

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 5 February 2023
7.30pm

Tragic Handelian figures

Les Talens Lyriques

Simone Pirri violin
Gabriel Grosbard violin
Emmanuel Jacques cello
Christophe Rousset director, harpsichord

Ambroisine Bré mezzo-soprano

- George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) Notte placida e cheta HWV142 (?1708)
- Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713) Trio Sonata in G minor Op. 3 No. 11 (pub. 1689)
I. Grave • II. Presto • III. Adagio • IV. Allegro
Ciaccona. Largo - Allegro from Trio Sonata in G Op. 2 No. 12
'Ciaccona' (pub. 1685)
- George Frideric Handel From *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* HWV17 (1724 rev. 1725-30)
Cara speme, questo core • Svegliatevi nel core
- Interval*
- George Frideric Handel Son qual stanco Pellegrino from *Arianna in Creta* HWV32
(1733-4)
- Trio Sonata in B minor HWV386b (pub. c.1730-3)
I. Andante • II. Allegro ma non troppo •
III. Largo • IV. Allegro
- Agrippina condotta a morire HWV110 (c.1807-8)

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18th-century Italy was irresistible to two groups of visitors above all others: the intrepid young on the fashionable 'Grand Tour', and artists. However, whereas most of those travelling through Europe for their own interest were of means allowing them to extend their adventures as long as they chose, the musicians, writers and painters converging on Italy's main cities could not afford themselves any such indulgence. They needed to use their time in the vibrant cultural centres of Florence, Venice and Rome to enrich their work, and to do that they also needed financial and material support in the form of patronage from the peninsula's most resourceful and significant figures.

The most accomplished musicians could hope to attract the attention of the most senior clerics in Rome such as Cardinals Pietro Ottoboni and Benedetto Pamphili, who spent notoriously large sums on musical spectacles for their private parties. By the time George Frideric Handel arrived in Italy in 1706 Pope Clement XI had banned opera in the Papal States, so he found a loophole writing grand, sacred music and large-scale secular cantatas for such figures. The latter were performed at the Cardinals' gatherings in their Roman palaces and outside during weekends at their estates in the countryside beyond the city walls. These pseudo-operas also appeared at the exclusive meetings of the private society of intellectuals known as the *Accademia dell'Arcadia*, founded by the charismatic Queen Christina of Sweden and counting among its membership figures such as Ottoboni and Pamphili. It had been convened to revive and retain the values of ancient Classical tradition by way of representation in literature and music, and supported the work of composers such as Alessandro Scarlatti, Arcangelo Corelli and Giovanni Bononcini. Handel's time in Rome as the guest of such high-profile patrons, including the Marquis Francesco Maria Ruspoli, had led to his gradual absorption into this exclusive salon, and it was here that he first met Corelli, and encountered such notable writers as Pietro Metastasio and Piero Bonelli.

The *Accademia* also provided an attractive mystique to those passing through on their Grand Tours. Among the mementoes these travellers took back to London were examples of the music of the country that had so captivated them, and which originated from this illusive culture: in the famous painting by the celebrated portrait artist Pompeo Batoni, John Montagu, Earl of Sandwich, displays the spoils of his Italian tour, a *chitarra* tucked under his arm and an open copy of Corelli's Trio Sonata No. 5 on his lap. Then, as now, for the English Italy was synonymous with style and elegance, and when Italian musicians such as **Corelli** began to arrive in London, their presence permeated the entire musical scene. Most notably, English chamber music began to model itself on Corelli's archetypal trio sonatas that followed two traditional Italian forms: those written for the church ('da chiesa'), as exemplified by his Trio Sonata in G minor Op. 3 No. 11, and for chamber ('da camera'), such as the Trio Sonata in G Op. 2 No. 12 – both of which were held up as

paradigms of procedural perfection by English composers.

