In literature, the space of the chivalric poem often presents itself as an ambivalent place, dominated by intertwined paths, a metaphor of the innumerable quests pursued by the paladins. The vast forest is already a labyrinth where the knights are often lost and damsels in distress. Like the islands where they are frequently kept captive by magic, the castles, the enchanted palaces in particular, draw them in through the seductive power of the senses, and most notably the erotic seduction of voice. At the beginning of Canto 12 of Ariosto's Orlando furioso, the epic poem of 1516, wandering knights and princesses arrive one after the other in an enchanted palace designed by Atlante.

The building created by the sorcerer is a work of illusion providing in turn other illusions between its walls. Indeed, in this magical creation, people can think they are hearing the voice of their beloved calling their name. Wandering endlessly through the numerous rooms of the building, looking for the object of their love, the paladins and ladies are ensnared in a labyrinth of illusory desires. The enchanted palace of Atlante is conceived as a place of perdition, in which the characters are kept in the maze of their love obsession. Created in 1691 in Hanover, Steffani's opera Orlando generoso does more than allude to this theme. Inspired by Ariosto, Mauro's libretto contains many references to the original epic but elaborates another narrative structure which gives the opera the quality of a new enchanted palace, where one is easily getting lost and made captive by the seduction of the opera's “voice.”

Taking the enchanted palace and the peregrinations of the characters as rhetorical artifices and as metaphor relating to the form and content of the libretto, I will be searching through six of the many “rooms” of an imaginary building. By doing so, I hope to create a mental architecture of Orlando generoso, to inform the physical language and style of our performance. In this process of discovery, various pieces of evidence will be examined, in the hopes of structuring them afresh for the stage. Although presented here in a specific order for the reader’s convenience, the rooms are interdependent of each other and could be explored in any order, with one perhaps becoming lost in them as Orlando was.

Orlando generoso presents the essential features of a knight: true nobility revealed and acquired through hardships and renunciation. When created in 1691 in Hanover, Steffani's opera elaborated on the idea that self-control and self-sacrifice are one of the foundations of the aristocracy. This simple political message was even more significant in 1692, when the opera was revived to celebrate a very auspicious event: after years of negotiations, the prestigious position of Elector of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire was finally given to Ernst August (1629–1698), Steffani's patron. The Duke was appointed Prince-elector by Emperor Leopold I, thus raising the House of Hanover to electoral dignity. These circumstances gave a special aura to Orlando generoso's revival the same year, even if the nomination, which came with many potential benefits, had been in the works for several years.
As a third son and landless cadet, Ernst August seemingly had little chance of succeeding his father as ruler. But his prestigious and happy marriage in 1658 with Sophie of the Palatinate (1630–1714) elevated him into the most ancient ruling families of Europe. Sophie, daughter of Frederick V, Elector Palatine, granddaughter of King James I of England, was a woman of exceptional intellect and wisdom. She proved to be a devoted ally to Ernst August and supported his aristocratic ambitions. In 1662, he was chosen as Prince-Bishop of Osnabrück. However, in 1679, after his elder brother had died without sons, Ernst August inherited part of his father’s territories, including the principality of Calenberg, which included Hanover; thus, he succeeded to the title of Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg. This unanticipated development in his political status spurred his ambition to increase his political power and join the other influential German countries that had the status of Prince Electorate.

The “Kurfürsten,” Prince-electors of the Holy Roman Empire, were the members of the electoral college that elected the Holy Roman Emperor. From the Middle Ages, the empire never achieved the extent of political unification as was formed in the west, in France. It evolved instead into a decentralized, limited elective monarchy, composed of many sub-units: kingdoms, principalities, duchies, counties, prince-bishoprics, Free Imperial Cities, and other domains. While the various princes, lords, bishops, and cities of the empire owed the emperor their allegiance, they also possessed extensive privileges that gave them de facto independence within their territories. It could be said that, in one way or the other, all Holy Roman Emperors considered their vassals to be the descendants of those who ruled the lands of Charlemagne’s empire.

To obtain this coveted position of Prince-elector, the Duke had to fulfill major conditions. In 1683, Ernst August instituted primogeniture, which had the effect of ensuring that his territory would not be further subdivided between his heirs after his death, a pre-condition for obtaining the coveted electorate. Physical action was taken to demonstrate his support to the Holy Roman Empire: Ernst August rallied Leopold I, Holy Roman Emperor, in the Great Turkish War and gained military recognition. Two of the duke’s sons were less fortunate and died in battles in 1690 and 1691. These demonstrations of allegiance to the empire were balanced by the necessity of establishing lineage and ancestry: the families of the various electors could trace their origins back to the time of Charlemagne (742–814), considered then to be the first emperor, and Ernst August had to prove that his Guelph lineage was as ancient as the other electoral families.

Ernst August was primarily concerned with increasing his political power, and to this end assigned Leibniz a task that was to be the thinker’s pursuit for the rest of his life: writing a complete history of the House of Brunswick. “I dig up various things from archives, inspect old records, and gather unpublished manuscripts. From these things I try to shed light on the history of Brunswick,” Leibniz summarized. The new duke showed little interest in the details of this mission, but his wife Sophie was interested and, during the years 1686–1692, she took great care of the history of the Guelph dynasty. The Electress took Leibniz under her personal protection and for more than thirty years carried on a written correspondence with the thinker, who acted as an intellectual beacon for Hanover and its reputation. Leibniz’s first major undertaking was to establish the clear lineage of Ernst August, going back to the medieval Saxon duke Henry the Lion.

