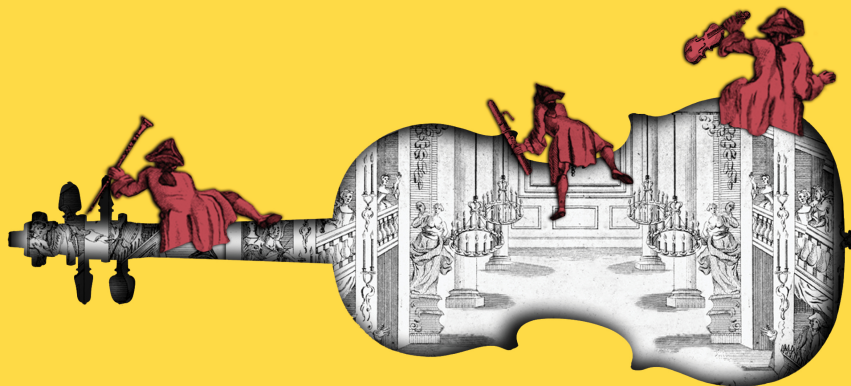


Handel's Unsung Heroes

LEO DUARTE · JOE QIU · THOMAS GOULD

LUCY CROWE · IESTYN DAVIES · CHRISTINE RICE

LA NUOVA MUSICA · DAVID BATES





HANDEL'S UNSUNG HEROES

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Teseo (1712)

1 Ouverture 4. 39

Rinaldo (1711)

2 Marcia 0. 52

3 Battaglia 1. 31

4 Or la tromba (*Davies, Sharp*) 3. 26

Alcina (1736)

5 Sta nell'Ircana pietrosa tana (*Rice, Montgomery, Walters*) 5. 58

Giulio Cesare in Egitto (1724)

6 Sinfonia (*Davies, Chance*) 0. 33

7 Recitativo: Cieli, e qual delle sfere (*Davies*) 0. 18

8 Sinfonia 0. 51

9 Recitativo: Giulio, che miri? (*Davies*) 0. 19

10 V'adoro, pupille (*Crowe, Duarte*) 4. 55

11 Se in fiorito ameno prato (*Davies, Gould*) 8. 04

Ariodante (1734)

12 Scherza infida (*Rice, Qiu*) 11. 27

Aci, Galatea e Polifemo (1708)

13 Qui l'augel da pianta in pianta (*Crowe, Duarte*) 10. 29

Rinaldo

14 Venti, turbini (*Davies, Gould, Qiu*) 3. 47

Rodrigo (1707)

15 Passacaille (*Gould*) 4. 24

Amadigi di Gaula (1715)

16 Pena tiranna (*Davies, Duarte, Qiu*) 5. 48

Agrippina (1709)

17 Se giunge un dispetto (*Crowe, Duarte*) 3. 19

Total playing time: 71. 16

Leo Duarte oboe

Joe Qiu bassoon

Thomas Gould violin

Paul Sharp trumpet

Roger Montgomery horn

Joseph Walters horn

Lucy Crowe soprano

Christine Rice mezzo-soprano

Iestyn Davies countertenor

Alexander Chance countertenor

La Nuova Musica — David Bates

La Nuova Musica — David Bates

Violin: Thomas Gould (leader), Liz MacCarthy, Davina Clarke, Sam Staples, Abel Balazs, Simon Jones (principal 2nd), Naomi Burrell, Andrej Kapor, Henry Tong

Viola: Jane Rogers, Jordan Bowron, Martin Kelly

Cello: Alex Rolton, Imogen Seth-Smith, Jacob Garside

Double bass: Judith Evans, Carina Cosgrave

Oboe/Recorder: Leo Duarte, Sarah Humphrys

Bassoon: Joe Qiu, Hayley Pullen

Horn: Roger Montgomery, Joseph Walters

Trumpet: Paul Sharp, Simon Munday, John Hutchins, Peter Mankarious

Timpani: Jude Carlton

Harp: Joseph McHardy, David Bates

Theorbo: David Miller

Harp: Joy Smith

Soprano: Lucy Crowe

Mezzo-soprano: Christine Rice

Countertenor: Iestyn Davies, Alexander Chance

General Manager: Lucy Bending

Producer: Rebecca Nathan

Fundraiser: Harriet Lawrence



Riot at Covent Garden Theatre, in 1763, in consequence of the Managers refusing to admit half-price in the Opera of Antiochus.

