

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 22 September 2021 7.30pm

Max Emanuel Cenčić countertenor

{oh!} Orkiestra Historyczna

Martyna Pastuszka conductor

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Leonardo Vinci (c.1696-1730)

Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762)

Francesco Scarlatti (1666-1741)

Nicola Porpora (1686-1768)

George Frideric Handel

All'orror delle procelle from *Riccardo Primo, re d'Inghilterra* HWV23 (1727)

Sta l'alma pensosa from *Gismondo, re di Polonia* (1727)

Violin Sonata in G Op. 1 No. 1 (1716) *arranged by Charles Avison*

I. Adagio – Presto • II. Allegro • III. Grave • IV. Allegro

Concerto grosso No. 4 in E minor

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

Concerto grosso No. 3 in A minor

I. Allegro • II. Andante • III. • IV.

Core avvezzo al furore from *Polifemo* (1735)

Deggio morire, o stelle from *Siroe, re di Persia* HWV24 (1728)

Interval

Leonardo Vinci

George Frideric Handel

Francesco Scarlatti

Charles Avison (1709-1770)

George Frideric Handel

Johann Adolf Hasse (1699-1783)

Bella pace from *Gismondo, re di Polonia* (1727)

Se dolce m'era già from *Floridante* HWV14 (1721)

Concerto grosso No. 1 in E

I. Grave • II. Allegro • III. Grave • IV. Allegro

Concerto grosso No. 6 in D (pub. 1744) *based on Domenico Scarlatti*

I. Largo • II. Con furia • III. Adagio • IV. Vivacemete

La tigre arde di sdegno from *Admeto, re di Tessaglia* HWV22 (1726)

Non sempre oprar da forte from *Cajo Fabricio* (1732 rev. 1733-66)

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Three centuries ago, when few ventured beyond their hometowns, many of Europe's finest musicians prospered through work abroad. They shared knowledge of the safest routes through primal forests and mountain passes, of sea crossings, tides and turnpike roads, of where to stay and hostelryes to avoid, of when to tour and when to stay at home. Like the aristocratic Grand Tourists who often employed them, **Handel** and his contemporaries travelled far.

The works in this evening's programme reflect the international outlook of composers and performers of Handel's generation and the appetite for Italian music north of the Alps. Although Italian opera was slow to take off in the British Isles, when it did, it found favour everywhere from London to Edinburgh, Bath to Dublin. Italian musicians were also in high demand. The Castrucci brothers, Pietro and Prospero, for instance, led Handel's opera orchestra in London for many years, while **Francesco Geminiani**, a violinist of outstanding ability, fine composer and influential teacher, performed for George I with Handel at the harpsichord and became one of the brightest stars of Britain's music scene.

Before finally settling in Dublin, Geminiani was based in London from 1714 to 1732 and in Paris and London thereafter. His pupils included the violinist Matthew Dubourg, Master of the State Music in Ireland, and the composer **Charles Avison**, director of the Musical Society in his native Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Avison's arrangement of his teacher's Violin Sonata in G Op. 1 No. 1 and reworkings of **Domenico Scarlatti's** keyboard *Essercizi*, published in 1744 in a collection of a dozen orchestral concertos, show his esteem for both composers and disregard for their rights as original creators, a common condition before the introduction of copyright law. Orkiestra Historyczna underlines the free flow of musicians across borders during the 18th Century with three concerti grossi by **Francesco Scarlatti**, Domenico's uncle, whose career led him from Palermo and Naples to London and Dublin. The violinist-composer taps his expertise as a performer and considerable inventive resources to find fresh things to say in the concerto form. Francesco's concertos, probably written after his arrival in London in 1719, are hallmarked by their irresistible joie de vivre and expressive intensity.

Singers proved the big box-office draw of the age, performers of the calibre of the castrati Senesino, Caffarelli and Farinelli, and the sopranos Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni, whose famous rivalry caused a riot onstage at the King's Theatre, London, in the summer of 1727. Many of the era's leading singers, Caffarelli and Farinelli among them, had been trained by the composer **Nicola Porpora**. His painstaking teaching methods set rock-solid technical foundations, while his operas delivered showpiece arias to test them. Porpora journeyed from Naples to London in 1733 at the request of a group of nobles determined to establish a new opera company to rival Handel's Royal Academy of Music, resident at the King's Theatre since 1720. The so-called Opera of the Nobility launched its first season in December 1733 with Porpora's *Arianna in Naxos*, a popular triumph. Farinelli made his London debut in *Polifemo* (1734), a *melodramma* in

three acts, delighting his audience early in the piece with the vivacious 'Core avezzo al furore', a striking blend of exuberant virtuosity and Neapolitan lyricism.

