

Handel the Alchemist

London Handel Players

Adrian Butterfield violin, director
Rachel Brown flute
Oliver Webber violin
Naomi Burrell violin
Nicola Cleary violin
Maxim Del Mar violin
Sophie Simpson violin

Rachel Byrt viola
Elena Accogli viola
Sarah McMahan cello
Gavin Kibble viola da gamba
Cecelia Bruggemeyer double bass
Carina Cosgrave double bass
Silas Wollston harpsichord

Joel Raymond oboe
Onagh Lee oboe
Nathaniel Harrison bassoon
Katherine Spencer chalumeau
Eligio Quinteiro lute, theorbo

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

The Alchemist Suite HWV43 (1707-10)

*I. Overture • II. Prelude • III. Minuet •
IV. Sarabande • V. Bourrée • VI. Air • VII. Minuet •
VIII. Air • IX. Gigue*

Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713)

Concerto grosso in D Op. 6 No. 7 (pub. 1714)

*I. Vivace - Allegro • II. Allegro •
III. Andante largo • IV. Allegro •
V. Vivace*

Johann Joachim Quantz (1697-1773)

Flute Concerto No. 161 in G QV5:174

I. Allegro • II. Arioso. Mesto • III. Allegro Vivace

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)

Grillen-Symphonie TWV50:1

I. Etwas lebhaft • II. Tändelnd • III. Presto

Interval

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

The Married Beau Suite Z603 (1694)

*I. Overture • II. Slow Air • III. Hornpipe • IV. Air •
V. Hornpipe • VI. Jig • VII. Trumpet Air •
VIII. March • IX. Hornpipe on a ground*

George Frideric Handel

Concerto grosso in A Op. 6 No. 11 HWV329 (1739)

*I. Andante larghetto e staccato • II. Allegro •
III. Largo e staccato - Andante • IV. Allegro*

Jean-Féry Rebel (1666-1747)

Les Caractères de la Danse (1715)

*I. Prelude • II. Courante • III. Menuet • IV. Bourrée
• V. Chaconne • VI. Sarabande • VII. Gigue •
VIII. Rigaudon • IX. Passepied • X. Gavotte •
XI. Sonate • XII. Loure • XIII. Musette •
XIV. Sonate*



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The title for this concert is taken from the incidental music to a 1710 revival of Ben Johnson's play *The Alchemist*, but it also celebrates **Handel** as a master distiller and blender of the different musical styles of people and nations. Although he spent most of his adult life in London, Handel was a real cosmopolitan. He grew up in Germany, but went to Italy for several years to finish his musical apprenticeship. By the time he settled in London, he was conversant in both French and Italian styles, and had quickly worked out what the English taste was, too. *The Alchemist Suite* is derived from his 1707 opera *Rodrigo*, reduced (from four lines to three) and re-arranged by an anonymous composer, who added a prelude of his own. Published in 1710 by John Walsh, who had 13 years earlier published the Suite which we will hear by Purcell, it was a response to an increasing demand for printed music, by amateurs and professionals alike.

Handel wrote *Rodrigo* whilst in Italy, and it was here (Rome) that he met **Arcangelo Corelli**. Handel learnt much from the master, who teased him for his youthful French overtures, saying, 'Ma, caro Sassone, questa Musica è nel stylo Francese di ch'io non m'intendo' ('this Music is in the French style, which I do not understand'). Corelli's set of 12 Concerti Grossi Op. 6 were published posthumously in 1714 and were subsequently printed in Amsterdam, London and Paris, an indication of their enduring and universal popularity. Twenty-five years later, in 1739, John Walsh junior (ever the businessman) persuaded Handel to compose a set of 12 *concerti grossi*, which would become known as his own Op. 6. For these, Handel followed Corelli's easy elegance and his effortless conversation between solo instrument and *ripieno* orchestra. Charles Burney described Corelli's concerti as 'so majestic, solemn and sublime that they preclude all criticism.'

While working for the Elector of Saxony, **Johann Joachim Quantz** gave some flute lessons to the young Prussian Prince Frederick – in secret, as his father had banned such effeminacies. Eventually, as King himself, Frederick managed to poach Quantz with an eye-watering salary to become his own personal flautist. Throughout his career, Quantz experimented with the flute, widening the bore and deepening its range, and he wrote over 300 *concerti* to show its potential. This one, in G major, displays the flute's various facets: nimble outer movements showing its agility, and a plaintive inner movement showing its pathos.

A compatriot of Quantz with even more *concerti* to his name was **Telemann**. He went to read law at Leipzig in 1701, but soon abandoned it and took up various posts composing and directing music in eastern and northern Germany. A man of immense activity, he masterminded concerts, composed church music and published an incredible number of works (partly in order to pay off his wife's gambling debts), including *concerti* and symphonies for almost every instrument and

combination of instruments. The combination here is ingeniously unusual – strings, a chalumeau (an early clarinet), an oboe, two flutes and two solo double basses. With their wonderfully scratchy gut strings, these basses become the cricket's legs rubbing together. Telemann had a cordial relationship with Handel: the two exchanged exotic plants. Handel also used Telemann's music as seeds for his own imagination, and several of his most successful tunes were originally Telemann's.

If Handel learned the Italian style from Corelli, it was to **Purcell** that he looked for an English flavour – although Purcell's music itself shows the influence of the French style, as well as the popular taste for a good dance. In 1694, Purcell wrote the incidental music to John Crowne's *The Married Beau Suite*, a farce about infidelity committed by somewhat self-regarding individuals. The following year, Purcell died, anecdotally as a result of too many late nights, but almost certainly from tuberculosis. His theatre music was gathered, edited and published by Walsh in 1697 as a *Collection of Ayres, Compos'd for the Theatre, and upon other Occasions*, and the music for *The Married Beau* became a suite to be played in concerts or at home. This suite is full of interesting and varied dances, and the final movement is a lovely example of Purcell's particular genius at composing music on a ground bass.

Handel's Concerto Grosso Op. 6 No. 11 was originally an organ concerto written for the interval of *Alexander's Feast* (1739). When Handel's publisher John Walsh suggested a collection of *Twelve Grand Concertos*, re-working this, and its companion in F (No. 9), was a neat decision. The opening movement is elegant but witty, the soloists having ever-diminishing note values. This is followed by a Fugue (interesting and often cheeky fugue subjects are a trademark of the Op. 6 set) and, in true Corelli style, a brief Largo. The Andante is a walk through one of London's pleasure gardens, the solo group conversing with the orchestra, and the first violin providing gently virtuosic entertainment. The concerto ends with a playful Allegro, with plenty of conversation and birdlike trillings.

With the foundation of the Académie Royale de Danse in 1661, the French became the leading exponents of ballet, and Jean-Féry Rebel himself contributed to the development of the *ballet d'action*, a self-contained dance with its own narrative (as opposed to being incidental to opera). Handel responded to this art form in his operas *Ariodante* and *Alcina*, inspired by the arrival of Madame Sallé's dance troupe in London in 1734, and seems to have been acquainted with **Rebel's** music. Rebel's *Les caractères de la danse* (1715) is a gazetteer of all the fashionable dance forms of the day, and is a composition characteristic of a remarkably imaginative composer.

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