

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 10 June 2025
7.30pm

Enchantresses

Sandrine Piau soprano

Jérôme Correas conductor, harpsichord

Les Paladins

Catherine Plattner violin

Patrick Oliva violin

Benoît Bursztejn viola

Nicolas Crnjanski cello

Franck Ratajczyk double bass

Benjamin Narvey theorbo, guitar

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Overture from *Ariodante* HWV33 (1735)

Scherza in mar la navicella from *Lotario* HWV26 (1729)

E pur così in un giorno ... Piangerò la sorte mia from *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* HWV17 (1724 rev. 1725-30)

Concerto grosso in A Op. 6 No. 4 HWV322 (1740)

I. Larghetto affettuoso • II. Allegro •

III. Largo e piano • IV. Allegro

Ah, mio cor from *Alcina* HWV34 (1735)

Il vostro maggio from *Rinaldo* HWV7 (1711, rev. 1717-31)

Trio Sonata in G Op. 5 No. 4 HWV399 (pub. 1739)

I. Allegro • II. A tempo ordinario • III. Passacaille •

IV. Gigue. Presto • V. Menuet. Allegro moderato

Tornami a vageggiar from *Alcina* HWV34



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Like all 18th-century composers, Handel structured his operas around his singers. The period of the first Royal Academy of Music, from 1719 to 1728, offered him stability and some of the most celebrated artists then available in Europe, lured to London by the stellar fees on offer. The role of Cleopatra in *Giulio Cesare* (1724) was one of the first written for Francesca Cuzzoni, then at the height of her popularity and success. Cleopatra's arias showed off her versatility, encompassing flirtation, cunning, seduction, defiance, grief, and jubilation. 'Piangerò la sorte mia' comes near the beginning of act three, as Cleopatra laments both the loss of the battle against her brother and the imagined demise of her lover, Cesare. The intimate, sparse accompaniment of cello, first violins and flute, frame and expose the angularity and anguish of the lamenting vocal line, though the tempo change for the B section shows Cleopatra's mettle even in the face of grief.

Once the first Royal Academy folded, Handel's operatic ventures had less security not only in finances and choice of venue, but also in terms of singers. One constant over the period 1729-1737, however, was his new prima donna, Anna Maria Strada del Pò, whom the late 18th-century historian Charles Burney said was 'A singer formed by himself, and modelled on his own melodies.' Strada's first creation for Handel was the role of the heroine, Adelaide, in *Lotario* (1729) – itself a sort of prequel to the story of *Ottone*, the first Handel opera with a role created for Cuzzoni, in 1723. The cast for Handel's new venture had a mixed reception, with Handel's friend Mary Pendarves describing Strada (as 'first woman') thus: 'her voice is without exception fine, her manner perfection, but her person very bad, and she makes frightful mouths'. Perhaps this description partly explains the characterisation of Adelaide, who is more 'angry queen' than *innamorata*. 'Scherza in mar la navicella', from the end of act one, certainly requires the kind of virtuosity that might have led Strada to make 'frightful mouths', as Adelaide voices her defiance of Berengario and Matilde, who demand that she marry their son, Idelberto, in order for them to secure control of Italy.

Strada was one of several singers whom Handel apparently took on in part because he saw the potential to shape their voices as he wished. Burney says that Strada 'came hither a coarse and awkward singer with improvable talents, and he at last polished her into reputation and favour'. Handel entrusted some of his best roles to her, most notably that of the eponymous sorceress in *Alcina* (1735). In this role, not only her voice but also her other attributes might have suggested the part. Alcina bewitches the warrior Ruggiero to fall in love with her, but eventually the enchantment is broken and he abandons her. Carestini, the castrato who took the part of Ruggiero, was 'tall, beautiful, and majestic', according to Burney. Of Strada, on the other hand, he said: 'she had so little of a Venus in her appearance, that she was usually called the Pig'. Choosing Strada to represent a woman needing to use magic to bewitch men into loving her may have amused audiences.

By the time she played Alcina, Strada was evidently a singer of considerable dramatic and musical talent, for the

role plumbs the depths of emotion, and is the focus of the opera. Even though magic was a key attraction, Handel is careful to show us Alcina's genuine attachment to Ruggiero. At the end of the second act, when she discovers Ruggiero has deceived her and intends to escape, she responds initially not with anger, but with anguish and shock in 'Ah! mio cor'. As Burney noted in the 1780s, a composer could easily have chosen a different response: 'Perhaps a modern composer, from the rage into which the enchantress is thrown in the drama ... would have given the lady less tenderness, and more passion; however that may be, the first strain of this air, upon a continued moving bass, is truly pathetic.'

Handel increasingly supplemented his Italian cast with English singers in the 1730s. This was partly prompted by his increased reliance on English oratorio, and partly on financial circumstances: native singers were undoubtedly cheaper to employ. In *Alcina*, the role of the protagonist's sister and confidante, Morgana, was taken by Cecilia Young, while that of the child Oberto was, unusually, given to the young William Savage, who would be stalwart bass for Handel in later years. Morgana was a substantial role to entrust to a non-Italian, but Young had apparently been trained by the violinist Geminiani, and Burney said that she had 'a good natural voice and a fine shake', and that she 'had been so well taught, that her style of singing was infinitely superior to that of any other English woman of her time'. Morgana's 'Tornami a vageghiar', from the end of act one, in which she hopes to persuade 'Ricciardo' (Ruggiero's former lover, Bradamante, in male disguise) to love her, is certainly a showstopper.

