

# WIGMORE HALL 125

Wednesday 24 June 2026  
7.30pm

Lea Desandre mezzo-soprano

Thomas Dunford director, lute

Jupiter Ensemble

Louise Ayrton violin

Magda Sypniewski violin

Mario Carpintero viola

Cyril Poulet cello

Ismael Campanero double bass

Violaine Cochard harpsichord

Neven Lesage oboe

- George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) With Darkness Deep from *Theodora* HWV68 (1749)
- Fly from the threat'ning vengeance, fly! from *Occasional Oratorio* HWV62 (1746)
- From *Dances from Terpsicore* (1734)  
*Prelude • Chaconne • Sarabande • Gigue*
- As with rosy steps the morn from *Theodora* HWV68
- Prophetic raptures swell my breast from *Joseph and his Brethren* HWV59 (1743)
- Suite from *Theodora*  
*Overture • Trio • Courante*
- Will the sun forget to streak from *Solomon* HWV67 (1748)
- III. Sarabande from Suite in D minor HWV437 (1733)
- Guardian angels, oh, protect me from *The Triumph of Time and Truth* HWV71 (1757)
- No, no, I'll take no less from *Semele* HWV58 (1743)



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The arias in tonight's concert cover the range of Handel's oratorios. *Joseph and his Brethren* represents the most common type of oratorio: an episode from the Old Testament. The *Occasional Oratorio* was written for a particular occasion, although it also drew on Old Testament texts. *The Triumph of Time and Truth* was a translation of an Italian oratorio about the transience of life; *Semele*, a Greek myth, was virtually opera without costume. *Theodora*, written in 1749, was uniquely set in early Christian times, during one of Diocletian's persecutions. Antioch has been commanded to make sacrifice to Venus and Flora or face punishment. Theodora, a local Christian leader, refuses and is accordingly arrested and threatened with rape. As the Romans celebrate their fecund goddesses, Theodora languishes in a cell, longing for Death to rescue her from a worse fate. 'With Darkness Deep' is in F sharp minor, a key Handel reserved for moments of lonely despair; the strings are marked staccato to imply stabbing grief, and 'veil' is given a warm melisma to suggest the comfort of death.

A few years earlier, in 1745, the winter season had gone so badly that by early January Handel advertised the cancellation of his concerts. This provoked enough support from subscribers to carry on, but his revivals of oratorios including *Joseph* (below) and *Messiah* were flops: he ended the season early and retreated to the countryside to recover. While Handel was enjoying the spas of Scarborough, Bonnie Prince Charlie was marching southwards. Finding few subscribers in England, the Young Pretender retreated to Scotland, pursued by the Duke of Cumberland. Patriotic fervour gripped London. Handel decided to cash in on this in 1746 by producing the *Occasional Oratorio*. But even this didn't fill seats. Charles Jennens was scathing about the libretto, writing that it was 'a triumph for a Victory not yet gain'd... an inconceivable jumble of Milton & Spencer, a Chaos extracted from Order by the most absurd of all Blockheads'. However, the music is good, including the virtuosic 'Fly from the threat'ning vengeance, fly!', written for the agile voice of the French soprano Elisabeth Duparc, 'La Francesina'.

*Terpsicore* was written for another French woman, the dancer Madame Sallé, who worked with Handel in the 1734-5 opera season. Performed as a prologue for a revival of *Il Pastor Fido*, it is a conversation between Apollo and Erato about the power of music and dance, illustrated by Terpsichore herself, entering to a chaconne and dancing a sarabande (signifying pleasure), a gigue (ardent love) and an air (jealousy).

'As with rosy steps the morn', from Act I of *Theodora*, is sung by Theodora's companion Irene. A panicked messenger exhorts the Christians to flee from the murderous Romans, but Irene gently rebuffs him, stating that trust in God is the only action needed. This aria conveys her serene trust: Handel's brilliance here is constructing an upside-down cake with the upper strings taking a typical bass line of constant quavers, while the basses supply velvety decoration.

In *Joseph and his Brethren* (1743), Joseph, sold by his brothers into slavery, is now the right-hand man of the Pharaoh, having foreseen seven years of plenty and seven of famine. He is also the husband of Asenath, the high-priest's daughter, who senses that Joseph has some inner turmoil (he has not told her that his brothers have turned up in search of corn). She sings this wonderfully optimistic aria, trusting in the generosity of the Egyptians, and encouraging Joseph also to be generous.