Steffani’s operas for Munich conveyed aristocratic virtues and moral lessons, inspired by mythology and Greco-Roman antiquity supported by the edifying ambition of Jesuit theater. These elements were transformed to fit the frame of a clear political agenda when in 1688, after Niobe, Steffani moved from the service of the catholic Elector of Bavaria, Max II Emanuel, to the protestant Duke of Brunswick, Ernst August. The chivalric theme of Orlando generoso’s libretto, focusing on the famous paladin Roland, whose total allegiance to the Emperor Charlemagne became legendary, may well have been the original choice of Ernst August; indeed, around that time, the duke started imposing a cultural policy to demonstrate the authenticity of his noble lineage and to support his claim to be worthy of being elevated to the Electorate.

Prestige could also be acquired by means of history, and for this last aspect Ernst August could have not been better equipped than to have Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) at his devoted service. Aside from a patron’s political agenda, the second influence which dominates Orlando generoso is the impact of the polymath Leibniz, whose intellectual brilliance was starting to dazzle Europe around this time. In December 1676, after working for the Elector of Mainz, Leibniz took the position of Court Councilor in Hanover. His duties were varied and included being a political advisor, a technical consultant, and most importantly a librarian and historian. Three years after Leibniz arrived in Hanover, Johann Friedrich of Brunswick died. Leibniz passed into the service of his brother, Ernst August, in 1679.
From 1687 to 1690 Leibniz travelled through France, southern Germany, Austria, and Italy to gather the historical material needed to write the history of the House of Brunswick. His path led him in 1688 to Munich where Steffani had just composed Niobe. In March 1688, Leibniz approached Max II Emanuel to gain access to the Bavarian ducal archives, which he obtained. In early April Leibniz visited the library twice. However, the permission was withdrawn, because of an alleged administrative mistake made by Leibniz in his request. In fact, due to Hanover increasing’s power, the Bavarians feared that Leibniz might be engaged in political espionage. Leibniz asked Steffani to intervene, and even if the composer’s efforts on Leibniz’s behalf were in vain, there is no doubt that this episode fomented a good relationship between the two polymaths. Leibniz could report to Electress Sophie: “Mr. Agostino Steffani [sic], who is full of a true devotion to Your Serene Highness and only speaks of [you] with transports of veneration as well as well as of my Serene Master, assisted me greatly and granted me all sorts of favors, as did his brother.”

Electress Sophie had Leibniz’s letter read aloud to her by her secretary: “Mr Hortance has delighted me with your letter from Munich, which made me realize that as you have been so busy researching things of the past you have forgotten to send some news to those of the present.” This reader who the Francophile Electress familiarly calls “Mr Hortance” is Bartolomeo Ortensio Mauro, who would soon write the librettos of all Steffani’s Hanoverian operas, including Orlando generoso. Born in Verona in 1632 or 1633, Abbate Mauro had served the Duke of Brunswick since 1679, and was Duchess Sophie’s personal secretary, writing in German, French, Italian, and Latin. This distinguished linguist was, with the ducal couple, one of the first to know about the progress Leibniz was making in his research. Soon, an idea germinated in the mind of the Ernst August: an official order brought Leibniz back to Hanover as the Duke was “inclining to have an opera produced on the history of Henry the Lion, at which your presence and opinions could be very necessary.”

The discovery proving that Henry was an ancestor of Ernst August had to be made known to the world by all available means, even if the book Leibniz was preparing was not yet ready for publication (it would never be completed). A European campaign of communication was initiated by the polymath, thanks to his multiple contacts: the news was spread all over Europe and genealogy books were to be revised. In Hanover, the Rittersaal of the Leineschloss (Leine Palace) was redecorated, in the medieval tradition, with family portraits and coats of arms, displaying the lineage newly curated by Leibniz. For the general people of Hanover, an opera was also a good medium to touch many. With the clear intention to make opera a recurrent event in his capital, Ernst August employed Steffani as composer in residence, ordered the Hanoverian court poet Mauro to write librettos and, to assure a permanent visibility to his patronage, commissioned a new opera house for his city palace. Henrico Leone, Steffani and Mauro’s first opera by for Hanover, was created there in January 1689.

In September 1688, Sophie had written to Leibniz, “It does not stop us from making a big building in your library to play the opera this winter. It is Signor Hortense [Mauro] who is composing the play of Henry the Lion. I believe that we have taken this subject so that posterity will not forget all the states that formerly belonged to that house [of Brunswick].” Ortensio Mauro, who was Sophie of the Palatinate’s secretary between 1684 and 1704, proclaimed in his libretto the lineage and status of the house of Brunswick-Lüneburg. The subject, a famous victory of Henry the Lion, was chosen by Duke Ernst August of Hanover to promote the idea of unifying Brandenburg, Celle, Wolfenbüttel, and Hanover. By this pedigree, Henrico Leone is already remarkable on its own. But the piece also sheds some special light on Orlando generoso. Both operas are based on the life of a knight: Henry the Lion, the most powerful German prince of the twelfth century and the French paladin of ninth century, Roland.

While Henrico Leone was still being performed, Leibniz, continuing to travel around for his research, made new discoveries. This led to a new medieval reference for another opera. In January 1689, Leibniz wrote to Sophie: “Madame. Since His Serene Highness the Duke of Modena offered me [...] the use of his archives, as much as it will be necessary to clarify the common origin of the two Serene Houses of Brunswick and Este, I did not balance if it was necessary to take advantage of it and I am about to go to Italy. For this is where we must look for the main point of history, which remains to be clarified. And it is certain that the most remote male ancestors of Brunswick’s house come from there.” And Sophie, who was then enjoying the first opera of Steffani written for Hanover, replied to Leibniz, “I believed you on the

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way to come to see our Henrico Leone whose history you want to write, but in what I see, you want to go further to seek its origin, so that those who come after us, do not have to seek ours. This is how you want to make us immortal, but when I read history, I can hardly remember the names of the heroes.”

