: Princess of Trebizond; promised in marriage to Tamerlano (Emperor of the Tartars)

arias

Act I

"Dal crudel che m'ha tradita"

Act II

"Par che mi nasca in seno"

Arioso: *"Nò, che sei tanto costante"*

Act III

"Crudel più non son io"

Duet with Tamerlano: *"Vedrò ch'un dì si cangerà"*

Rodelinda, HWV 19

Eduige

range: C4–E5

tessitura: D4–D5

originated by: Anna Vicenza Dotti

character: sister of Bertarido (husband of Rodelinda, Queen of Lombardy); promised in marriage to Grimoaldo (usurper of the throne)

arias

Act I

"Lo farò, dirò spietato"

Act II

"De' miei scherni per far le vendette"

Act III

"Quanto più fiera tempesta freme"

Lotario, HWV 26

Matilde

range: A^b3–E5

tessitura: C4–C#5

originated by: Antonia Merighi

character: wife of Berengario (Duke of Spoleto and ruler of a divided Italy with Lotario, who is also King of Germany)

arias

Act I

"Vanne a colei che adori"

"Orgogliosetto v`a l'augelletto"

Act II

"Arma lo sguardo"

Act III

"Quel superbo già si crede"

"Impara, codardo, ch'un anima forte"

Recit: *"Furie del crudo averno"*

Partenope, HWV 27

Rosmira

range: A3-F5

tessitura: D4-C#5

originated by: Antonia Merighi

character: Princess of Cyprus, lover of Arsace (Prince of Corinth), promised to him, but betrayed for Partenope (Queen of Naples)

arias

Act I

"Se non ti sai spiegar"

"Un'altra volta ancor"

"Io seguo sol fiero trà boschi le belve"

Act II

Duet: *"Infido, ingrato!"*

"Furie son dell' alma mia"

Act III

Arioso: *"Arsace, oh Dio, così infido l'ingannò"*

"Quel volto mi piace"

Recit: *"Cieli! che mira? abbandonato e solo"*

Trio with Partenope and Arsace: *"Un anima ingrata"*

Poro, HWV 28

Erissena

range: A3-E5

tessitura: C#4-D5

originated by: Antonia Merighi

character: sister of Poro (King of India); loved by both Gandarte (general in Poro's army) and Alessandro il Grande

arias

Act I

"Chi vive amante"

"Compagni nell' amore"

Act II

"Di rendermi la calma"

Act III

"Come il candore d'intatta neve"

"Son fonfusa pastorella"

Ezio, HWV 29

Onoria

range: C4-E5

tessitura: D4-D5

originated by: Francesca Bertolli

character: sister of Emperor Valentiniano and secretly in love with Ezio (general and hero of the Roman Empire); rival to Fulvia

arias

Act I

"Quanto mai felice siete"

Act II

"Finchè per te mi palpita timido"

Act III
"Peni tu per un ingrata"
Verse: *"Cangia sorte di ripente"*

Sosarme, HWV 30

Erenice
range: B^b3–F5
tessitura: D4–C#5
originated by: Anna Bagnolesi
character: wife of Haliate (King of Lydia)

arias

Act I

Recit: *"Rasserena Erenice..."*
"Forte in ciampo al suo furore"
"Due parti del core"

Act II

Duet with Argone: *"E udir potrei?"*
"Vado al campo a combatter col pianto"

Act III

"Cuor di madre, e cuor di moglie"

Arianna in Creta, HWV 32

Carilda
range: A3–D5
tessitura: C#4–C#5
originated by: Maria Caterina Negri
character: friend of Arianna (daughter of Minos, King of Crete)

arias

Act I

"Dille, che nel mio seno"
"Quel cor che adora"

Act II

"Narrargli allor saprai"

Act III

"Un tenero pensiero"

Ariodante, HWV 33

Dalinda
range: C#4–G5 (soprano version: E4–B5)
tessitura: D4–D5 (soprano version: F#4–F#5)
originated by: Cecilia Young (soprano), but originally composed for alto
(through Act III, scene 10)
character: friend of Princess Ginevra (daughter of the King of Scotland);
secretly in love with Polinesso (Duke of Albany) but loved by Lurcanio
(Ariodante's brother)

arias

Act I

"Apri le luci"
"Il primo ardor è così caro" (soprano)

