

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 30 March 2023
7.30pm

Handel in Rome

Nardus Williams soprano

Dunedin Consort

Matthew Truscott violin I,
director

Sarah Bevan-Baker violin I

Hilary Michael violin I

Huw Daniel violin II

Rebecca Livermore violin II

Kristin Deeken violin II

Beth Woodford viola

Alison McGillivray cello, viola da gamba

Lucia Capellaro cello

Christine Sticher double bass

Alexandra Bellamy oboe

Frances Norbury oboe, recorder

László Rózsa recorder

Rafael Arjona Ruz theorbo

Stephen Farr organ

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Overture from *Admeto, re di Tessaglia* HWV22 (1726)
Sinfonia • Ballo di Larve

Ero e Leandro HWV150

Tu del ciel ministro eletto from *Il trionfo del Tempo e del
Disinganno* HWV46a (1707)

Interval

Concerto Grosso in G minor Op. 6 No. 6 HWV324 (1739)

I. Largo affettuoso • II. A tempo giusto •

III. Musette. Larghetto • IV. Allegro • V. Allegro

Tra le fiamme HWV170 (c.1707-8)

Per me già di morire from *La Resurrezione* HWV47 (1708)

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Handel in Rome

In his three-and-a-half years in Italy from 1706, the young **Handel** - or *Il caro Sassone* ('the dear Saxon') as they named him - produced more than 150 works in an outburst of extraordinary creativity that set him up for the rest of his career. That he was able to draw on so much of this material for his operas is all the more remarkable given Pope Clement XI's 1703 ban on operatic performances, though, as this evening's cantatas show, there was still plenty of scope for drama.

The *Sinfonia* and *Ballo di Larve* that open *Admeto* plunge the audience into a nightmarish and fevered scene, as Admeto himself is tormented by visions of demons dancing across his mind and body. Although premièred in London in 1727, the strength of Handel's scene-setting here harks back to the vignettes and dioramas he captured in his cantatas in Italy.

In *Ero e Leandro*, Ero's nightmares have fully become a reality. In a grim twist of fate, her lamp has gone out and so her lover, Leander, has lost his guide in his nightly crossing of the Hellespont to see her. The cantata begins as she struggles to understand that what she can see is his dead body. Her rage at the seas turns to a grief so intense and introverted that she comes only to think of how she must join him in death. This psychological intensity is ramped up through a rich palate of solo string writing and oboes that are first confrontational and then keening. The cantata ends not with an aria but with a stark recitative that brings Ero her last kiss with Leander's frozen lips.

The first half closes with Belezza's stratospheric aria from the end of *Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*. Through this secular oratorio - text nevertheless written by Cardinal Pamphili, one of Rome's many competing patron-priests - Time and Disillusionment work together to persuade Beauty to ignore the wiles of Pleasure. In this aria, Time treads implacably forwards in the tutti strings and yet Handel entwines soprano and solo violin above them to set Beauty entirely free. As with so much of Handel's Italian output, this music had a second life in England when the oratorio was revived in translation as *The Triumph of Time and Truth*, in which the aria became 'Guardian angels' and the violin an oboe to no less profound effect.

Although Handel's Op. 6 *Concerti Grossi* were composed in scarcely a month in the Autumn of 1739 in London, they too have a connection to Rome. Arcangelo Corelli, who found fame in the city and whom Handel first met there in 1706, defined the concerto grosso form in his own Op. 6 set. There's little doubt that Handel's choice of opus number, as

well as the alignment of formal structure and orchestration, was intended to write himself into the tradition as Corelli's greatest successor. The most notable feature of tonight's sixth in G minor is its extended *Musette* - so called for the bagpipe suggested by the drone in the bass - which was so popular as to be regularly excerpted for separate performance in Handel's own time.

Tra le fiamme, also known as *Il Consiglio* ('The Advice'), sets another text by Cardinal Pamphili and so takes us back to the Rome of 1707. Just as the story of *Ero e Leandro* explored the risks of crossing boundaries - between land and sea, between continents - so Pamphili's text uses the story of Icarus and his overreaching attempt at flight to counsel the listener to take the middle course and stay in their lane: resisting extremes of behaviour will avoid the risk of drowning, whether literally in the waters of the Aegean or figuratively in sin. Some see Handel himself as the intended recipient of this lesson, advised to steer clear of the moral dangers of composing opera and, perhaps more importantly, its ban by papal edict.