We return to *Theodora* for its *Overture*: a slow, French-style introduction whose key never quite settles, a furious fugal allegro, a gentle and somewhat pathetic minuet and a brisk *Courante*.

The Queen of Sheba visits Solomon in Act III of *Solomon* (1748). In 'Will the sun forget to streak' she reflects on the magnificence of his temple and his music. This aria has huge legato poise, with shimmering semiquavers in the upper strings and an expansive obbligato oboe giving a sense of wonderment.

1707 was a year of brilliance for Handel, from large-scale works such as *Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* to a tiny set of variations on the popular theme *La Folia*, perhaps influenced by Corelli, whose own variations on *La Folia* achieved both instant and long-lasting popularity. Needing a piece to publish quickly, Handel returned to it in the 1730s for his Suite in D minor.

Handel also returned – twice – to *Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*, arranging it first as *Il Trionfo del Tempo e della Verità* (1737) and then as *The Triumph of Time and Truth* (1757), his final major composition. Facing a choice between a short life of hedonism or a more sober but lengthy existence, Beauty opts for the latter in a serene final aria, originally for a duet between her and a solo violin (perhaps Corelli), but re-scored for oboe in 1737 and 1757. Handel made subtle changes to both lines, but he kept the key, E major, perhaps because in contemporary theory it signified the 'separation of body and soul'.

Written in 1743, *Semele* was not uncontroversial: 'all the opera people are enraged', wrote Mrs Delany, presumably because it was competition for the Middlesex Opera. The oratorio people, used to more religious fare, were also enraged, thinking of it, in Jennens's words, as 'a bawdy Opera'. The story, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, tells of Semele's affair with Jupiter, cut short when she is hoodwinked by Juno into persuading Jupiter to reveal his godhead to her, whereupon she is instantly fried. 'No, no, I'll take no less' is that fatal persuasive aria – commanding and brilliant, it was one of a series of showstoppers in *Semele* for 'La Francesina'.

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## George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

### With Darkness Deep from *Theodora* HWV68

(1749)

Thomas Morell

With darkness deep, as is my woe,  
Hide me, ye shades of night;  
Your thickest veil around me throw,  
Conceal'd from human sight.  
Or come thou, death, thy victim save,  
Kindly embosom'd in the grave.

### Fly from the threat'ning vengeance, fly! from *Occasional Oratorio* HWV62 (1746)

Fly from the threat'ning vengeance, fly!  
Ere 'tis too-late,  
Avoid your fate,  
The bolt once thrown, ye surely die.  
Put not your trust  
In the unjust,  
Who lift their heads so high.

### Dances from *Terpsicore* (1734)

*Prelude*

*Chaconne*

*Sarabande*

*Gigue*

### As with rosy steps the morn from *Theodora* HWV68

Thomas Morell

As with rosy steps the morn,  
Advancing, drives the shades of night,  
So from virtuous toil well-borne,  
Raise Thou our hopes of endless light.  
Triumphant saviour, Lord of day,  
Thou art the life, the light, the way!

### Prophetic raptures swell my breast from *Joseph and his Brethren* HWV59 (1743)

Prophetic raptures swell my  
breast,  
And whisper we shall still be  
blest;  
That this black gloom shall  
break away,  
And leave more heav'nly  
bright the day.

### From Suite from *Theodora* (1749)

*Overture*

*Trio*

*Courante*

### Will the sun forget to streak from *Solomon* HWV67 (1748)

Will the sun forget to streak  
Eastern skies with amber ray,  
When the dusky shades to break  
He unbars the gates of day?  
Then demand if Sheba's queen  
E'er can banish from her thought  
All the splendour she has seen,  
All the knowledge thou hast taught.

### III. Sarabande from Suite in D minor HWV437 (1733)

#### Guardian angels, oh, protect me from *The Triumph of Time and Truth* HWV71 (1757)

Guardian angels, oh, protect me,  
And in Virtue's path direct me,  
While resign'd to Heav'n above.  
Let no more this world deceive me,  
Nor let idle passions grieve me,  
Strong in faith, in hope, in love.

### No, no, I'll take no less from *Semele* HWV58 (1743)

William Congreve

No, no, I'll take no less,  
Than all in full excess!  
Your oath it may alarm you.  
Yet haste and prepare,  
For I'll know what you are,  
With all your powers arm you.