

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 21 May 2023
7.30pm

Tenore Assoluto

Michael Spyres tenor

Francesco Corti conductor, harpsichord

il Pomo d'Oro

Zefira Valova violin Ludovico Minasi cello

Nick Robinson violin Ismael Campanero Nieto double bass

Giulio D'Alessio viola Miguel Rincón theorbo

- George Frideric Handel** (1685-1759) Empio, per farti guerra from *Tamerlano* HWV18 (1724)
Dread the fruits of Christian folly from *Theodora* HWV68 (1749)
- Antonio Vivaldi** (1678-1741) Cada pur sul capo audace from *Artabano, re de' Parti* RV706 (pub. 1718)
Concerto in G minor for strings RV156
I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro
- Baldassare Galuppi** (1706-1785) Vil trofeo d'un'alma imbelle from *Alessandro nell'Indie* (c.1737)
Concerto a4 No. 3 in D
I. Maestoso • II. Allegro • III. Andantino
- Gaetano Latilla** (1711-1788) Se il mio paterno amore from *Siroe* (1740)
Interval
- Jean-Philippe Rameau** (1683-1764) Cessez de ravager la terre from *Nais* (1749)
- Nicola Porpora** (1686-1768) Nocchier, che mai non vide from *Germanico in Germania* (1732)
- Domenico Natale Sarro** (1679-1744) Fra l'ombra un lampo solo from *Achille in Sciro* (1737)
- Giuseppe Sammartini** (1695-1750) Concerto grosso in A Op. 2 No. 1 (by 1738)
I. Spiritoso • II. Allegro assai • III. Andante • IV. Allegro
- Johann Adolf Hasse** (1699-1783) Solcar pensa un mar sicuro from *Arminio* (1745)
- Antonio Mazzoni** (1717-1785) Tu m'involasti un regno from *Antigono* (1755)

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Tenore assoluto

'*Il tenore assoluto*' might translate as 'the definitive tenor'. Caruso was described as such, as was Pavarotti; in 1724 the term might have been applied to Francesco Borosini, the greatest Italian tenor of his age, who visited London that year and sang for **Handel** the role of Bajazet in his opera *Tamerlano* at the King's Theatre Haymarket. During his aria 'Empio, per farti guerra', the captive Bajazet takes poison and as he dies promises in his repetitive delirium that his *ombra* ('shade', or ghost) will haunt Tamerlano. The aria has a middle section in a restrained tone before repeating the first part from the top - *da capo*. All the arias in this programme follow the same ABA pattern.

Italian opera fell out of fashion in London during the 1740s and Handel turned to the English oratorio, religious works to satisfy an increasingly prurient public. In Lent 1750, he staged at the Covent Garden Theatre his favourite, *Theodora*, a Christian but not Biblical story set in Antioch under the Zeus-worshipping Emperor Diocletian. In the aria 'Dread the fruits of Christian folly' the Roman soldier Septimius enters to arrest the Christian Theodora and bewails her 'stubborn melancholy' in long, angry rapid-fire melismas (syllables extended melodically for emphasis).

The Venetian violinist and composer **Vivaldi** taught music in an orphanage from 1703, forming an orchestra of mostly young women which became famous throughout Europe. He took a sabbatical after ten years to oversee productions of his operas, including *Artabano, re de' Parti* for the Venice carnival in 1718 with the star Venetian tenor Antonio Denzio in the title role. He sings the bitter Act III aria 'Cada pur sul capo audace' entering on a descending run to illustrate *cada* ('fall').

The orphanage obliged Vivaldi to send coursework for the students during his absence which amounted to a vast number of mostly unpublished concertos now held in a library in Turin, among them the Concerto in G minor RV156. It has three movements, quick-slow-quick, the first distinguished by a catchy syncopated figure, the second by oozing dissonances, the third by zipped ascents in whirling three-time.

Vivaldi's younger contemporary **Baldassare Galuppi** ran the music at another Venetian orphanage. He interrupted his teaching career to come to London following the success of his setting of the librettist Metastasio's *Alessandro nell'Indie* in 1738. Alexander the Great has conquered lands as far as India, where women taken prisoner inspire his chivalrous rage: he didn't come to the Ganges to conquer damsels, he sings. Galuppi was one of 90 composers to set this text which Metastasio dedicated, somewhat provocatively, to the Pretender to the English throne, James Stuart, son of the exiled King James II.