Musically, Handel combines viola da gamba and recorders to great effect to deliver by turns the wavering human heart, the beating wings of Icarus, and the rippling waves of the sea. Unusually, the cantata ends with a full repeat of the opening aria, bringing back the fluttering wings of both the short-lived butterflies and the reincarnating phoenix, reinforcing the continued challenge of staying the middle course for human hearts and minds.

The programme closes with Mary Magdalene's lament from *La Resurrezione*. As well as picking up the resurrection imagery of Pamphili's phoenix, there is a further link between the last two pieces in terms of instrumentation. Handel first met the prodigiously talented German gambist Ernst Christian Hesse in Hamburg and is very likely to have seen him again in Rome at this time. It is tempting to think that Handel's extremely demanding writing for the instrument took advantage of having one of Europe's greatest players on hand.

The aria uses the gamba alongside the appropriately sepulchral combination of recorders, muted oboe and solo violin to support Mary Magdalene through her intensely chromatic reflection on the contradictory pain and comfort of Jesus's death. In one final piece of symmetry, that violin solo would have been played by Corelli himself, leading the orchestra for *La Resurrezione's* first and only performances in Rome at Easter 1708.

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George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Overture from *Admeto, re di Tessaglia*

HWV22 (1726)

Sinfonia

Ballo di Larve

Ero e Leandro HWV150

attr. Pietro Ottoboni

Recitative

Qual ti riveggio, oh Dio, Ahi, vista che m'uccide! Così vieni a bear mi, idolo mio? È pur questo, occhi miei, Leandro? Ahi lasso! Leandro il mio conforto, Ecco su queste arene e sangue e morto.	O God, what a state I see you in again, Ah, the sight kills me! Is this how you come to make me happy, my idol? And is this really Leander, my eyes? Alas! This is Leander, my comfort, drained and dead on the sand.
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Aria

Empio mare, onde crudeli, Giusto è ben ch'io mi quereli, Della vostra crudeltà. Sei pur morto, o caro, ed io Veggio ancor, Leandro mio, Viva in te la fedeltà.	Pitiless sea, cruel waves, it's right that I complain of your cruelty. You really are dead, my dearest, and yet still I see, my Leander, loyalty alive in you.
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Recitative

Amor, che ascoso ne' suoi vaghi lumi, Da così dolce loco Porgevi esca al mio fuoco, Ove fuggisti allor che tempo e morte Tesero insidie al caro idolo mio? Ahi tempo! Ahi morte! Ahi crudo amore, oh Dio.	Love, who living in his beautiful eyes, stoked the fires of my passion from such a sweet abode, where did you flee when time and death laid a trap for my dear idol? Ah, time! Ah, death! Ah, cruel Love, O God!
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Aria

Se la morte non vorrà Meco usar la crudeltà Che già teco praticò, Pria del tempo idolo amato Pria del tempo a te verrò. Che se morte a me s'asconde, Di trovarsi in mezzo all'onde, La tua fè già m'insegnò.	If death won't treat me with the same cruelty it has already dealt you, before time, my beloved idol, before time I will come to you. If death hides itself from me, your loyalty has already shown me how to find it in the midst of the waves.
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Recitative

Questi dalla mia fronte a forza svelti biondi crini, Che lacci furo al cuor di Leandro, E gl'ornamenti, rinforzo un tempo, Ora gravosi impacci di mia beltà: Prendili, o mar: Tu chiudi nel profondo dell'acque questi tesori miei; Indi la salma attendi di colei Che più di questi a bel Leandro piacque.	These golden locks torn from my scalp, which were snares for Leander's heart, and these ornaments, once confirmations, now heavy reminders of my beauty: Take them, O sea: Hide in the deeps these treasures of mine; then wait for my corpse, which Leander loved more than these things.
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Aria

Si muora, si muora: Come son viva ancora, In tanto e rio martir? Alma, non troverai cagion più bella mai, Più propria per morir.	Let me die, let me die: How am I still alive, in such bitter grief? Soul, you'll not find a reason nobler nor more fitting to die.
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Recitative