During his time in Modena, Leibniz was eventually able to give the duchess “the name of the heroes” she would have no difficulty in remembering: his archival researches showed a connection between Ernst August’s lineage and the famed and antique Este family. In fact, he found a document from 1154 proving that the two branches, the Guelph and the Este, both descended from Duke Henry the Lion of Saxony and Bavaria. The Este, or Estensi, who received the family’s Italian possessions were from the younger line, and in the course of time acquired Ferrara, Reggio, and Modena. Orlando generoso’s libretto specifically mentions these medieval family roots, when the character Bradamante meditates on the prophecy that her union with the knight Ruggiero will produce an illustrious descendance: “di Guelfi et Estensi” (of Guelphs and Estensi). This line in Steffani’s opera refers directly to a passage in Ariosto’s Orlando furioso (III.16–59) where a magician foretells that Bradamante will marry Ruggiero and give birth to the house of Este. Along with Roland, martial Bradamante and valiant Ruggiero are also heroes found in Ariosto’s epic. And indeed, the libretto of Orlando generoso is greatly indebted to Orlando furioso.

The subject and characters of Steffani’s Orlando generoso come directly from the epic poem by the Italian writer Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533). In Munich, Steffani’s operas were based on historical or mythological figures, from Greek or Roman fables. In Hanover, a new style had been started with Henrico Leone and like Henry, Orlando was first an historical figure before being a legendary one: the Frankish knight Roland, who died in 778. This legend is recounted in La Chanson de Roland (the Song of Roland), a “Chanson de geste” based on the actual Battle of Roncevaux Pass in 778 during the reign of Emperor Charlemagne. This major work of French literature exists in various manuscript versions; this testifies to its enormous and enduring popularity in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries. In this medieval epic, Charlemagne’s army is fighting the Muslims who ambush the rear guard of the emperor’s army in the Pyrenean mountains. The overwhelmed Christians plead with Roland to blow his horn to call for help, but Roland believes that blowing his horn in the middle of the battle would be an act of cowardice. After a bloody fight, the Christians are outnumbered, and Roland, knowing that Charlemagne’s army is now safely away, blows his olifant (horn) to warn them until his temples burst, and he dies a martyr’s death. Angels take the soul of the knight to Paradise for his devotion to the Christian emperor.

Thanks to literature, the character of Roland acquired a new importance that goes far beyond the historical record: in the twelfth century, a version of the French poem was translated—via Latin—into the Middle High German Rolandslied by Konrad der Pfaffe, a monk. A comparison with the French original, as we know it, reveals several quite significant additions to the original Chanson. In addition to the translation replacing French topics with generically Christian ones, it greatly praises Bavaria, Konrad’s patron. In the epilogue of the Heidelberg manuscript, the most complete version still extant, we learn from the monk that the French original was procured for him by “Duke Henry,” at whose request he composed his translation. As the poem was composed between 1173 and 1177, it has been supposed that this duke was Henry the Lion (1156–1180). Leibniz, during his research into the lineage of Ernst August, may well have stumbled upon the manuscript, as he was exploring the connection between Henry and Ernst August. History was used by Konrad as vehicle for propaganda purposes, for Charlemagne is depicted in Rolandslied as the model Christian emperor, while Roland is the loyal Christian knight who loses his life in battle holding to his holy oath of allegiance to the Emperor.

The exploits of Roland had been recounted in earlier literature, but Ariosto’s monumental poem is the crowning glory of the tradition. Ariosto’s own poem is itself a continuation of the epic Orlando innamorato...
In Ariosto, Orlando is also a fearless and almost invincible knight, but he becomes infatuated with the beautiful princess Angelica and, driven mad by his obsession, forgets his duties to the Christian Emperor. Boiardo’s poem first modified the image of the knight from chivalric paragon to obsessed lover, but Ariosto’s choice of the word “furioso” to follow Boiardo’s “innamorato” refers to the knight’s frantic obsession caused by unreciprocated love. Ariosto’s Orlando’s furioso is worked out in detail, often ostensibly complicated in plot, as Ariosto adds another main story line to the tale of Roland, one not in the Frankish original, by including the loving characters of Ruggiero and Bradamante. This creative decision is a literary courtesy to his patrons the Este, a noble Italian family whose lineage is then traced to the valiant couple. Both stories unfold against the backdrop of the Emperor Charlemagne’s holy war, involve hundreds of characters—princes, warriors, princesses, damsels, magicians, monsters—and range across the whole of Europe and beyond.

Orlando generoso condenses Ariosto’s universe into three acts. In Mauro and Steffani’s opera, like in Ariosto’s poem, two main lines are clear: the knight Orlando’s madness caused by his one-sided love for the princess Angelica and the reciprocated and possessive loves of Ruggiero and Bradamante. The first line is the most developed in psychological terms; the second line offers a number of events, and involves magic. Besides its relevance to the Este dynasty, the story of Ruggiero had already been featured in opera because of its suitability for spectacular stage effects: in Florence in 1625 by Francesca Caccini for La Liberazione di Ruggiero dell’isola d’Alcina and in Venice in 1650 for La Bradamante, perhaps with music composed by Francesco Cavalli. In Versailles in 1664, Molière and Lully extended the “Ruggiero” theme to create a multi-day spectacle with Les Plaisirs de l’Ile Enchantée. The primary line centered around Roland and Angelica/Medoro had inspired Lo sposalizio di Medoro e di Angelica by Marco da Gagliano and Jacopo Peri in Florence in 1619 and Angelica in India in Venice in 1656. Noteworthy for its connection with Hanover is Il Medoro, performed in 1658 in Venice on a libretto by Aurelio Aureli, which was dedicated to Ernst August and an elder brother of his during their Carnival stay in that city. It may not be by chance that the preface of this libretto refers to the figures of Alessandro and Medoro, as these two heroes will later be found in the first operas presented in Hanover after Henrico Leone.