Galuppi probably composed the Concerto in D for the students at the orphanage. It has three dance movements - a slow introduction, a spritely *Allegro* and a

stately minuet, dances which the pupils would have enjoyed.

Metastasio was so dominant a librettist that each of his texts was set by multiple composers. **Gaetano Latilla** set his *Siroe* for the carnival in Rome in 1740. The tenor here is King Cosroe, who angrily sings 'Se il mio paterno' to his elder son who has been proud - *altero*, the second syllable extended to a complex yodel. The middle section voices a barely suppressed threat against the son's suspected treachery.

In 18th-century Paris, **Jean-Philippe Rameau's** favourite tenor was Pierre Jélyotte, who sang Neptune in the 1749 opera *Naïs*. His aria 'Cessez de ravager la terre' imitates both the furious storm (with melismas on 'chain' and 'war') which he has summoned to drown his rivals and the very different calm which follows (melisma now on 'reign') in the slow minor middle section.

A storm at sea is also the substance of Segeste's aria 'Nocchier, che mai non vide' in **Nicola Porpora's** opera *Germanico in Germania* for Rome in 1732. The tenor laughs with a rollicking melisma on *mar* ('sea') as the wind fills the sails, but his gaiety turns to fear when the sea turns threatening and the middle section minor.

The Italian star tenor after Borosini was Angelo Maria Amorevoli, who sang Ulisse in **Domenico Sarro's** setting of Metastasio's *Achille in Sciro* for the opening night of the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples by order of the Emperor Charles III in 1737. The tenor summons the image of a ship once more. In the dark, a flash of lightning helpfully illumines *il mar* - the sea, illustrated by a melisma of choppy triplets. The minor middle darkens as the music warns of treacherous paths.

The Italian composer and oboist **Giuseppe Sammartini** came to London around 1730 and made his varied career here playing in the theatres, composing and teaching the Prince of Wales's children. His Op. 2 Concerti grossi were published in 1738. No. 1 is in four movements: a *Spiritoso* in dotted rhythm; an *Allegro assai* in three-time; a bitter minor key *Andante*; and an irresistibly syncopated *Allegro*.

The German superstar tenor Anton Raaff performed many Italian operas by his compatriot **Johann Adolf Hasse**, perhaps including the role of Segeste in *Arminio* for Frederick of Prussia in 1745. His aria concerns the volatile sea again although the stormy melisma this time illustrates not *mar* but the middle syllable of *cangiarsi* - 'change'. The middle section retains the tempestuous mood of foreboding.

The definitive tenor has the title role in **Antonio Mazzoni's** setting of Metastasio's *Antigono*, which was in rehearsal at the Lisbon Opera when the earthquake struck in 1755 and was not performed until 2011. The 18th-century audience was robbed of an extraordinary piece in the aria 'Tu m'involasti un regno' which contains not a few appropriately ground-shaking moments.

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George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Empio, per farti guerra from *Tamerlano* HWV18 (1724)

Nicola Francesco Haym, after Agostin Piovene and Nicolas Pradon

Empio, per farti guerra	Wretch, to wage war on you
Dal regno di sotterra	my shade shall return
L'ombra	from the subterranean
ritornerà.	realm.
E l'ira degli Dei	And the wrath of the Gods
Al suon de' sdegni miei	shall be perhaps awakened
Forse si	by the sound of my
sveglierà.	resentment.

Dread the fruits of Christian folly from *Theodora* HWV68 (1749)

Thomas Morell

Dread the fruits of Christian folly,
And this stubborn melancholy
Fond of life and liberty.
Chains and dungeons ye are wooing,
And the storm of death pursuing;
Rebels to the known decree.
Dread the fruits... *da capo*

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Cada pur sul capo audace from *Artabano, re de' Parti* RV706 (pub. 1718)

Antonio Marchi

Cada pur sul capo audace	May his proud head
Quella face,	be singed by this flame
Che s'accende	that is ignited
Dallo sdegno nel mio cor	by the anger of my heart.
Traditor [Il rival] d'un Re	Deceiver [The rival] of a
sprezzato	King disparaged,
Provi pur l'estremo	may an extreme fate be
fato	yours
Fra le smanie del dolor.	amid the throes of anguish.

