

# RANZCO Museum

## John Taylor from Norwich

*O shining, o serene eyes.*

The dramatic secular cantata composed by Georg Freidrich Handel relates how beautiful eyes cause the singer to languish and die. The second aria tells how blazing eyes cause both pleasure and death to the singer.

The brilliant 18<sup>th</sup> century composer, born in the same year as Bach, died in 1759, a respected and rich man rewarded with a state funeral in Westminster abbey.

Both Handel and Bach died blind. Their visual demise followed cataract surgery by the 18<sup>th</sup> century medical charlatan John Taylor from Norwich, who self-promoted and styled himself as "Chevalier. Ophthalmiater, Pontifical, Imperial, Royal."

His practice grew to him becoming the royal eye surgeon to King George II, touring Europe in a coach painted with eyes bearing the motto "*Qui dat videre dat viver*" – He who gives sight gives life.

Arriving in a town with attendants in livery, displaying his gold instruments, he gave self-promoting speeches prior to surgery as part of his travelling show. He performed cataract surgery by couching and strabismus surgery by bloodying the squinting eye without muscle surgery. He then patched the fellow's eye, so the bloody eye took up fixation, claiming great success.

Bach was blinded after two operations, with his sight succumbing to infection, which was treated with laxatives and venesection. Handel's blindness was followed by a rapid demise in health.

Writer Samuel Johnson noted that Taylors' life showed "an instance of how far impudence may carry ignorance".

At that time, eye surgery was primitive with no concept of bacterial infection or anaesthesia. Partial success in 1/3 of cases was the norm. However, procedures by a charlatan like Taylor carried greater risk.

Taylor died in obscurity in 1772, himself blind. Karma!

**Dr David Kaufman**  
Museum Curator

RANZCO  MUSEUM



*Handel the composer*

## *O lucenti, o sereni occhi*



*Ostentatious coach of Taylor the Ophthalmiater*