While every one of these entertainments had involved one group of characters or the other, Orlando generoso is the first to associate both groups. Although Mauro’s libretto gives each equal importance, the magic spectacle is reserved for Ruggiero while the psychological aspects are more developed with the character of Orlando. The depiction of his obsession for Angelica and the culmination of it in madness was propitious for complex music painting, a potential that had previously been exploited by Quinault.
and Lully in 1685 for their “tragédie en musique,” Roland. As was demonstrated by the French libretto, the story of Roland could easily provide the entire content of an opera and Mauro, who had already adapted librettos by Quinault for Hanover, certainly knew it. But considering Leibniz’s recent genealogical discoveries, another reason to include Ruggiero and Bradamante was they were considered to be the legendary founders of the Guelph/Este dynasty. In choosing to add other valorous paladins beyond the main character of Orlando, and incorporating the reference to Ariosto’s patron, Mauro’s libretto shows the hand of Leibniz: the Este and Guelph houses were united in their lavish patronage and the opera stage of Carnival was a splendid way to proclaim it.

Leibniz may have viewed the transfer of the library to leave space for a theater with interest. In fact, while in Paris from 1672 to 1676, Leibniz had enjoyed Lully’s first efforts at opera, and although his views on spectacles were shaped by his religious convictions, his protestant resistance to such an entertainment so connected with catholic Italy was put aside, for he was convinced that opera could have a positive moral impact: “It is necessary to snare the world in the trap, to take advantage of its weakness, and to deceive it in order to heal it.” According to Leibniz, opera could be spiritually very effective because its combinative nature appealed to both internal and external senses. In Orlando generoso, alongside the knightly quests and love affairs, trickster Brunello punctuates the action and offers comic relief for what is after all an opera about the search for identity intended to be performed during Carnival, a period of masks and disguises. The sense of irony and the humor contained in the poetry of Orlando furioso becomes, in Mauro’s hands, a pervasive element in his opera. There are distinct aspects of light-heartedness and playfulness in the situations the librettist creates for the stage, both in terms of the characters’ encounters and their choices of what to say. The duke’s interest for spectacles in Venice, where he had thrown royal entertainments in 1685 and 1686 to celebrate his military alliance with the Republic, demonstrated his understanding of the benefits of devising entertainments that can both convey the princely metaphor and satisfy a more general public.

During his stays in Venice, Ernst August had many opportunities to satisfy his senses while also admiring the opera houses and notably their machines suitable for creating stage effects, an art for which Venetians were renowned all over Europe. The influence of Italian theater architecture can also be seen in the new opera house that Ernst August commissioned from his architect Girolamo Sartorio (1642–1707). Beginning in 1667, Sartorio was the “Bauverwalter” (Building Administrator or first architect) in the service of the Dukes in Hanover; he led significant construction projects that elevated the city to the rank of other European capitals. The expansion of the Leineschloss Palace, in the very center of Hanover, was his primary responsibility, and there he built a theater suitable to the Duke’s ambition. Although he became a citizen of the principality in 1674, Sartorio was born in Venice. Coming from a musical family—he was the younger brother of composers Antonio Sartorio (1630–1680) and Gasparo Sartorio (1625–1680)—Girolamo had some experience in the field of opera architecture. Indeed, he had previously designed the first commercial opera house in Germany, the “Oper am Gänsemarkt” in Hamburg, which had opened.

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In 1689, Duchess Sophie had written to Leibniz that “[his] library has become a theater where the most beautiful opera spectacles of the world have been represented. Signor Hortense makes the verses and Signor Steffani who has been to Mr. the Elector of Bavaria, the music.” So close was the relation between Leibniz and the dukedom that the ducal library was thought of as his. The new location confirmed this relation: after different projects selected for the new site, the private quarters of the philosopher would ultimately include the collection. The transfer of the Hanoverian library to leave space to create a theater was decided when the Duke realized that the existing court theater was too small to display the majestic opera he had in mind, which included flying effects and multiple changes of scenery.
in 1678. The new opera house in Hanover was described as “being the best painted and the best contriv’d in all Europe” by Irish traveler John Toland (1670–1722) in 1702; it was so ingenious that three plates describing its interior were included in an architectural book published in 1748, sixty years after its construction.

The general floor plan, in form of a horseshoe, shows that Sartorio designed a house for Hanover based on its Venetian contemporaries, as the auditorium was divided in boxes like a commercial house. But in Hanover, opera was offered by the Duke to the city for free. Toland alluded to this in the account of his 1702 visit: “There is a pretty Theatre with handsome Lodges for all Qualities [ranks of society]; for nobody pays Money that goes to a Play there, the Prince, as in some other Courts of Germany, being at all the expense to entertain the town as well as the Court.” Above the stage, as a deliberate reminder of his patronage, the proscenium flaunted the name and rank of Ernst August under his coat of arms. A plan of the building included a cross-section displaying the complex carpentry which allowed stunning effects to be presented. Apparitions from under the deep stage could seemingly materialize and vanish thanks to a large trapdoor, and flying effects, coming from the large space above the proscenium, were also feasible.