As the distinguished musician and historian Charles Burney wrote in his *General History of Music* in 1776: 'The ancient Romans had the fine arts and eminent artists from Greece; and, in return, the modern Romans supply all the rest of Europe with painting, sculpture, and Music. This last art is a manufacture in Italy, that feeds and enriches a large portion of the people; and it is no more disgraceful to a mercantile country to import it, than wine, tea, or any other production...' **Handel** had written most of his secular cantatas during his time in Italy between 1706 and 1710: two of the best known, which bookend this evening's performance, are based on the mythological subjects of Burney's account and date from 1707-8, when Handel was employed by the Ruspoli family. Of the many entertainments he wrote for them, *Notte placida e cheta* is a dream sequence, set in the pastoral surroundings of Arcadia as the protagonist imagines her lover. It is most likely to have been written for one of the Ruspoli's regular Sunday evening recitals and is unusual for a cantata – although not for an opera – in that each of its four arias is preceded by a recitative. Its intention for a grander occasion than a straightforward recital is also evident in the variety of styles it uses over the course of its movements: two recitatives are fully accompanied, the first aria concentrates on the tonal colours of the words themselves, another narrows the forces into an intimate duet between singer and cello, and the closing movement pulls all these together into a filigree display of counterpoint and fugue. *Agrippina condotta a morire* is more directly dramatic, telling the story of the rage of the Roman empress Agrippina the Younger as she finds herself condemned to death by her own son, Emperor Nero.

When Handel arrived in London in 1710, however, he encountered no obstacles to the composition of opera as he had in Rome. It was here that his path again crossed Pietro Bonelli's, and the two began a collaboration that included some of Handel's most famous *opere serie*. This dramatic Italian form was based on Classical subjects in the same manner as the secular cantatas that he had written in Italy, and which had effectively functioned as opera in disguise under the Pope's ban. As a result, they were also sung in Italian and featured some of the same heroic male characters. *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* was an immediate success when it was premièred at the Royal Academy in 1724. Its arias 'Cara speme, questo core' and 'Svegliatevi nel core' were both written for the character of Sesto, an *en travesti* (trouser) role most likely created by Handel for Margherita Durastanti, the soprano whose name had been closely associated with his in Rome. *Arianna in Creta* follows the same pattern of Classical mythology, telling the story of the slaying of the Minotaur by Theseus and Ariadne, daughter of King Minos of Crete. In it, Alceste's soothing aria 'Son qual stanco Pellegrino' transports the listener back to the voice-and-cello intimacy of *Notte placida e cheta*.

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George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Notte placida e cheta HWV142 (?1708)

Anonymous

Recitativo

Notte placida e cheta,
che col tuo fosco ammanto
porgi grato riposo al mio
dolore, deh! Se potessi
almeno col tuo grato
sopore far ch'in sogno
vedessi dell'idol mio l'idea
tutta in gioia cangiata ed in
sorriso, proverebbe il mio
core un paradiso.

Aria

Zeffiretti, deh!
venite,
Sol da voi porger si ponno
Nel mio sen con dolce
sonno
Mormorando aure
gradite.
E allor poi dirò contento,
Vagheggiando di mia
Fille
Non severe le
pupille:
Pur felice ebbi un
momento.

Recitativo

Momento fortunato in
cui l'anima s'avviva quando
di vita priva potea restar,
da tante cure e tante,
e se in sogno godrò,
quel solo istante, vivrò
sempre qual fui, fedele
amante.

Aria

Per un istante,
Se in sogno, Amore,
Mi fai gioir,
Sempre costante
T'offrisco il core
Sino al morir.
A un giust'affetto
Questa mercede
Non puoi negar,
E un sol diletto
A intatta fede
Si può donar.

Calm and soundless night

Recitative

Calm and soundless night,
who with your dark
mantle offers welcome
peace from my sorrow,
ah, if you could only with
your grateful languor
make me see in a dream
the image of my love all
changed to joy and
smiling, then would my
heart know paradise.

Aria

Come, oh come you
zephyrs,
for only you can offer
my heart through sweet
slumber
the murmur of soft-
blowing airs.
And then I will say, content,
while gazing into the eyes
of my Phyllis,
which are no longer
frowning:
'For this moment I was
happy.'

Recitative

O happy moment in which
the spirit comes alive,
freed from life and the
goad of so many cares.
And if in a dream for just
that one instant I rejoice,
then I will live as always a
faithful lover.

Aria

For an instant
if in a dream, Love,
you make me joyful,
then ever faithful
I offer you my heart
until death.
To a true love
this reward
you cannot deny.
This one gift
to perfect faithfulness
may be granted.

Accompagnato

Ma già sento che spande
l'ali placide e chete
cortese sonno e le
pupille aggrava.
Questo misero core
tu lo soccorri, Amore;
fa ch'io pur giunga a quel
che tanto agogno;
vientene, Amore, i
rai già chiudo, e
sogno.