Concerto in G minor for strings RV156

I. Allegro

II. Adagio

III. Allegro

Baldassare Galuppi (1706-1785)

Vil trofeo d'un'alma imbelle from *Alessandro nell'Indie* (c.1737)

Pietro Metastasio

Vil trofeo d'un'alma imbelle	Vile symbol of a craven heart
È quel ciglio allor, che piange.	are those tear-stained eyes.
Io non venni in fi no al Gange	I did not come to Ganges' shores
Le Donzelle	to conquer
A debellar.	damsels.

O' rossor di quegli allori,	Ah the shame of those laurels
Che non han fra miei sudori	which my sweat and tears
Cominciato a germogliar.	did not cause to germinate.

Concerto a4 No. 3 in D

I. Maestoso

II. Allegro

III. Andantino

Gaetano Latilla (1711-1788)

Se il mio paterno amore from *Siroe* (1740)

Pietro Metastasio

Se il mio paterno amore	If my paternal love
Sdegna il tuo cuore altero,	your haughty heart
Più giudice severo	disdains,
Che padre a te sarò.	a harsher judge than father
	you shall come to see in me.

Et l'empia fellonia	And the wickedness and
Che forse volgi in mente	treachery
Prima che adulta sia	that you may now be
Nascente opprimerò.	hatching,
	before it comes to full
	fruition
	I shall nip it in the bud.

Interval

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764)

Cessez de ravager la terre from *Naïs* (1749)

Louis de Cahusac

Cessez de ravager la terre, Aquilons, aux mortels ne faites plus la guerre! Eole, enchaîne leur fureur! Zéphyr, que votre douce haleine Répandez dans les airs et sur l'humide plaine Les charmes de la paix qui régne dans mon cœur.	Cease to ravage the earth, North Winds, wage war with mortals no more! Aeolus, restrain their fury! Zephyrs, may your sweet breath waft the charms of the peace that reigns in my heart through the air and on the humid plain.
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Nicola Porpora (1686-1768)

Nocchier, che mai non vide from *Germanico in Germania* (1732)

Nicola Coluzzi

Nocchier, che mai non vide L'orror della tempesta, Scioglie le vele, e ride, Il vento non l'arresta, E lieto solca il mar.	The helmsman that never saw the horror of the tempest unfurls the sails and laughs, the wind does not detain him and he merrily sails the seas.
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Ma quando l'onda freme, E l'aria si scolora, Mesto sospira, e teme: Ma sul periglio allora È vano il sospirar.	But when the waves start to roar and the skies begin to darken, he sadly sighs in fear: but sighs are powerless before the coming peril.
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Domenico Natale Sarro (1679-1744)

Fra l'ombra un lampo solo from *Achille in Sciro* (1737)

Pietro Metastasio

Fra l'ombra un lampo solo Basta al Nocchier sagace, Che già ritrova il polo, Già riconosce il mar.	In the dark a single flash of lightning is all the skilful helmsman needs to soon regain his bearings and to see the sea again.
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Al pellegrin ben spesso Basta un vestigio impresso, Perché la via fallace Non l'abbia ad ingannar.	For the wayfarer very often a scanty track is all he needs for the treacherous path not to lead him astray.
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Giuseppe Sammartini (1695-1750)

Concerto grosso in A Op. 2 No. 1 (by 1738)

I. Spiritoso

II. Allegro assai

III. Andante

IV. Allegro

Johann Adolf Hasse (1699-1783)

Solcar pensa un mar sicuro from *Arminio* (1745)

Giovanni Claudio Pasquini

Solcar pensa un mar sicuro Perché vede il ciel sereno. Non si fi di, in un baleno Può cangiarsi il cielo, e il mar.	He thinks to sail a placid sea because he sees the sky serene. But beware, in a flash the sky and sea can change.
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Perché il ciel divenga oscuro Basta sol, che un nembo scioglia, Perché il mar le furie accoglia, Un sol vento può bastar.	For the sky to suddenly darken all it takes is a scudding cloud, for the sea to welcome the furies, a puff of wind is all it takes.
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Antonio Mazzoni (1717-1785)

Tu m'involasti un regno from *Antigono* (1755)

Pietro Metastasio

Tu m'involasti un regno, Hai d'un trionfo il vanto; Ma tu mi cedi intanto L'impero di quel cor. Ci esami il sembiante, Dica ogni fi do amante Chi più d'invidia è degno, Se il vinto, o il vincitor.	You have robbed me of a kingdom and taken the prize of triumph; but leave me at least the dominion of that heart. Beholding this countenance, let every faithful lover say who is more worthy of envy, the conquered or the conqueror.
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