Steffani’s operas for Hanover all have deities and magicians appearing by magic and the fascination of the period for the mechanical effects certainly played a part in the success of the spectacle. Flying dragons and enchanted castles abound in Orlando generoso, reminiscent of medieval legends that found echoes in the heraldic bestiary in Ernst August’s coat of arms above the stage. Horses and birds are so often found in the chivalric poems that Mauro’s libretto unsurprisingly gave a significant role to the hippocyph, the monster invented by Ariosto, made of the front of an eagle and back of a horse. As with other librettos of the period, Orlando generoso elaborates creatively on the interaction between narrative appropriation, creative extrapolation, and encomiastic intention. To the main Roland plot, the zealous librettist added—likely under the advice of Leibniz—some events related to the stories of the founders of the Este dynasty: Ruggiero is trailed by the wizard Atlante, who brought him up as a Saracen and wants to prevent him from marrying Bradamante, a Christian warrior princess favored and protected by the good sorceress Melissa.

The libretto of Orlando generoso is printed in three languages: the sung verses of the drama are in Italian, while detailed synopses in both French and German assured that the Hanoverian audience and any visitors would be able to follow the eventful story. In Mauro’s libretto, the knight Orlando has fallen in love with Angelica. He does not know that she has married Medoro, an African soldier of low birth, whom she had found wounded and nursed back to health. Forgetting his duties to his uncle Charlemagne, the knight has followed the princess to the empire of her father, Galafro, king of Cathay. There, when Orlando discovers that he has been deceived again and again, he goes mad and is only restored to sanity through renouncing his need to be loved by Angelica. The characters arrive in China by means of travel (Roland’s group) or magic (Este group).

The stage of Hanover was suitable for such a complex display involving natural and supernatural causalities. An image of the stage attempts to show how it incorporated two different methods for positioning the sets in its volume: with more or less depth, enhancing the intimacy or grandeur created by the sets. Johan Oswald Harms (1643–1708), a prolific stage designer in north Germany at the time, watched over the furnishing of the theater’s stage equipment machinery. Although it is not clearly recorded, it is nevertheless likely that Harms also painted some “repertoire” shutters and backdrops which could be used for any opera, a customary practice at the time. Most opera librettos call for a forest scene, a palace, a sea shore, and so on. Although Mauro’s work for Hanover generally follows these rules, Orlando generoso requires a very special group of sets not often found in contemporaneous librettos. As most of the action takes place in China, this exotic location may have prompted the design of special scenery, which certainly contributed to the appeal of the production.

In a few successful winter seasons, Ernst August had managed to put Hanover on the cultural map of Europe’s best. In 1693, a countess’s report to the Queen of Sweden is a good summary of the success of the Hanover opera house: “The Theatre is built in a very noble style, the stage is broad, and the painted sets are wondrously beautiful.” Another expression of the desire of the Hanoverian court to use the stage as an active vehicle for its prestige can also be seen in the Duke’s summer palace of Herrenhausen, conceived as retreat from his busy capital. In Herrenhausen, “The Garden is delicate indeed, the Water-works great and noble, the Basins and Fountains extremely large.” Beginning in 1683, and for over three decades, the French-born Martin Charbonnier (1655–1720), the main gardener, shaped the geometrical gardens in the style established by Versailles. This grand design, which associates symbolic agency and political agenda, can be seen in the majestic outdoor theater created between 1689 and 1693, concurrently with the winter opera house: “There are beautiful Cascades, and there is a perfect Theatre excellently cut out into green Seats, the dressing-rooms for the Actors being so many Bowers and Summer-houses on each side, the whole set off with many fine Statues, most of ‘em gilt.” The gardens were to become Duchess Sophie’s major artistic preoccupation. “The garden is my life,” she once admitted, and she could see as its main creator.
Room 5: Kunstkabinett

Sophie’s first goal was for the gardens in Hanover to be as beautiful as those seen in France and those she enjoyed in Holland where she had been brought up. In the palace of Herrenhausen, the “Spiegelzimmer,” the mirror room, was also influenced by the Netherlands; the mirrors that gave Sophie’s favorite room its name were not intended to replicate crowds of courtiers, like the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles did, but served as the reflective background for her large porcelain collection, therefore its alternate appellation of “Spiegelkabinet.” The blue and white china pieces were arranged in the fashion of a Dutch curiosity cabinet, certainly under the influence of Leibniz, for whom the learning function of such a “Kunstkammer” was manifest. In a collector’s cabinet, the apparent disparity of objects on display illustrated the many paths of intellectual exploration one could undertake. As porcelain originally came from China, the exhibited objects in Herrenhausen could show both geographic and historical perspectives.

Since Marco Polo (1254–1324) reported that, during his time in China, he had seen ceramic reminiscent of the shiny surface of a shell he called “porcella,” this analogy had given porcelain its name. The “blue and white” developed and was widespread in China as early as the fourteenth century. From the sixteenth century, some of this production was destined to be exported to Europe, where it was highly sought after. Thus the “blue and white” became for Europe the symbol of China, hence the name “china” given in English to porcelain. When the Portuguese established relations with China, they obtained the consent of the imperial government to settle in Macao, and they were allowed to buy large quantities of Chinese porcelain in Canton which they imported to Lisbon. From there, this ceramic with blue decoration on white background spread throughout Europe. The Dutch companies later broke Portugal’s monopoly and imported porcelain in northern Europe. For a while, civil wars in China slowed Portuguese and Dutch trade, but during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor (1654–1722) of the Qing dynasty, an expansion of the trade was undertaken. By the 1690s, objects made of china had become widely distributed outside of Portugal and the Netherlands. It was not many years before European craftsmen and artists began to imitate the sought-after Chinese porcelain.