Aria

Luci belle,
Vaghe stelle,
Pur vi miro
Placidette,
Vezzosette,
Verso me.
Son felice,
Se mi lice
Lo sperare
Al mio amor
Grata mercé.

Accompagnato

Oh delizie d'amor, sazie mie
voglie saranno al fin. Se in
mar placido e cheto di
gioie di piacer, ma... chi
indiscreto mi rompe il
sonno ed ogni ben mi
toglie?

Ah, conosca il
mortale:

Aria

Che non si
dà
Qua giù pace gradita,
Se non altro che un sogno
È la sua vita.

Accompagnato

But even now I feel the
calm and silent wings of
grateful sleep spread
over me and way upon
my eyelids. Ah, Love,
come to the aid of this
suffering heart; let me
achieve what I so yearn
for, come to me, Love,
my eyes are closing
and I dream already.

Aria

Lovely eyes,
comely stars,
now I see you
calmly,
teasingly,
turn toward me.
I am happy
if I may
hope
for my love
an obliging mercy.

Accompagnato

O the delights of love; at the
end my desires will be
satisfied. But if in this sea
of peace and quiet...who
is this intruder who
troubles my sleep and
robs me of my joy?

Ah, all mortal man should
know:

Aria

That no one can achieve
longed
for peace here on earth
if his life is no more
than a dream.

Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713)

Trio Sonata in G minor Op. 3 No. 11 (pub. 1689)

I. Grave

II. Presto

III. Adagio

IV. Allegro

Ciaccona. Largo – Allegro from Trio Sonata in G Op. 2 No. 12 'Ciaccona' (pub. 1685)

George Frideric Handel

From *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* HWV17

(1724 rev. 1725-30)

Nicola Francesco Haym, after Giacomo Francesco Bussani

Cara speme, questo core

Dear hope

Cara speme, questo core
Tu cominci a lusingar.
Par che il ciel presti
favore
I miei torti a
vendicar.
Cara speme, questo core
Tu cominci a lusingar.

Dear hope, my heart
you begin to flatter.
It seems that heaven
lends its favour
to the avenging of the
wrongs I have suffered.
Dear hope, my heart
you begin to flatter.

Svegliatevi nel core

Awaken in my heart

Svegliatevi nel core,
Furie d'un'alma offesa,
A far d'un traditor
aspra vendetta!

Awaken in my heart,
furies of an offended soul,
to take harsh revenge
on the traitor!

L'ombra del genitore
Accorre a mia difesa,
E dice: a te il rigor,
Figlio, si
aspetta.

The shadow of my father
hastens to my defence,
and says: from you, my son,
now is the time for
ruthlessness.

Interval

George Frideric Handel

Son qual stanco Pellegrino from *Arianna* in *Creta* HWV32 (1733-4)

(1733-4)

Anonymous, after Pietro Pariati

I am like some weary traveller

Son qual stanco
pellegrino,
Che nel dubbio suo cammino
Muove incerto, errando il piè.

I am like some weary
traveller
who, uncertain of his
path,
hesitates and stumbles.

Ma se poi si fa sua scorta,
Face, o stella, si conforta
E smarrito più non è.

But if he finds a lamp or star
to guide him, he takes heart
and then is lost no more.

Trio Sonata in B minor HWV386b (pub. c.1730-3)

I. Andante

II. Allegro ma non troppo

III. Largo

IV. Allegro

Agrippina condotta a morire HWV110

(c.1807-8)

Anonymous

Agrippina led to her death

Recitativo

Dunque sarà pur vero
Che disseti la terra il sangue
mio?
E soffrir deggio, o Dio,
Che mi trapassi il sen destra
ribelle?
Cruda Roma! Empie stelle!
Barbaro mio destin!
Figlio inumano, e qual furore
insano
A condannar vi spinge alma
innocente?
Ah! Cuore, ah! Cuor
dolente,
Cuor di madre tradita e
disprezzata
Vuol così la tua sorte:
Spira l'anima forte
Vilipesa, schernita,
invendicata.

Recitative

So it has really come to this,
that the earth shall drink
my blood?
And must I suffer, O God,
the rebel sword to pierce
my breast?
Cruel Rome! Wicked stars!
Barbarous fate!
Inhuman son! What
crazed fury
pushes you to condemn
an innocent soul?
Ah, my heart! Ah, my
suffering heart,
the heart of a mother
betrayed and despised,
your fate has willed it thus:
the strong soul shall die,
reviled, scorned,
unavenged.