Act III

"Neghittosi or voi che fate?"
Duet with Lurcanio: *"Spera, spera io già mi pento"* (treble clef, E4–A5)

Alcina, HWV 34

Bradamante
range: A3–E5
tessitura: D4–D5
originated by: Maria Caterina Negri
character: heroic warrior betrothed to Ruggiero (warrior under Alcina's
spell); travels to Alcina's enchanted island to rescue him in disguise as
her brother Ricciardo

arias
Act I
"È gelosia, forza è d'amore"
Act II
"Vorrei vendicarmi"
Act III
"All' alma fedel"
Trio with Alcina and Ruggiero: *"Non è amor, nè gelosia"*

Atalanta, HWV 35

Irene
range: B^{b3}–E5
tessitura: C4–C^{#5}
originated by: Maria Caterina Negri
character: shepherdess, in love with Aminta (a shepherd); daughter of Nicandro (confidant of Meleagro, the King of Aetolia)

arias
Act I
"Come alla tortorella"
Act II
"Soffri in pace il tuo dolore"
Act III
"Ben' io sento l'ingrata"

Arminio, HWV 36

Ramise
range: B^{b3}–F5
tessitura: D4–C5
originated by: Francesca Bertolli
character: sister of Arminio (a German prince); in love with Sigismondo (son of Segeste, another German prince who is tormenting Arminio)

arias
Act I
"Sento il cor per ogni lato"
Act II
"Niente spero, tutto credo"
Act III
Duet with Tusnelda: *"Quando più minaccia il Cielo"*
"Voglio seguir lo sposo"

Giustino, HWV 37

Leocasta
range: A3–D5
tessitura: D4–C5
originated by: Francesca Bertolli
character: sister of Anastasio (the Emperor); falls in love with Giustino (a simple farmer who becomes a hero by saving her from a bear, he is the estranged brother of Vitaliano, tyrant of Asia Minor)

arias
Act I
"Nacque al bosco"
Act II
"Sventurata navicella"
Act III
"Augelletti garruletti"

Berenice, HWV 38

Selene
range: B^{b3}–F5
tessitura: D4–E^{b5}
originated by: Francesca Bertolli

character: sister of Berenice (Queen of Egypt); secretly in love with Demetrio (betrothed to Berenice); uses Arbace to win Demetrio's love

arias

Act I

"Gelo, avvampo, considero, e sento"

Act II

"Si poco è forte"

Act III

Arioso: *"Tortorella, che rimira"*

"Questa qual sia beltà"

Faramondo, HWV 39

Rosimonda

range: A3–G5

tessitura: D4–D5

originated by: Maria Antonia Marchesini, *"La Lucchesina"*

character: daughter of Gustavo (King of Cimbri); in love with Faramondo (King of the Franks who has killed Gustavo's son in battle); her hand in marriage and the throne of Cimbria have been offered to whoever brings Faramondo's head to Gustavo

arias

Act I

"Vanne, che più ti miro"

"Sento, che un giusto sdegno"

Act II

"Sì, l'intendesti, sì, è questa la mercè"

Duet with Faramondo: *"Vanne e vivi con la speranza"*

Act III

"Sappi, crudel, io tamo?"

Serse, HWV 40

Amastre

range: C4–E5

tessitura: D4–C#5

originated by: Antonia Merighi

character: a princess promised in marriage to Serse (King of Persia); in disguise as a man until the final scene of the opera

arias

Act I

Arioso: *"Se cangio spoglia, non cangio core"*

"Saprà delle mie offese ben vendicarsi il cor"

Act II

Arioso: *"Speranze mie fermate"*

"Or che siete speranze tradite"

"Anima infida, tradita io sono"

Duet with Serse: *"Lo sà il mio cor piagato"*

Act III

Arietta: *"Cagion son io del mio dolore"*

Anastasia Robinson created six roles.

Francesca Bertolli and **Antonia Merighi** each created four roles.

Maria Caterina Negri created three roles.

Anna Vicenza Dotti created two roles.

Anna Bagnolesi, **Jane Barbier**, and **Maria Antonia Marchesini** each created one role.