Satirical print (1763), **British Museum**, inspiration for album cover design

Handel's Orchestra and Players

London, in Handel's day, had more professional orchestras than any other city. Not much is known about many of the instrumentalists who played in these orchestras but we do know enough to shed some light on the lives of three unsung heroes for whom Handel wrote music on this disc.

The Italian violinist Pietro Castrucci, a pupil of Corelli who Handel had met in Rome, came to London in 1715 and became leader of Handel's Haymarket Theatre orchestra. Handel wrote the violin solo in *Se in fiorito* for Castrucci and it is thought that he might also be the inspiration for William Hogarth's *The Enraged Musician*. He died in poverty in Dublin in 1752 but was afforded a state funeral at which *the Dead March* from Handel's *Saul* was performed.

Jean Christian Kytch, a Dutch wind player who came to London around 1708, is

named as the recipient of the bassoon solos in the autograph score of *Rinaldo*. In 1738 he too died in poverty, his body found lying in the street near Piccadilly. Days later his two young children were seen driving asses down the street by three of Kytch's colleagues. His colleagues started the Fund for the Support of Decay'd Musicians and their Families, an organisation which Handel supported and which still exists today as the Royal Society of Musicians.

The German, John Ernst Galliard, was principal oboist for Handel when he produced *Teseo* and probably also *Amadigi*. Galliard produced his own theatre works, notably the 1712 opera *Calypso and Telemachus*, the last opera performed entirely in English at the Haymarket. Handel regarded Galliard's work so highly that he is reported, perhaps apocryphally, to have said he would sooner have composed *Calypso* than any of his own operas. Today, Galliard is

best remembered for his English translation of Tosi's seminal vocal treatise, as a founder of the Fund for the Support of Decay'd Musicians, and as a founder of the original Academy of Ancient Music.

Leo Duarte



Leo Duarte



Thomas Gould



Joe Qiu

Sammartini

I saw Arminius last Saturday ... Mr Handel has a much larger orquestre (I do not know how to spell that word) than last year & the loss of Castrucio [Pietro Castrucci] is abundantly supplied by Martini [Sammartini] who plays immediately above [John] Clegg where Castrucio us'd to sit.

4th Earl of Shaftesbury to James Harris, 18 January 1737

Rinaldo

(premiered at the Queen's (later King's) Theatre Haymarket in 1711)

Marcia & Battaglia

After many adventures Rinaldo has freed his beloved Almirena and resumed his rightful place as leader of the Christian crusading army gathered to redeem Jerusalem from Saracen forces. Before the battle each army marches past, and Handel saves his big guns for this Christian march.

Purcell had used three trumpets on the operatic stage; Handel, positioning himself as Purcell's even more glorious (and patriotic?) successor, uses four. Cleverly, he begins with strings and the instruments that often imitate trumpets in baroque music, oboes, so his unleashing of four trumpets, in four parts, and with timpani, is all the more sensational. This march for medieval Crusaders would be quite

acceptable on a British parade ground of Handel's time, and its later history is nice evidence of his success in assimilating local musical idioms.

The march was taken up seventeen years later into that quintessentially British work *The Beggar's Opera*, and became so naturalised there that Handel had to write a new march to replace it when he subsequently revived *Rinaldo*. The Haymarket Theatre stage could be opened up to a depth of 90 feet, well able to accommodate a battle scene, though it's doubtful that the stage directions were carried out to the letter: *The Armies attack each other and form a regular Battle, which hangs in Balance, till Rinaldo having storm'd the City, descends the Mountain with his Squadrons, and assaults the Pagans in the Rear, who immediately fly, and are pursued by Rinaldo.*

Or la tromba**Rinaldo**

*Or la tromba in suon festante
mi richiama a trionfar.*

*Qual guerriero e qual amante,
gloria e amor mi vuol bear.*

Or la tromba ecc.