Aria

Orrida, oscura l'etra si
renda
E spesso avvampi col
balenar.
E tuoni e lampi, per mia
sventura,
A sparger prenda il mio
sperar.

Aria

Let the sky become
horrible and dark,
let it often flare up with
bolts of lightning.
And, for my misfortune,
let it spread
rumblings and flashings at
the moment of my death.

Recitativo

Ma pria che d'empia morte
Nel misero mio sen, giunga
l'atro veleno,
Pria che pallida esangue
sparga ne' fiati estremi
E l'anima e l'
sangue,
Giove, Giove Immortale, tu,
che vuoti dall'etra,
Sopra il capo de'
rei,
La tremenda faretra,
Tu, che fra gli
Dei

Recitative

But before the black poison
of cruel death has reached
my wretched breast;
before, pale and bloodless,
in my final gasps
I yield my soul and life-
blood;
Jove, immortal, Jove, you,
who from heaven's vault
empty you fearsome
quiver of arrows
onto the heads of the guilty,
you, who above all other
gods

Di provvido e di giusto hai
pregio e vanto,
Vendica questo pianto,
E bla ragion di così acerba
pena;
Tuona, Giove Immortal,
tuona e balena.

have the merit of wisdom
and justice,
avenge these tears,
and the cause of such
bitter pains;
thunder, immortal Jove,
thunder and strike down!

Aria
Renda cenere il tiranno
Un tuo fulmine
crudel,
Giove in Ciel, se giusto
sei,
In vendetta
dell'inganno,
Usa sdegno e
crudeltà,
Per pietà de' torti miei.

Aria
Turn the tyrant to ashes
with one of your harsh
lightning bolts,
Jove in heaven, if you are
just!
In revenge for this
treachery,
unleash your scorn and
cruelty
in pity of my wrongs.

Recitativo
Sì, sì del gran tiranno
Provi l'alta potenza 'l
traditore;
Lacero l'empio core,
esca d'augel
rapace
Renda sol per mia pace il suo
destino;
E sparsa e
palpitante
Sopra le nude arene,
Miri poscia ogni fibra il
pellegrino
Con pestiferi fiati
Gli ultimi suoi respiri avveleni
la terra
E l'ossa infrante, fra tormenti
severi,
Pria che l'anima spiri,
Servano poi d'orror ai
passaggeri;
Mora l'indegno figlio...
Ah! Che a tal nome penso
ancor
Che son madre, e manca il
furor,
Ne so dir come.

Recitative
Yes! Let the traitor
feel the power of the
greatest despot;
let destiny lacerate his
wicked heart and give it as
prey to ravenous birds:
only then may I find
peace;
and may his entrails, still
throbbing, scattered
over the desert sands,
be seen by passing
pilgrims;
with pestilent vapour
may his final breaths
poison the earth,
and his bones, broken by
terrible torture
before he breathes his last,
serve as objects of horror
to passers-by;
let the unworthy son die...
Ah! that name reminds
me
that I am a mother, and
my anger abates,
though I cannot say how.

Scena
Come, o Dio, bramo la morte
a chi
Vita ebbe da
me?

Scena
How, O God, can I desire
the death
of one who owes his life
to me?

Forsennata che
parli?
Mora, mora l'indegno!
Che d'empia morte è
degno,
Chi sol brama godere al mio
periglio.

Madwoman, what are you
saying?
Let the wretch die!
For he who wants only to
rejoice at my peril
deserves a cruel
death.

Ho rossor d'esser
madre
A chi forse ha rossor d'esser
mio fi glio.

I am ashamed to be the
mother
of one who is ashamed to
be my son.

Sì, sì, s'uccida,
Lo sdegno grida!
Sì, sì, s'uccida...
E chi? L'amata prole?
Ah! Tolga il ciel che
chiuda
I lumi ai rai del sole;
Viva benchè
spietato,
Sì, viva, e si
confonda,
Con esempio d'amor, un
cuore ingrato.

Yes, yes, kill him,
my anger cries out for it!
Yes, yes, kill him...
But who? My beloved child?
Ah! heaven forbid that he
should close
his eyes to the light of day;
let him live, even if he is
heartless,
yes, let him live, and his
ungrateful heart
be confounded by this
example of love.