Ecco, gelide labbra, Pegni della mia fè, gl'ultimi baci, Dolce nido d'amor, pupille amate, Quanto mi duol, che chiusi Rimirar non possiate L'ultimo sforzo d'un fedele amore.	Look, icy lips, here are my last kisses, pledges of my loyalty; sweet nest of love, beloved eyes, how much it hurts that, closed, you cannot see the last efforts of a faithful love.
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Si disse e fiera in mar precipitossi, Ove trovò la giovinetta ardita Morte ad altri noiosa, a lei gradita.	So she spoke and boldly flung herself into the sea, where the courageous woman found death, hateful to others, but welcome to her.
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**Tu del ciel ministro
eletto from *Il trionfo del
Tempo e del
Disinganno* HWV46a**

(1707)

Benedetto Pamphili

Tu del ciel ministro eletto, Non vedrai più nel moi petto Voglia infida, o vano ardor. E se vissi ingrata a Dio, Tu custode del cor mio A lui porta il nuovo cor.	Heaven's chosen minister Heaven's chosen minister, no more will you see in my heart disloyal desire, or vain passion. And though I have been indifferent to God, you, my guardian angel, offer Him now my reborn heart.
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Interval

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

**Concerto Grosso in G minor Op. 6 No. 6
HWV324 (1739)**

I. Largo affettuoso

II. A tempo giusto

III. Musette. Larghetto

IV. Allegro

V. Allegro

Tra le fiamme HWV170 Among the flames

(c.1707-8)

Benedetto Pamphili

<i>Aria</i> Tra le fiamme tu scherzi per gioco, O mio core, per farti felice, E t'inganna una vaga beltà. Cadon mille farfalle nel foco, E si trova una sola fenice, Che risorge se a morte sen va.	<i>Aria</i> Among the flames you playfully dart, O my heart, to make yourself happy, and are deceived by a fine beauty. A thousand butterflies fall into the fire, and there is only one phoenix, which rises from death.
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<i>Recitativo</i> Dedalo già le fortunate penne Tessea con mano ardita E con tenera cera Piuma a piuma aggiungea. Icaro, il fanciulletto	<i>Recitative</i> Daedalus once wove lucky wings with crafty hands and with supple wax, adding feather after feather. Icarus, the young child
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Sovente confondea L'ingegnoso lavoro; Ah, così mai trattato non avesse E cera e piume: Per chi non nacque augello Il volare è portento, Il cader è costume.	often hampered this ingenious work; ah, if only he had never treated wax and feathers like this: for those not born a bird, flying is a miracle, falling a habit.
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<i>Aria</i> Pien di nuovo e bel diletto Sciolse l'ali il giovinetto, E con l'aure già scherzando. Ma del volo sì gradito Troppo ardito L'onda ancor va mormorando.	<i>Aria</i> Full of new and fair delight, the young boy unfurled the wings, and played games with the breezes. But of the flight so enjoyed but too daring the waves still whisper.
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<i>Recitativo</i> Sì, sì purtroppo è vero: Nel temerario volo Molti gl'Icari son, Dedalo un solo.	<i>Recitative</i> Yes, yes it is unfortunately true: of those flying recklessly there are many like Icarus, but only one Daedalus.
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<i>Aria</i> Voli per l'aria chi può volare Scorra veloce la terra il mare Parta, ritorni né fermi il piè. Voli ancor l'uomo ma coi pensieri Che delle piume ben più leggeri E più sublimi il ciel gli diè.	<i>Aria</i> Let those that can fly, fly through the air, swiftly skimming the land and the sea, coming and going without touching the ground. And man may fly too, but in his thoughts, which, heaven sent, are far lighter and more sublime than feathers.
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<i>Recitativo</i> L'uomo che nacque per salire al cielo, Ferma il pensier nel suolo E poi dispone il volo Con ali che si finge, e in sé non ha.	<i>Recitative</i> The man born to ascend to heaven fixes his thoughts upon the ground, and then sets about his flight with wings he has created, that are not innate to him.
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<i>Aria</i> Tra le fiamme ...	<i>Aria</i> Among the flames ...
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Per me già di morire
from *La Resurrezione*

HWV47 (1708)

Carlo Sigismondo Capece

To die for me

Per me già di morire

Non paventò Gesù.

Egli mi dà gl'ardire;

Per lui nulla

pavento,

Né morte, né tormento;

Quando ho Gesù nel cor non

temo più.

Jesus did not fear

to die for me.

He gives me courage;

because of him I fear

nothing,

neither death nor torment;

when Jesus is in my heart

I am no longer afraid.

Translation of 'Per me già di morire' by Anthony Hicks.