Prior to the battle, Rinaldo, having deployed the troops, responds to the sound of the trumpet calling him to heroic action. Though Rinaldo invokes only one trumpet, Handel provides four to set his soloists off in blazes of glory. Displaying their skills with constantly varied cries, Rinaldo and the trumpets exchange athletic fanfare-like volleys before urging each other up the scale – perhaps as an image of the hero's imminent scaling of the mount of Jerusalem to liberate the

Rinaldo

*Now the trumpet with joyful sound
calls me again to triumph.*

*Both as a warrior and as a lover
glory and love wish to make me happy.*

Now the trumpet, etc.

city. By alternating voice and trumpet, Handel allows his star singer ample space for individual glory as well as inviting gasp-inducing ornaments and wittily combative imitations in the *da capo*. This is Rinaldo's final aria, and his most spectacular. It is the only aria Handel ever wrote with four trumpets as well as strings, oboes and drums.

Singer-player competition

[Farinelli] was seventeen when he left that City [Naples] to go to Rome, where, during the run of an opera, there was a struggle every night between him and a famous player on the trumpet, in a song accompanied by that instrument: this, at first, seemed amicable and merely sportive, till the audience began to interest themselves in the contest, and take different sides: after swelling several notes in which each manifested the power of his lungs and tried to rival the other in brilliancy and force, they both had a swell and a shake together, by thirds, which was continued so long, while the audience eagerly awaited the event, that both seemed exhausted; and, in fact, the trumpeter, wholly spent, gave it up, thinking, however, his antagonist as much tired as himself, and that it would be a drawn battle; when Farinelli, with a smile on his countenance, showing he had only been sporting with him all this time, broke out all at once in the same breath, with fresh vigour, and not only swelled and shook the note, but ran the most rapid and difficult divisions, and was at last silenced only by the acclamations of the audience.

Charles Burney, *The present state of music in France and Italy*, 2nd edn, 1773, pp 213-14

Alcina

(premiered at the Covent Garden Theatre in 1736)

5

Sta nell'Ircana pietrosa tana

Ruggiero

*Sta nell'ircana pietrosa tana
tigre sdegnosa, e incerta pende,
se parte, o attende il cacciator.
Dal teso strale guardar si vuole;
ma poi la prole lascia in periglio.
Freme, e l'assale desio di sangue,
pietà di figlio; poi vince amor.
Sta nell'ircana, ecc.*

Released from his long amorous enchantment under the spell of the sorceress Alcina, Ruggiero sings this aria to his true love Bradamante before confronting Alcina's troops in a final showdown – his first heroic action in

Ruggiero

*The disdainful tigress goes to her rocky
Hyrcanian lair, and vacillates, uncertain
whether to leave, or await the hunter. She
wants to avoid the threatened arrow,
but then would leave her young in danger.
She trembles, assailed by desire for blood
and pity for her child; then love prevails.
The disdainful etc.*

the whole opera. In order to write a suitably heroic aria in which his starring castrato Carestini can display his bravura technique, Handel ignores the text's unhelpful description of an anxious maternal tigress. Instead he seizes on

the mention of a hunter, and writes ebullient solo parts for two horns in sunlit G major uplands. Here, Handel's writing is rhythmically bouncing, pitting the release of Ruggiero's pent-up energy in the galloping strings against the constantly varied measures and metres and pitches of a succession of phrases calculated to exhibit Carestini's virtuosic agility. With his usual fine sense of dramatic pacing, after the introduction's horn calls Handel gives his singer command of the stage with the

Giulio Cesare in Egitto

(premiered at the King's Theatre Haymarket in 1724)

6

Sinfonia

Cesare

*Taci! Che fia?
Cieli, e qual delle sfere
scende armonico suon, che mi rapisce?*

Nireno

Avrà di selce il cor chi non languisce.

backing of strings alone, before heightening the excitement by endorsing each vocal statement with enthusiastic assent from the horns (an arrangement which also provides an ideal platform for unfettered singer's ornaments in the *da capo*). In the B section Ruggiero's dialogue with richly detailed close-harmony strings lasts just long enough to make one impatient for a return of the horns' merry sequences and clarion jubilation.