Handel's gradual shift to working with English singers reflected his canny adaptation to changing audience tastes. His diversification in the 1730s meant that he added not only oratorios to his seasons of opera, but also concertos. Initially, his focus was on the organ concerto, which he himself performed in the intervals between his oratorios, showcasing his virtuosic skill as a performer. In 1739, he prepared a set of 12 *concerti grossi* – an old-fashioned form by that time, but one hugely in vogue in England thanks to Arcangelo Corelli's Opus 6 *concerti grossi*. Not surprisingly, Handel also designated his set 'Opus 6' and followed Corelli's scoring, with a concertino group of two violins and cello and four-part strings and continuo for the tutti sections. But the musical style and variety of forms is Handel's own, and reflects then-current taste. No. 4 follows the 'da chiesa' (church) form: a slow introduction, a faster movement in fugal style, another slow movement and a fast, imitative finale. In the same year, Handel also prepared his 'Opus 5' set of trio sonatas. These were mostly assembled from pre-existing works – a mix of overtures from the Chandos anthems of 1717-18 and dances written for the operas from 1734-35. No. 4 in G major borrows and adapts from a variety of dramatic works: *Athalia*, *Parnasso in Festa* (a serenata), *Radamisto*, *Terpsichore* (a divertimento), with the final Menuet borrowed from *Alcina*.

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George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Overture from *Ariodante* HWV33 (1735)

Scherza in mar la
navicella from *Lotario*
HWV26 (1729)

Anonymous

Scherza in mar la
navicella,
Mentre ride aura
seconda,
Ma se poi fiera
procella
Turba il ciel, sconvolge
l'onda
Va perduta a
naufregar.

Non così questo mio
core
Cederà d'un empia sorte
Allo sdegno, ed al furore,
Che per anco in faccia a
morte
Sa da grande
trionfar.

Scherza in mar...

E pur così in un giorno
... Piangerò la sorte mia
from *Giulio Cesare in*
Egitto HWV17

(1724 rev. 1725-30)

*Nicola Francesco Haym,
after Giacomo Francesco
Bussani*

Recitativo

E pur così in un giorno
Perdo fasti e
grandezze?
Ahi fato rio!
Cesare, il mio bel nume,
È forse estinto;
Cornelia e Sesto inermi
son,
Né sanno darmi
soccorso.
O dio!
Non resta alcuna speme al
viver mio.

On the sea the little
boat frolics

On the sea the little boat
frolics
wafted along by gentle
breezes,
but later if a raging
rainstorm
discomfit the skies and
throw waves in disarray
it will suffer shipwreck
and be lost.

Not in this way shall my
heart
yield to the scorn and rage
of a wicked fate,
which even when
confronted with death,
knows how to triumph
with greatness.

On the sea...

And so thus, in one
day ... I shall lament
my fate

Recitative

And so thus, in one day
Am I to lose splendour
and grandeur?
Ah, cruel fate!
Caesar, my handsome god,
has perhaps perished;
Cornelia and Sesto are
defenseless,
and know not how to help
me.
Oh God!
There remains no hope
for my life.

Aria

Piangerò la sorte mia
Sì crudele e tanto ria
Finché vita in petto
avrò.
Ma poi morta d'ogn'intorno
Il tiranno e notte e giorno
fatta spetbro agiterò.

Aria

I shall lament my fate.
So cruel and so bitter,
As long as there is life in
my breast.
But then dead at every turn
Night and day the tyrant
I will torment, as a ghost.

Concerto grosso in A Op. 6 No. 4 HWV322
(1740)

I. Larghetto affettuoso

II. Allegro

III. Largo e piano

IV. Allegro

Ah, mio cor from *Alcina* Ah! My heart!
HWV34 (1735)

*Anon. adapted from
Riccardo Broschi, after
Ariosto*

Ah! mio cor! Schernito
sei!
Stelle! Dei! Nume
d'amore!
Traditore! T'amo
tanto;
Puoi lasciarmi sola in
pianto,
Oh Dei! Perché?

Ma, che fa gemendo
Alcina?
Son regina, è tempo
ancora:
Resti, o mora, peni
sempre,
O torni a me.

Ah! mio cor! schernito
sei ...

Ah! My heart! You are
being mocked!
Ye stars and gods! God of
love!
Treacherous one! I adore
you so;
and yet, you can abandon
me in tears
oh ye gods! Why?

But what has set Alcina
wailing?
I am Queen, and there is
still time:
remain here or die; for
ever agonise
or come back to me.

Ah! My heart! You are
being mocked ...

*Please do not turn the page until the song and its
accompaniment have ended.*

Il vostro maggio from Your May

Rinaldo HWV7

(1711, rev. 1717-31)

*Giacomo Rossi and Aaron
Hill*

Il vostro maggio de' bei verdi anni, O ori amanti, Sempre costanti Sfiorate in amore!	Your May of the beautiful young years, oh loving hearts, always constant caressed in love!
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Né un falso raggio D'onor v'affanni, Che sol beato Chi amante amato Possede un bel core.	Nor should a false ray of honour distress you, for he alone is blessed who, loved by a lover, possesses a beautiful heart.
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Trio Sonata in G Op. 5 No. 4 HWV399 (pub. 1739)

I. Allegro

II. A tempo ordinario

III. Passacaille

IV. Gigue. Presto

V. Menuet. Allegro moderato

**Tornami a vageggiar Look upon me
from *Alcina* HWV34 tenderly again**

*Anon. adapted from
Riccardo Broschi, after
Ariosto*

Tornami a vageggiar, Te solo vuol amar Quest'anima fedel, Caro mio bene.	Look upon me tenderly again, my faithful heart would love none but you, my dear one.
--	--

Già ti donai il mio cor; Fido sarà il mio amor, Mai ti sarò crudel, Cara mia speme.	I have given you my heart, my love will be true; I shall never be unkind, my dearest love.
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