By the last part of the seventeenth century the fashion soon to be known as “chinoiserie” was born in Europe. Chinoiserie became a multifaceted phenomenon that took many different shapes and produced a wide variety of artifacts. Through the centuries China has fascinated, seduced, and puzzled the western world as no other culture or country has ever done. First as a huge, mighty, and wealthy silk-producing kingdom named Cathay that was idealized as a possible ally against or of the Saracens (like in Ariosto). After the sixteenth century, distant China was perceived as a peaceful paradise of wisdom, social justice, and wealth, and it served as a kind of utopia. This dream place is where most of the action of Orlando generoso occurs. In this aspect, the libretto follows the fashion of chinoiserie and should be considered as an homage to and as a witness of the fascination the Chinese empire was exercising on Europeans.

The intrigue and allure of such a counter-image of Europe prompted the creation of books that would have a long-lasting influence on the image of China. The most important was Nieuhof’s pictorial account of the first Dutch embassy, undertaken from 1655 to 1657 with aim of improving trade relations between the Republic and the Empire. Johan Nieuhof (1618–1672) accompanied a delegation of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) to China in 1655. After his return, he had his journals published in Amsterdam in 1665. The book was one of the great bestsellers of its time and remained the most important source of European knowledge about China until the end of the eighteenth century, mostly due to its illustrations. During his trip Nieuhof had indeed drawn Chinese people, their usages and customs. The engravings illustrating his book were copied many times by others: they are the basis of much European chinoiserie. His view of the imperial palace in “Peking” (Beijing) clearly influenced many designers, including Harms in his drawings of Orlando generoso’s scenery. The same etching had also had an effect in France and, through Versailles, may have influenced Hanoverian design.

In the park of Versailles, Louis XIV had built the “Trianon de Porcelaine” in 1670 to “spend some hours of the day during the heat of the summer.” The roofs and walls of this little pleasure pavilion were covered by ceramic tiles.
and its cornice was ornamented with urns made of blue and white faience. The erection of the building was so quick that the Trianon de Porcelaine was judged to be an “enchantment” and the fashion spread so rapidly that the monthly magazine *Mercure Galant* could write in 1673: “The Trianon of Versailles has given birth to the aim in all individuals to have one: almost all the great lords who have country houses have built one in their parks and individuals at the end of their gardens.” Duchess Sophie surely viewed the Trianon de Porcelaine in Versailles when she was visiting France in the year 1679. Her visit of the gardens where she saw “all that was to be seen” was summed up in a few more thoughtful words: “Versailles, where spending is doing more wonders than nature.” Next to the Trianon de Porcelaine, which displayed the production of French factories, the famous fountains, testimony to the feats of water engineers, were turned on in her honor by order of Louis XIV, and everything was done to give the future Electress a royal treatment.

French influence was significant at the time, whether in war or in peace, and the French court set the standard for what was considered to be in good taste in the German countries. In the musical arts this French influence was balanced by Italy, but the performances of Lully’s *Psyché* in Hanover in 1684 and *Thésée* in Wolfenbüttel in 1687 demonstrate the popularity of French opera in the principalities of north Germany during Steffani’s time. On one of these occasions, *Mercure galant* reported that “the court of Hanover, which follows all the fashions of that of France, imitates it also in its divertissements.” The choice to set most of the action of *Orlando generoso* in China may have been first influenced by Ernst August’s memory of *Il Medoro*, which he had enjoyed in Venice in 1658. But then again, Quinault’s libretto for the creation of Lully’s *Roland* in 1685 in Versailles had also set the action in Cathay; Lully’s *Roland* was performed in Ansbach the following year, where Steffani, still active in Bavaria, may have heard it. In 1691, in the same month that Steffani’s opera was created in Hanover, *Roland* was revived in the new marble-built Trianon that had replaced the Trianon de Porcelaine in Versailles. The performances of Lully’s opera at court may have been the opportunity for Berain, the chief designer in France, to design chinoiserie sets, and the third act’s divertissement, where the people pay homage to Princess Angelica, probably saw a parade of costumes inspired by Chinese decorative arts.

Since the first Jesuit mission to China in 1582, the European religious order had gained credit in the Chinese empire thanks to their knowledge of mathematics and astronomy. It may not be a coincidence that the same year Lully’s *Roland* was created in Versailles, France was about to send its first Jesuit mission to China. After their arrival in Peking in 1688, the French Jesuits sent many documents back to Europe, which were then widely disseminated. Everything coming from the Far East excited curiosity: not only the visual and decorative arts, but the questions of philosophy and spirituality. In 1692, the year of the revival of *Orlando generoso*, the Kangxi Emperor of the Qing dynasty issued an Edict of Toleration, allowing the free practice of Christianity in China. This prompted some deep interest in the Chinese forms of religion. The high degree of religious tolerance was commented on all over Europe. Leibniz himself had been fascinated for many years by China and the possibilities its civilization represented for the progress of European thoughts and faith.

The decision by Mauro and Steffani to set the resolution of their *Orlando generoso* in China was certainly approved,
if not suggested, by the Sinophile philosopher. As a naturalist, jurist, metaphysician, mathematician, and philologist, Leibniz was interested by all aspects of the Chinese civilization. Keeping a sturdy correspondence with the French Jesuit missionaries who had lived there, the theologian in him was fascinated by the question of the Chinese religious rites. The celestial empire was a suitable place for the spiritual awakening of Orlando and the revelation he experiences at the end of the opera. It is in Cathay, an appellation also given to China in Ariosto’s epic, that Orlando will become “furioso” and, more importantly for Hanover, “generoso.” The choice of Cathay as the unlikely place where the “generosity” of Orlando was to be revealed may have been influenced by Leibniz’s thinking. In a letter to Sophie, the philosopher reflected that “Often God to open the eyes to man, and to give him some reflection, makes use of an occasion which seems remote, and is not sufficient in itself; but as she finds man in a certain disposition and the matter prepared, she does a great deal.” At the end of the opera, Orlando is alone in a dungeon and undergoes a period of introspection. Isolated in his cell, where has been put by the Chinese emperor so he “will no longer be a laughing-stock to the world,” the knight reflects on the destructive potential of his obsession for Angelica. Separated from the rest of the world, Orlando returns to his senses in a very different way than the magical end of Ariosto’s epic poem, where his reason is retrieved from the Moon by a fellow knight. In Orlando generoso, the spiritual awakening of the knight is of a very different nature: by his generosity he reaches another level of being.