Caesar

*Hush! What can this mean?
Heavens, from which of the spheres
does this sound, which ravishes me, descend?*

Nireno

It would take a heart of flint not to be moved.

Cesare

*Giulio, che miri? e quando
con abisso di luce
scesero i Numi in terra?*

Caesar

*Julius, what do you see? And when
with such depth of light
did the gods come down to earth?*

 10

V'adoro, pupille**Cleopatra**

*V'adoro, pupille,
saette d'amore,
le vostre faville
son grate nel sen.
Pietose vi brama
il mesto mio core,
ch'ogn'ora vi chiama
l'amato suo ben.*

Cleopatra

*I adore you, fair eyes,
arrows of love,
your sparkles
are welcome in my breast.
My pensive heart asks you
to be pitiful,
that it may ever call you
its dearest beloved.*

Cesare

*Non ha in cielo il Tonante
melodia che pareggi un sì bel canto.*

Caesar

*In heaven the Thunderer does not have
a melody the equal of such a lovely song.*

After Julius Caesar arrives in Egypt with his army, Cleopatra schemes to enlist his help to put her on the throne. Calling herself Lydia, a servant of Cleopatra, she quickly captivates him, but herself falls in love, and with the help of her servant Nireno she arranges a ravishing musical tableau to make herself irresistible to him.

Two orchestras, one in the pit and one on stage – a challenge for a music director that Handel gave himself only once more, for the finale of *Ariodante* – are variously combined in the three episodes of the scene (two sinfonias and Cleopatra's aria, itself interrupted by Caesar's enchanted exclamation).

At first only the on-stage orchestra of the still hidden tableau of Parnassus plays, making Caesar think he hears the music of the spheres; during the second sinfonia the pit musicians join in as the tableau opens to show 'Virtue' alongside nine instrumentalists, one for each of the

Muses, and scored in eight parts: oboe and first violin, second violin, viola, viola da gamba (double-stopping), harp, theorbo, bassoon and cello.

In response to Caesar's rapturous amazement 'Virtue' at last herself begins to sing. Handel continues to craft his effects with minute attention to detail (the violins of both orchestras are both divided and muted). Each pause in Cleopatra's unspooling melody is answered by echoes and amorous sighs from the pit, while her main accompaniment surrounds her on stage; for the central minor-key section only the on-stage musicians accompany her, their newly surging quavers suggesting the intensifying desire to which Caesar gives voice before the return of the orchestra's combined harmony for the *da capo*.



Thomas Gould, Leo Duarte & Joe Qiu

Ornaments: Corelli reported by Handel

Dined at Mr Jennings's, Ormond Street. The Master, Handel, Hetherington. Handel quite Blind, but pretty Chearfull, & after Dinner play'd finely on Mr. J.'s Piano forte. Handel s[ai]d th[a]t Corelli was at the head of the Orchestra at Rome w[he]n he first went thither; that twas a rule w[i]th Corelli's Band of Music th[a]t w[he]n any one made a Grace[= ornament], he sh[ou]ld forfeit a Crown; & one poor fidler lost his whole salary before he c[ou]ld be Cured of Gracing [= ornamenting].

Diary of Rev. George William Harris, 29 May 1756

Se in fiorito ameno prato**Cesare**

*Se in fiorito ameno prato
l'augellin tra fiori e fronde
si nasconde,
fa più grato
il suo cantar.
Se così Lidia vezzosa
spiega ancor notti canore,
più graziosa
fa ogni core
innamorar.
Se in fiorito, ecc.*

Caesar

*If a little bird
hides itself
among the flowers and leaves
of a pleasant meadow,
it makes its song the lovelier.
If in the same way the lovely Lydia
unfolds her song by night,
even more gracefully
she makes every heart
fall in love.
If a little bird, etc.*