Floridante, first performed by the Royal Academy of Music in December 1721, cast Senesino in the title-role of the Thracian prince betrayed by Persia's tyrannical king Oronte. In the work's final act Floridante, caught in a complex web of royal intrigue, faces the choice of persuading his beloved Elmira to marry Oronte or die with her. Floridante's lament 'Se dolce m'era già', in the form of a slow siciliana, stands as a confession of unconditional love. In *Admeto* Handel exploited the rivalry between Faustina and Cuzzoni, creators of the respective roles of Alcestis and Antigona at the opera's first performance in January 1727. To prevent Senesino in the title-role from being upstaged, Handel fashioned three substantial soliloquies for Admetus, King of Thessaly. 'La tigre arde di sdegno' captures the king's burgeoning love for Antigona and anger that his apparently dead wife, Alcestis, cannot be found in Hades.

Riccardo Primo was first staged in December 1727 to mark George II's recent coronation. Handel cast Senesino as Richard I and projected the heroism of England's lionhearted king into the aria 'All'orror delle procelle', a tour de force for alto castrato. *Siroe* introduced the work of the Italian poet and librettist Pietro Metastasio to the London stage in 1728. Fashioned by Nicola Haym after Metastasio's largely fictional account of the rightful heir to the 7th-century Persian throne, the opera's plot is mired in duplicity and motivations of revenge, to which Handel adds rich layers of individual character and emotional complexity. 'Deggio morire, o stelle', written for Senesino, projects Siroe's heartfelt response to divine injustice and readiness to take his own life.

Rivalry was not exclusive to opera singers; composers, too, battled to land the most lucrative contracts and prestigious patrons. Porpora and his younger contemporary **Leonardo Vinci** competed for audience acclaim in Venice and Rome in the 1720s; **Johann Adolf Hasse**, Porpora's former pupil and Faustina Bordoni's husband, took Vinci's place following the latter's death in 1730. Vinci's *Gismondo, re di Polonia* received its première at Rome's Teatro delle Dame in January 1727. The arias 'Sta l'alma pensosa' and 'Bella pace', each distinguished by their Neapolitan tunefulness, combine elements of a new style destined to mature into Classicism. Hasse's *Cajo Fabricio*, with six castrati in its original cast, was first performed in Rome in 1732 and recycled by Handel for his eponymous King's Theatre *pasticcio* the following year. Fabricius's da capo aria 'Non sempre oprar da forte', written for the alto castrato Domenico Annibali, displays Hasse's gift for building and sustaining potent dramatic emotional contrasts.

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George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

All'orror delle procelle from The horror of storms

Riccardo Primo, re d'Inghilterra

HWV23 (1727)

Paolo Antonio Rolli after Francesco Briani

All'orror delle procelle
Al rigor d'avverse stelle,
Cuori avvezzi in mare e in terra,
Guerra, guerra!
Mia vendetta è il vostro onor...
Del combattere la gloria
Non è in man della fortuna,
Solo è figlia la vittoria
Del comando e del valor.

On land and sea, your hearts
know well the horror of storms
and pitilessness of hostile fate:
to war, to war!
My vengeance is your honour...
The glory of battle
lies not in fortune's hands,
rather is victory won
by command and valour.

Leonardo Vinci (c.1696-1730)

Sta l'anima pensosa from My heart is pensive

Gismondo, re di Polonia (1727)

Francesco Briani

Stà l'anima pensosa
Che un solo momento
Mi rende, e m'invola
La pace, e l'amico.
Offeso è l'onor,
Cangiato è il contento
In fiero dolor:
Son gioco del fato.
L'onor si difenda,
S'offenda il nemico,
Trionfi lo sdegno
In vece d'amor;
Ma chi mi consola
Con dirmi che allor
Sia il Cielo placato?

My heart is pensive
because, in a single moment,
I have won and lost again
both peace and a friend.
My honour is affronted,
my happiness has turned
to piercing sorrow:
I am fate's plaything.
Let my honour be upheld,
let my enemy be slighted,
let anger triumph
instead of love;
but who will console me
by telling me that
heaven will then be placated?

Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762)

Violin Sonata in G Op. 1 No. 1 (1716)

arranged by Charles Avison

I. Adagio - Presto
II. Allegro

III. Grave
IV. Allegro

Francesco Scarlatti (1666-1741)

Concerto grosso No. 4 in E minor

I. Largo
II. Allegro

III. Largo
IV. Allegro

Concerto grosso No. 3 in A minor

I. Allegro
II. Andante

III.
IV.

Nicola Porpora (1686-1768)

Core avvezzo al furore from A heart used to facing the

Polifemo (1735)

Paolo Rolli

Core avvezzo al furore
dell'armi,
A i gran mostri, alla rabbia del
mare,
Paventare i perigli non sa.
Nelle fiere contese di morte
Non ha l'anima men grande, men
forte
Chi l'incontra di quel che la
dà.

A heart used to facing the fury of
armies,
hideous monsters, the rage of the
sea,
knows not how to fear danger.
In brutal combats to the death,
he who meets his end is as strong
and
brave of spirit as he who deals the
fatal blow.

George Frideric Handel

Deggio morire, o stelle from I am weary ... I must die,

Siroe, re di Persia HWV24

(1728)

Nicola Francesco Haym after Pietro

Metastasio

Son stanco, ingiusti Numi, Numi,
Di soffrir l'ira vostra. A che mi
giova l'innocenza e virtù?
S'opprime il giusto,
S'inalza il traditor. Se i meriti umani
Così bilancia Astrea,
O regge il caso, o l'innocenza è
rea.

I am weary, unjust gods, of enduring
your wrath. What good are
innocence and virtue to me?
The righteous are trampled,
traitors prosper. If this is how Astraea
measures the merits of man,
either chance rules, or innocence is
guilt.

Deggio morire, o stelle!
Né all'innocenza mia
V'è chi contento dia,
Né chi dia pace.
Io son vicino a morte,
E ogn'un nella mia sorte
O mostrasi rubella
O pur si tace.

I must die, O stars,
for there is no one
to reward my innocence
with happiness or peace.
I stand about to die,
and as I face my destiny,
I am met with either
hostility or silence.

~Interval~

Leonardo Vinci

Bella pace from Gismondo, re Fair peace

di Polonia (1727)

Francesco Briani

Bella pace dal seno di Giove
Spiega l'ali, e qui teco discenda
La speranza, l'amore, il diletto.
E costante in ogn'anima s'accenda
Quel desio, che dal Cielo ti
muove,
Quella fede, ch'io chiudo nel
petto.

Fair peace is flying from Jupiter's
breast, and may you be visited here
by hope, love and pleasure.
And let every soul for ever burn
with the desire that from heaven
guides you,
and with the faith I bear within my
heart.

George Frideric Handel

Se dolce m'era già from

Floridante HWV14 (1721)

*Paolo Antonio Rolli after Francesco
Silvani*

Se dolce m'era già viver,
Cor mio, con te, dolce
Per te sarà morire ancora.
E questo si dirà:
Quando il suo ben perse,
Volle per fedeltà
Morire allora.

If it once was sweet to me

If it once was sweet to me,
my dearest, to live with you,
it will be as sweet to die for you.
And they will say of me:
when he lost his beloved,
he too then wished to die,
out of loyal devotion to her.

Francesco Scarlatti

Concerto grosso No. 1 in E

I. Grave
II. Allegro

III. Grave
IV. Allegro

Charles Avison (1709-1770)

Concerto grosso No. 6 in D (pub. 1744)

based on Domenico Scarlatti

I. Largo
II. Con furia

III. Adagio
IV. Vivacemente

George Frideric Handel

La tigre arde di sdegno from

Admeto, re di Tessaglia HWV22

(1726)

Nicola Francesco Haym

La tigre arde di sdegno,
Se perde il caro pegno,
Ma se lo trova poi,
Lo stringe al petto e annoda,
E ogn'or godendo va.
La tortora si lagna,
Se persa ha la compagna,
Se la rivede poi,
La voce al canto snoda
E seco in gioia sta.

The tigress burns with rage

The tigress burns with rage
when she loses her beloved cub,
but when she finds it again,
hugs it close to her breast
and is happy once more.
The turtle dove laments
when she loses her mate,
but when she sees him again,
lifts her voice in song
and shares with him her joy.

Johann Adolf Hasse (1699-1783)

Non sempre oprar da forte

from *Cajo Fabricio* (1732 rev.

1733-66)

Apostolo Zeno

Non sempre oprar da forte
E' di virtù consiglio;

Not always to attack

The counsel of virtue is
not always to attack;

Il paventar la morte
Opra è da saggio ancor.
In faccia del periglio
Fassi il valore ardire,
E allor così morire
Non reca gloria, e onor.

a wise man knows
he should fear death.
Acting with rash courage
in the face of danger,
and thus losing one's life,
is no way to win glory or honour.

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