That may be the reason why Mauro’s witty preface for his libretto does not expressly acknowledge the debt he owes to Ariosto but instead declares that the characters and actions of the libretto are so familiar to everyone that they needed no further introduction: “So well-known are the characters, and the mishaps, which are in the Drama, that to make them better known nothing else is needed.” In truth, Roland, Ruggiero, and Bradamante were all chivalric figures well-suited to undertake new adventures, and Mauro’s prefatory comments first stressed the importance of making all the adjustments necessary to the original in order to produce an enjoyable spectacle. But when it comes to justifying the title of his opera, Mauro explains further that “there is more verisimilitude in what concerns the moral of the story, and particularly, for Orlando, when he returns to his senses, and when, with a generous heart, he distances himself from his amorous weakness.” The spectacle of Chivalry was still an object of “verisimilitude” in the seventeenth century due to its connection with genealogy. It was the display of chivalric values associated with nobility that made the story relevant for the Duke and the audience of Hanover: how a Knight would overcome his self-interest, how his “generous heart” made him a true hero, was the point.

At a first glance, Mauro’s title is suggested by Ariosto’s canto IX, stanza 4, which begins: “Di tanto core è il generoso Orlando, / che non degna ferir gente che dorma.” The English seems straightforward: “The generous Orlando has such a heart, / That he would not deign to harm people who sleep.” This adjective “generoso” had a rich meaning in the seventeenth century; a contemporaneous Italian dictionary defines it as expressive of: “Generosity. Nobility, and grandeur of soul, drawn from known and noble begetting.” It is noteworthy that a German translation of Ariosto uses for the above passage the adjective “eldermütige,” which generally means “noble.” The Hanoverian audience of the seventeenth century knew about the love and madness of Orlando; in 1691, the opera was to show how the paladin became “generoso,” truly noble, at the end of the story. After displaying the exploits of Henry and his leonine courage, Hanover opera was focusing on Orlando’s spiritual deed revealing his noble heart. Knowing that Leibniz, as a genealogist, influenced the creation of both Henrico Leone and Orlando generoso because of their capacity to display the lineage of the Duke and his connection with the Este, the main point of “generoso” had to express this attitude toward the character and was an opportunity to reflect Leibniz’s philosophy on love.

Leibniz had already attempted a definition of love in his Confessio philosophi of 1673, where to a question of a Theologian “But what is ‘to love’?”, he had the Philosopher answer, “To be delighted by the happiness of another.” In 1677, he elaborated even more and added: “or to experience pleasure upon the happiness of another. I define this as true love.” In Steffani’s opera, Orlando, who suffered madness due to his obsession with Angelica, finally gives up his desire to be loved by her by admitting that her happiness is with Medoro, and he is therefore restored to reason by experiencing “true love.” His act of renunciation was understood as a true expression of nobility. This meaning is confirmed by a short text written by Leibniz around 1687 and simply titled On generosity, which gives all the keys: “Generosity according to the proper meaning of the word is the virtue that elevates us to perform actions that are worthy of our kind, nature, extraction, or origin […] Thus generosity by which is originally meant the virtue of true nobility is taken generally for virtue.” In a letter to Sophie dated 1697 he summarized: “To love is to find pleasure in the good, perfection, and happiness of others.” The only way for Orlando to escape from his cell of loneliness and isolation, both figuratively and metaphorically, is to truly love.
In the late part of the seventeenth century, the Hanoverian court became one of the most lavish of Germany, emulating the Bavarian court from which it lured away the opera composer Agostino Steffani. In Hanover, political ambition led to a flourishing culture. With Ernst August of Brunswick as a new patron, Steffani’s work made him a kind of “German composer”—not so much for setting German lyrics in music, since Italian was still the idiom chosen by Mauro, the librettist, to be sung in opera, but because his music would become the vehicle of a certain German identity-making. As in his previous operas for Munich, Steffani’s Orlando generoso reflects numerous social and moral values of the period. In Hanover, a specific element of propaganda would be added to these various influences, helping to formalize some key elements of Ernst August’s political agenda in the minds of the audience.

Steffani’s opera was first staged in German in 1696, as Der großmüthige Roland in the Hamburg opera house, where it was greatly admired by the non-aristocratic audience. The vicissitudes of this adaptation trace a short history of its perception. The refined translator, Gottlieb Fiedler (1675–1705), tried not to change a note of the “Incomparable Musique” to fit the German words, but his use of the adjective “großmüthige” in the German title emphasizes the elitist notions of chivalry, generous or magnanimous, present in the libretto. There were also productions of Der großmüthige Roland in Brunswick later in the decade and again in Hamburg in 1707. The special approach of Steffani and Mauro, under the eyes of Leibniz, proved to be a successful operatic treatment of the figure of Orlando, a knight whose rooted nobility is revealed by generosity and true love.

—Gilbert Blin
When we decided to do Steffani’s *Orlando generoso* as our centerpiece opera for 2019, we first contacted Colin Timms, the Steffani expert who quite literally wrote the book on Steffani. Colin had made his own edition of the piece from the manuscript which represents the original version performed at the Hanover court in 1691 and kindly offered to share the files with us.