Caesar longs to rush to his new love, but she has vanished. Delighted and still spellbound, he entertains himself and the audience by contemplating her charming elusiveness. Out of the lush 'flowery meadow' of the orchestral introduction, enriched with the bucolic sounds of divided bassoons and a rustic drone in the bass,

the solo violin bird peeks first hesitantly, then with seven bars of concertante bravura flutterings (not so hidden as the words suggest) and its own closing ritornello. As befits this analogue of the beloved Lydia-Cleopatra, the bird turns out to be an equal partner with Caesar and, as the aria unfolds in performance,

a deliciously titillating one. After his swinging first phrase Caesar draws it into conversation by adopting its language, offering it bird-sized phrases which the bird imitates in answer, much of the time brilliantly in the upper reaches of its E (top) string; then in the B section the bird takes the lead, offering a motif for Casear to imitate.

Handel perfectly balances the unaccompanied display passages with the returns of the full orchestra, in which the humorous tension of competitive solo sparring resolves into what seems almost like applause. The 'fourth wall' is very transparent here, entitling the two soloists to indulge in all the freedom and fun of deciding for themselves, in the *da capo*, where to imitate, how to answer, and when to outdo each other — and whether to give each other advance warning.

Handel's violinist was Pietro Castrucci, who led his opera orchestra for over 20 years

and was known for spectacular playing, which Handel encouraged: as Lord Hervey said, hearing him and his brother in *Orlando*, the 'Exercise of playing Hendel's music' would make them 'sweat in Lapland at Christmas'.

Castrucci (Pietro)

a man of genius, well acquainted with the bow and finger-board of his instrument

Burney, *History* 2.1004

Ariodante (premiered at the Covent Garden Theatre in 1734)

12

Scherza infida

Ariodante

*E vivo ancora? E senza il ferro? oh Dei!
Che farò? Che mi dite, o affanni miei?
Scherza infida in grembo al drudo,
io tradito a morte in braccio
per tua colpa ora men vo.
Ma a spezzar l'indegno laccio,
ombra mesta, e spirito ignudo,
per tua pena io tornerò.
Scherza infida, ecc.*

Ariodante

*And I still live? And without my sword? O gods!
What shall I do? What do you say, my sorrows?
The faithless one plays on her lover's breast,
I, betrayed by your crime,
now go to death's embrace.
But to break the shameful bond,
as a sad shade, and disembodied spirit,
I will return to torment you.
The faithless one, etc.*

On the night before Ariodante's rapturously anticipated wedding to Princess Ginevra his wicked rival, the rejected Polinesso, tricks him into believing that the woman he sees welcoming Polinesso into her bedroom is Ginevra. Ariodante despairs, in one of Handel's greatest and most expansive outpourings of grief. Muted upper strings, pizzicato basses

and relentlessly repeating inner parts set off the solo bassoon, which presses on Ariodante's wounded heart, dragging him downward with a progression of discordant held notes under which he writhes and cries out in octave leaps of anguish, coming to a complete stop at the horror of his betrothed 'in the lecher's lap'. The B section's briefly maintained threat

of Ariodante's ghost returning to haunt Polinesso gives additional potency to the bassoon in the *da capo*, in its role as a signifier of death. An aria on such a scale, with such distinctive orchestral motifs, offers scope for varied possible interpretations, on the parts of both performers and listeners. The bassoon's sustained suspensions can be heard both as Ariodante's alter ego, moaning with him,

and as an image of his inescapable pain; the continual lapping movement of the strings can suggest both Ariodante rocking himself in grief and the waves of the sea into which he will presently throw himself. Both Ariodante's part and Ruggiero's (*Stanell'Ircana*) were written for the castrato Carestini, and the arias included here show Handel's appreciation of his excellence in both bravura display and intense pathos.

Aci, Galatea e Polifemo (premiered in Naples in 1708)

13

Qui l'augel da pianta in pianta

Aci

*Qui l'augel da pianta in pianta
lieto vola, dolce canta
cor che langue a lusingar.
Ma si fa cagion di duolo
sol per me che afflitto e solo,
pace, oh Dio! non so trovar.
Qui l'augel, ecc.*

Aci

*Here the little bird happily flies
from plant to plant, sweetly sings
to charm a pining heart.
But it is the cause of only sorrow
for me who, troubled and alone,
does not know, O God, how to find peace.
Here the little bird, etc.*



David Bates



Lucy Crowe

© Victoria Cadisch



Christine Rice

© Patricia Taylor



Iestyn Davies

© Chris Sorensen

The idyllic love of shepherd boy Acì and sea nymph Galatea is disrupted by the predatory cyclops Polifemo. Fleeing his threatening advances, Galatea dives into the sea for shelter, leaving Acì bereft.

