

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 14 March 2025
1.00pm

Telemann 'Paris' quartets

London Handel Players

Rachel Brown flute
Adrian Butterfield violin
Oliver Webber violin
Rachel Byrt viola
Gavin Kibble viola da gamba
Sarah McMahon cello
Silas Wollston harpsichord

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)

From 6 *Quadri*, Concerto No. 2 in D TWV43:D1
(pub. 1730)

I. Allegro • II. Affettuoso • III. Vivace

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Cara sposa from *Rinaldo* HWV7 (1711, rev. 1717-31)
arranged by Rachel Brown

Georg Philipp Telemann

From 6 *Quadri*, Sonata No. 2 in G minor TWV
43:G1 (pub. 1730)

*I. Andante • II. Allegro • III. Largo •
IV. Allegro*

George Frideric Handel

Se pietà di me non senti from *Giulio Cesare in
Egitto* HWV17 (1724 rev. 1725-30) *arranged by
Rachel Brown*

Georg Philipp Telemann

From 6 *Quadri*, Sonata No. 1 in A TWV43:A1 (pub.
1730)

*I. Soave • II. Allegro • III. Andante •
IV. Vivace*

George Frideric Handel

Yet can I hear that dulcet lay from *The Choice of
Hercules* HWV69 (1750) *arranged by Rachel
Brown*

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The extraordinary pieces in **Telemann's** collection of Quadri have an interesting history. They were, in fact, first published in Hamburg by 1730, in the years when the composer was at the height of his phenomenal productivity: for, as well as his roles as Kantor at the Johanneum Lateinschule, Kapellmeister to the five largest churches in the city and director of the Hamburg Opera and obligations to the courts in Eisenach and Bayreuth, he embarked on an ambitious project of self-publication of many of his works and it is thought he may even have undertaken the engraving of some of these himself.

The title of the first publication, offers an alternative scoring of viola da gamba or cello with *basso continuo*, but it is clear from the original parts that the third *concertante* voice was conceived for the gamba since the writing is so idiomatic for the instrument and frequently sets three treble voices against the bass.

Such was the popularity of this set that it was republished in Paris by Le Clerc in 1736, without Telemann's permission. This seems to have prompted the composer finally to make a long-awaited visit to the French capital where he stayed for eight months in 1737-38 and, whilst there, to compose a second glorious set of 'Paris' quartets, the 'Nouveau Quatuors'. Incidentally, the 'Paris' title, which connects these two sets, was first coined by the editors of the Telemann *Musikalische Werke* in the latter part of the 20th Century.

Unusually, the Quadri are not six works of the same genre, but instead comprise two Italianate concertos, two German-style sonatas and two suites of French dances, bringing together a variety of national styles. The two concertos and sonatas in this set contain brilliant solo passages, and yet the beauty of them lies in the interaction of all the parts, that constant passing of the baton, which requires consummate teamwork.

In the D major Concerto, the upright, German *allemande*-like opening and the exhilarating pride of the Polish-style Vivace movement at the conclusion are totally infectious. In the central Affettuoso movement the texture becomes a quartet as the two voices of the double-stopped gamba part are answered by flute and violin.

The two Sonatas contain some of Telemann's most luscious and emotional writing from the most energetic and flamboyant to the utterly beguiling in moments of great tenderness. Rather than portraying outright tragedy Telemann stirs and quells the passions through his rhetorical outbursts, bravura passagework, eloquent Adagios and poignant simplicity.

The limpid opening Andante of the G minor Sonata sets a serious and heartfelt tone in preparation for the brilliant, fugal Allegro in the Polish style. This in turn is followed by a Largo of great intimacy in which the melodic fragments pass back and forth between the flute and violin and include delicate piano and pianissimo echoes. Its serenity is dispelled by a final energetic fugue.

The A major Sonata opens with a heart-warming Soave, gallant and refined and this leads to a joyful, sparkling fugal Allegro. The third movement is a passionate

Andante in which the opening and closing sections containing affecting Corellian suspensions over a walking bass line frame beautiful, plaintive, pathetic instrumental solos, each interjected with polite asides from the other parts and the final Vivace provides a joyous conclusion.

'Handel at Home'

Before the advent of recording, music-lovers who wanted to relive the highlights of opera or oratorio performances they had attended (or perhaps to discover those they had missed) would have gathered friends and fellow musicians together to sing or play their favourite excerpts at home. In England, performances of **Handel's** stage and choral works were highly popular and demand for chamber arrangements must have been great. John Walsh, Handel's London publisher, produced just such arrangements of hundreds of arias for flute and continuo. The London Handel Players have made two recordings of these arias restoring the original string parts for a fuller texture.

Rinaldo was a musical triumph for Handel which came at a pivotal point in his life, coinciding as it did with his arrival in London. His richly inventive and deeply moving music assured for him the most revered place in the hearts of his British audience, so much so, that he made England his home for the rest of his life. Premiered in 1711, *Rinaldo* was the first Italian opera ever composed for the London stage, setting a new trend which was to last for many years. The plot, set in the Crusades, is one of love and loss. It opens in joyful spirits as Rinaldo and Almirena express their mutual love, but the hero must prove his military might in order to marry her. A battle ensues (*Sinfonia*) and she is abducted. Rinaldo pours out his grief in the exquisite aria which follows, 'Cara sposa', a lament of devastating beauty, full of poignant sighing gestures and richly intertwining contrapuntal voices which are underpinned by soulful chromatic lines. Handel himself felt that this was one of the finest arias he had ever conceived.

In *Giulio Cesare*, set in the turbulence of the Roman Civil War (49-47 BC), passions run high in the pursuit of power. Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, desperate for supremacy over her brother, Tolomeo, initially plans to seduce Caesar to gain his support, but ultimately the pair fall genuinely in love. With their lives in peril, Cleopatra implores the gods to protect her lover in an anguished appeal (*Se pietà di me non senti*).

The programme concludes with a particularly beautiful aria, 'Yet can I hear that dulcet lay', from a one-act drama, *The Choice of Hercules* (1750). Here the youthful hero is presented with the dilemma of following the path of either 'Virtue' or 'Pleasure'. Virtue ultimately prevails, but in yearning for Pleasure, he sighs for the blissful temptations of 'those wilds of joy' and a song 'as sweet as flows the honey dew'.

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