If we had simply cast and done that version, there would have been little left to do. But since *Orlando* was Steffani’s most popular opera, it was also the most often revived—once in Hanover in 1692 and then several times in Hamburg over the following years. There is a complete performance score from the 1692 revival in which several roles are substantially rewritten—obviously in order to accommodate different singers than the ones who had sung in 1691. There are no performance scores surviving from the Hamburg revivals, but one result of the popularity of *Orlando* was the publication of arias from the opera in nearby Lübeck in 1699: *Arien aus der Oper Roland*. This publication was of particular interest to us, not only for the supplemental information of various kinds, but in particular the fact that the arias for the title role of Orlando are printed here for tenor, as opposed to the 1691 version for alto and the 1692 version for soprano. We were now faced with a fundamental decision about who we would cast in the title role—and from which voice type. As performed in Hanover in 1691, the role was almost certainly sung by an alto castrato (possibly the experienced Ferdinando Chiaravalle), and in 1692 most likely a soprano castrato—leaving only the inferred tenor in Hamburg as a voice type that we could replicate in our own production. Beyond that, the communal experience of our whole production team—which we have gathered over many productions with Aaron Sheehan—made Aaron our first choice as the protagonist for this production. From this one decision an editorial odyssey was launched.

The details of the adaptation of a role will not be of interest to the general public, but since this practice—adapting roles to suit different singers and voice types from one production of an opera to another—was then the rule rather than the exception (very notably in the operas of Handel), being able to observe the details of how Steffani accomplished it was fascinating to me. Arias, most obviously, needed to be in different keys from the original version, but the more complex question is how to adapt the recitative sections to accommodate the new singer while leaving the other roles (as far as possible) untouched. In general, this is achieved by recomposition of the vocal line over a largely unchanged harmonic bass. These newly composed phrases need to suit the words as aptly as the original setting did while maintaining an equally convincing rapport with the harmonic structure. Being engaged with this process over several weeks gave me the exhilarating feeling of being inducted into Steffani’s workshop, with plentiful guidance from his own example.

It is a principal of the modern opera world to seek singers to fill unchanging and unchangeable roles in the standard opera literature—whereas it was a principal of operating practice in the Baroque and Classical opera world to change every role to suit the singer engaged for it. This is an element of “authenticity” which we would do well to revive.

—Stephen Stubbs
“A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...” With these words begin one of the most recognizable and exciting epics created for our modern era. We are as familiar with the fantastic characters and plots of Star Wars and its subsequent sequels (and prequels) as the late-17th-century audience would have been with Agostino Steffani and Ortensio Mauro’s spirited take on Ludovico Ariosto’s Orlando (itself an extension of an earlier Orlando by Boiardo).

By the time Orlando was first performed in Hanover in 1691, the definitive and widely published version of the Orlando was over 150 years old, and had spawned numerous stage adaptations. Composers and librettists worked hard to create their own innovative takes on the dense, episodic, poem. But, as with Star Wars, or epic adventures of the Wild West, or tales of exploration in the deep jungle, and so on, there are certain elements of plot and characterization in Orlando, that, when considered superficially, could act as a trigger for our modern sensitivities towards the appropriation of other cultures outside of the canon of Western Civilization and Eurocentric thought.

In addition to the magical wilds of the Pyrenees, with its fantastical castles in the sky, a large portion of Orlando takes place in the very real land of Cathay, an Empire with a succession of powerful dynasties on the landmass we now call China. Cathay would have been certainly considered “far, far away” to the European imagination, but the route of trade along the Silk Road had been providing Europe both luxuries and objects of everyday use (macaroni!) for countless decades. Europeans of this era saw in China a civilization of wealth and culture equal to their own. In fact, by the time of the premiere of Orlando, the concept of Chinoiserie had been widely established as a popular decorative style. European craftsmen tried to emulate the exquisite beauty of Chinese objects, landscaping, and architecture. It was a movement that lasted well into the eighteenth century, and beyond.

Jumping ahead to the nineteenth century, we find the abolishment of slavery, the height of European colonization, and the churn of the industrial revolution correlating with the rise of xenophobic/nationalistic tendencies in both Europe and America. These in turn reflect themselves in the popular culture of the moment, in uncountable, intentionally racist lampoons and parodies. At the same time, there is a growing interest in the appropriation of the artistic spoils of other cultures, which begins to appear in music (and in advertising), presenting a paying public with the concept of other cultures as, for example, dangerously passionate (Carmen), or alluringly submissive (Madama Butterfly). By the time we reach the middle of the twentieth century, these parodic stereotypes and tropes of exoticism are in full effect, and are most certainly being taken for granted by a Western, majority Caucasian audience—a problem modern artists and audiences have been left to untangle. Awareness of this problem is surely a start.

All of this is to say: this later historical context is simply not the one in which Orlando was created. From our close examination of the music and the libretto, we believe that the authors of our opera had nothing but excitement and good intentions in their presentation of a story set in foreign land and featuring foreign people. In a way, every person in the world of this opera is a stranger in a strange land of their own making. Steffani and Mauro do not treat the subject of foreigners with an ounce of parodic intention; there are political suspicions, certainly, but that just adds to the intrigue of meeting someone new from another place. Their motivation instead seems to be to expose the beautifully capricious inner psychologies of each of the individuals presented in this sensuous demi-comédie, just as Ariosto did in his epic poem. Luckily for us, they did it through the power of complex music and sublime spectacle. It is high-art fantasy in full force, and we strive to treat it and its subject matter with the respect it inspires. We hope you as an audience member are entertained and enchanted by this force. In other words, to perhaps boldly go where no essay on Baroque opera has gone before, “May the force be with You.”

—Seth Bodie

On Orlando and the Idea of Cultural Appropriation in the 21st Century