Handel's solo oboe and violin enchantingly add dramatic and emotional dimensions to the verbal text of Acì's lament with a dazzling variety of combinations of the three soloists. The words prompt a dialogue between Acì and a sympathising bird, and first we and Acì hear the chirruping oboe-

bird, but then, with piercing irony for him, the oboe-bird is answered by a violin-mate, and they happily entwine. Briefly the oboe-bird sympathises with Acì's sad little falling figure, but the violin elbows in between them, while he is desolately transfixed on a high G for an astonishing seven bars. The B section initially allows him unison with the oboe-bird, but the violin-bird flutters in here too. The open texture offers wonderful scope for ornamental flights of fancy to sharpen the poignancy of Acì's loneliness.

There is a delightful song in it [Berenice] of Strada's accompanied & in some places echoed by [Sam] Martini's hautboy, the voice and that alternately

[4th Earl of Shaftesbury to James Harris, 11 May 1737]

Rinaldo

14

Venti, turbini

Rinaldo

*Di speranza un bel raggio
ritorna a consolar l'alma smarrita;
sì, adorata mia vita!
Corro veloce ad oppugnar gl'inganni;
Amor, sol per pietà, dammi i tuoi vanni!*

*Venti, turbini, prestate
le vostre ali a questo piè.
Cieli, Numi, il braccio armate
contro chi pena mi diè.
Venti, ecc.*

The wicked sorceress Armida has abducted Almirina, lovely betrothed of the hero Rinaldo. Roused from grief, he sweeps to her rescue. With solo lines for violin and bassoon Handel writes a concerto grosso à tre that conjures the tempests Rinaldo invokes. 'Venti' comes at the end of Act

Rinaldo

*A fair ray of hope
returns to comfort my lost soul;
yes, my adored beloved!
I run speedily to assail the deceivers;
Love, through pity, lend me your wings!*

*Winds, whirlwinds, lend
your wings to my feet
Heaven, gods, strengthen my arm
against those who gave me pain.
Winds, etc.*

1, prime position for a leading singer's bravura display, and Handel keeps piling on the astonishment with kaleidoscopic variations of figurations and combinations. The opening mini-concerto for violin becomes a patter of semiquavers for both solo instruments. The decks are cleared

for the voice's entry, first unaccompanied, with a dazzling roulade, then alternating with the full orchestra, then decorated by the solo instruments, and eventually and climactically, Handel requires the bassoon to synchronise with the voice's acrobatic display (the bassoonist was probably the versatile and evidently virtuosic John Christian Kytch, who doubled as the

Queen's Theatre oboist). Exhilaration is heightened by Handel's concision: hardly have we marvelled at one aeronautic motif than another buffets it aside. The aria makes brazen demands of the three soloists' agility and ensemble such as British audiences had never before experienced. *Rinaldo* was Handel's first opera for England, and it took London by storm.

Amadigi di Gaula (*premiered at the King's Theatre Haymarket in 1715*)

16

Pena tiranna

Dardano

Pena tiranna
io sento al core,
né spero mai
trovar pietà.
Amor m'affanna,
e il mio dolore
in tanti guai
pace non ha.
Pena tiranna, ecc.

Dardano

Tyrannical pain
I feel in my heart,
nor hope ever
to find comfort.
Love leaves me breathless
and my sorrow
in so many woes
does not have peace.
Tyrannical pain, etc.