A me sol giunga la
morte,
Che sarò costante e
forte...
Incauta e che mai
dissi?
Non vuoi che Roma apprenda
Che cinto d'oro e
d'ostro
lo fui bastante a partorire un
mostro.

Let death come to me
alone,
for I shall be steadfast
and strong...
Rash woman, what am I
saying?
I do not want Rome to
learn
that I was capable of giving
birth to a monster
clothed in gold and
purple.

Cada lacero e
svenato,
Mora sì, mora l'ingrato
Che nemico a me si
fè!

Let him fall, lacerated and
bleeding,
let him die, the ingrate
who made himself my
enemy!

Sparga quel sangue
istesso,
Che sol per mio diletto
Trasse tenero infante
Nelle materne viscere
concelto.

Let that very blood be
spilled
which for my delight
grew into a tender infant
conceived in my motherly
womb.

Pera l'empio neron, sì,
pera...
Ah! Come in sì fi ero
periglio

Let wicked Nero die, yes,
die...
Ah! How in such fierce
danger

Torni su i labbri miei nome di
figlio.

can the name of my son
return to my lips!

Come, o Dio, bramo la
morte
A chi vita ebbe da
me?

How, O God, can I desire
the death
of one who owes his life
to me?

Sì, sì, viva nerone,
E sol de la sua
madre
Servan l'ossa insepolti
A gli aratri
d'inciampo;
Beva l'arido campo,

Yes, yes, let Nero live,
and only the unburied
bones
of the mother
be an impediment to the
farmer's plough.
Let the barren fields

Bevan le selve incolte,
Tratto dal cor che langue
Il più vitale e spiritoso umore;

Indi tutta rigore
Passi l'anima infelice,
Là ne' più cupi abissi;
Ivi apprenda empietà, poscia
ritorni
A funestar d'un fi glio ingrato
i giorni.

Aria
Se infelice al mondo
vissi,
Ne' profondi e cupi
abissi
Infelice ancor sarò.
Ma vendetta almen
faro:
Ombra nera e larva
errante,
Di rigor furia,
baccante,
Chi m'offese
agiterò.

Recitativo
Prema l'ingrato fi glio
Di plaustro trionfal sponde
gemmate,
Stridan le route
aurate,
E superbo, e tiranno
Di tal vittoria altero
Giunga cinto d'alloro in
campidoglio;
Che l'ultrici saette
lo di giove non voglio
A fulminare il contumace
orgoglio;
lo sola, ombra
dolente,
Se vuol barbaro ciel che si
m'accora,
Che il colpevole viva, e'l
giusto mora.

Aria
Su lacerate il seno,
Ministri, e che si fa?
Usate ogni rigore,
Morte vi chiede il core,
E morte date
almeno
A chi non vuol pietà !

and wild forests drink
that vital and lively liquid
drained from a dying
heart;
thence, cold as ice,
may the unhappy soul pass
down to the darkest depths,
there to learn wickedness,
so that it may afterwards
return to bedevil the days
of an ungrateful son.

Aria
If I have lived unhappy in
this world,
in the deepest, darkest
abysses
I shall be unhappy still.
But I shall at least have
vengeance:
as a black shade and
wandering ghost,
turned by my coldness to
a fury, a baccante,
I shall pursue the man
who wronged me.

Recitativo
Let my ingrate son
grip the jewelled sides of
his triumphal chariot,
let its gilded wheels
screech,
and the haughty tyrant,
proud of such a victory,
be crowned with laurel at
the capitol;
I do not want the avenging
arrows of Jove
to strike down his
stubborn pride;
I will do it myself, as a
grieving shade,
since pitiless heaven wishes
to torment me thus;
may the guilty live, and
the just die.

Aria
Come, tear open my breast,
ministers, why delay?
Use every torture,
my heart calls out for death,
and you can at least give
death
to one who wants no pity!

Recitativo
Ecco a morte già corro,
E d'un fi glio crudel sarà pur
vanto,
Che si nieghi alla madre,
O l'onor della tomba, o quel
del pianto.

Recitative
See, I hasten to my death,
and my ingrate son can
boast
that he denied his mother
both the honour of a
tomb, and that of tears.

Translation of 'Son qual stanco Pellegrino' by Avril Bardoni. 'Agrippina condotta a morire' by James Halliday, printed with permission. All other translations kindly provided by the artists.

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