Dardano has joined forces with the evil sorceress Melissa in hopes of winning the heroine Oriana from his rival, the hero Amadigi, whom Melissa vainly loves. At the mid-point of the opera, racked with passion, Dardano confronts his failure. The solo oboe and bassoon have lives of their own as shape-shifting characters, tormenting and sympathising by turns, and throughout, Dardano's vocal line is haunted by their implacable running quavers. Suspensions rub into the rawness of his pain, piercingly from the oboe, achingly from the bassoon. In the B section (no conventional contrast of mood here), thinned texture leaves Dardano utterly exposed as the bassoon and oboe alternately weave inescapable coils round his heart and share his anguish.

The solo instruments are set off by thick strings in five parts, with no relief from a harpsichord. The thudding octave leaps in the strings' opening and closing dotted figure – Handel at his most gestural –

suggest both the hammer blows of fate and Dardano beating his breast. The hollow tone of the bassoon, synonymous in baroque music with death, adds dramatic irony. Dardano will go on to plot Amadigi's murder, but it is he who will die.

Agrippina

(premiered in Venice at the Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo in 1709)

17

Se giunge un dispetto

Poppea

*Se Ottone m'ingannò, e s'egli ingrato
un dolce amor al fasto suo soggetta,
del cor offeso è giusto la vendetta.*

*Se giunge un dispetto
a' danni del cor,
si cangia nel petto
l'amore in furor.
Non ama chi offende
o segue l'umor,
il cor si difende
da effimero ardor.
Se giunge, ecc.*

Poppea

*If Ottone has deceived me, if he ungratefully
spurns a sweet love for his own grandeur,
the vengeance of my wronged heart is just.*

*If something spiteful
wounds the heart,
in the breast
love changes to fury.
He does not love, who offends
or follows his own wishes;
the heart defends itself
against fleeting passion
If something spiteful, etc.*

Pretty Poppea loves the guileless Ottone and is loved by him, but scheming Agrippina persuades her that Ottone has bartered her in exchange for imperial power. Poppea is capable of guile herself, but she is sincere in her love and, stung by Ottone's supposed rejection of her, vows revenge. Her determination spans a range of almost two octaves in feistily dancing triple time. Warming to her theme, she doesn't wait for the oboes and strings to finish their phrase before cutting in with her next fiendishly virtuosic roulade. All the other instruments drop out for a spot-lit centrepiece: Poppea matched by the solo oboe, first in running thirds and then each holding their note for a whole twelve bars — an invitation to show off their capacity to trill, a prized technical skill for baroque singers — before they both rush twice over down the scale.

Handel wrote two versions of the aria, and seems never to have performed this one, maybe because it too nearly resembles,

and surpasses, the voice-and-oboe fireworks of Agrippina's plotting soliloquy earlier in Act 1 — though that may have been intentional, showing Poppea to be a quick learner from her steely mentor.

Interview with David Bates

What makes this recording different from other discs of Handel arias?

There are plenty of wonderful Handel operatic arias recital discs out there that celebrate the expressive qualities and technical prowess of modern day Prima Donnas and Uomini! Indeed many orchestras that serve them play this nuanced repertoire very well indeed. *Handel's Unsung Heroes* shifts the focus from the starry singer, towards the variety of Handel's orchestrations and necessary virtuosity of its obbligato soloists who on this disc are seen as equal duetting partners to the singers. Don't get me wrong; in *Lucy*, Christine and I'm delighted to be working with the finest Handel singers of their generation, but I thought that it was time to create a programme that equally sings the praises of the orchestral players as well as our superb singers.

The arias on this disc are wonderfully varied but it must have been hard to decide which ones to include. Can you explain which arias made the final cut and why?

Our recital starts with the ebullient French Overture from *Teseo*. When we get to the third section which features the three way duel for two oboes and bassoon all bets are off as to where the virtuosity lies. Our first aria explores Handel's most electrifying of orchestral textures in *Or La Tromba* from *Rinaldo*, preceded by the swaggering Marche and a ferocious *Battaglia*.

This is the only occasion when Handel felt it necessary to score for four trumpets and drums alongside the strings and oboes. The recording session is etched into my memory – I just couldn't believe the majesty of our trumpets' tone. We took the aria and *Battaglia* at a break neck speed – I have to say that it was a little like driving a Ferrari. It was utterly thrilling.

We then move to *Sta nell'irca* from *Alcina*. Christine slays the virtuosic vocal line (including my dangerous da capo ornaments), while a pair of natural horns compete for supremacy with rowdy strings and oboes egging them on.

The sensual and voluptuous world of *V'adoro, pupille* is founded on Handel's most exotic orchestral textures in an effort to seduce the listener's ear, while Cleopatra does so on stage with her singing. It is one of the rare occasions you'll hear obbligato harp, theorbo, viola da gamba, violin and oboe all straining to win your aural affections! Lucy and Leo sing and play in unison until the da capo when they break out, following their own melodic fantasies. It is of course required for the singers to decorate the da capo of the aria, but what we don't know is if the obbligato soloists were also required to do so – or allowed to do so by Handel. But for this recital we have decided that it helps us further celebrate our obbligato soloists' invention and musicality to take this liberty in certain arias.

A second aria from *Giulio Cesare* follows: *Se in fiorito*. Thomas Gould stars alongside Iestyn in this dialogue aria. Set in the 'ameno prato' Cesare is inspired by the virtuosity and brilliance of a lone violinist with whom he jousts and duels for melodic supremacy. I am not sure if there is a victor, the sheer pleasure of the battle is sufficient for me.

The emotional highlight of *Ariodante* comes next - the aria *Scherza infida*. The vocal line of the eponymous hero is spellbinding (and Christine really does it proud), but this aria wouldn't tug so strongly on the heart strings without the obligato bassoon's distressed interjections that inspire and react to the vocal line. This, alongside the pizzicato strings and their plangent harmonies, set the perfect frame for one of Handel's finest psychological journeys.

The following number is in stark contrast. Unlike the dark and emotionally dangerous place which *Scherza infida* inhabits, the melancholic strains of *Qui l'augel* offer fragranced balm to the tormented singer, thanks to floaty violins figurations and lyrical oboe consolation.

But then the wind changes and all of a sudden a storm is whipped up in *Venti, turbini*. This time obligato violin and bassoon swirl and snarl around each other and inspire an initial unaccompanied exclamation from lestyn as Rinaldo. The three soloists continue to weave in and out of each other's paths and spur each other on to greater glory.

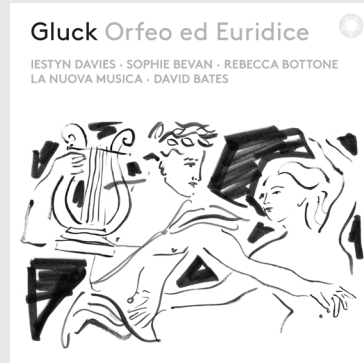
The mesmerising *Passacaille* from *Rodrigo* follows with wonderful violin solos passages and ravishing sonorities from the tutti orchestra. This sets up my favourite aria on the disc (if I am allowed a favourite) - *Pena tiranna* from *Amadigi*. For me it is a sarabande (with all its associations with death) with the tonic accent on the second beat. Its D minor tonal centre is particularly resonant for the strings, and the wailing bassoon and plangent oboe join Dardano as actual sentient characters with equal billing.

Our recital finishes with the soprano and oboe duet from *Agrippina: Se giunge un dispetto* - in a flash of virtuosity from Lucy and Leo, I hope that this stunner leaves you breathless and wanting more!

What a breathtaking selection - it must have truly lifted your spirits to record this exciting music during the time of the pandemic. How did it feel to be working at such a time?

I really couldn't make a project like this without the generosity and complicity of my fellow LNM musicians. We made this disc in the break between lockdowns 1 and 2 during the Coronavirus pandemic. While there was uncertainty and fear all around, our belief in shared creativity and the collective skill of LNM players, soloists and singers and engineers, producer, LNM production team, LNM supporters and trustees, made the project an utter joy, and fuels our desire to get back into the concert halls, opera houses and recording studios to continue to share this astonishing music with as wide an audience as possible.

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Acknowledgements

PRODUCTION TEAM

Executive producers **David Bates (La Nuova Musica) & Kate Rockett (PENTATONE)**

Recording producer **Jonathan Freeman-Attwood** | Recording engineer **David Hinitt**

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