

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 7 July 2023
7.30pm

In Memory of Eileen Miller

Handel's Heyday in London

Christoph Prégardien tenor

La Centifolia

Leila Schayegh violin, director

Rahel Wittling violin

Lukas Hamberger violin

Aliza Vicente Aranda violin

Soko Yoshida violin

Sara Gómez Yunta viola

Alex Jellici cello

Federico Abraham violone

Alberto Gaspardo harpsichord, organ

Georg Fritz oboe

Francesco Intrieri oboe

Adrià Sánchez Calonge bassoon

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Overture from *Rodelinda* HWV19 (1725)

Forte e lieto from *Tamerlano* HWV18 (1724)

Ouverture from Concerto Grosso in F Op. 3 No. 4 (1740)

Figlia mia, non pianger from *Tamerlano* HWV18

From Concerto Grosso in F Op. 3 No. 4

Andante • Allegro

Fatto inferno è il mio petto ... Pastorello d'un povero
armento from *Rodelinda* HWV19

Minuetto from Concerto Grosso in F Op. 3 No. 4

Tuo drudo è mio rivale from *Rodelinda* HWV19

Interval

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)

Allegro from Concerto in E minor for violin and 2 oboes
TWV53:e2

George Frideric Handel

Total eclipse from *Samson* HWV57 (1741-2)

Georg Philipp Telemann

From Concerto in E minor for violin and 2 oboes TWV53:e2
Andante • Menuet

George Frideric Handel

Thus when the sun from's wat'ry bed from *Samson* HWV57
From *Jephtha* HWV70 (1751)

Overture • Deeper and deeper still •

Hide thou thy hated beams • Waft her, angels



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When **Handel** arrived in England to settle in 1711, he brought with him the first experience of Italian opera that London audiences had ever had in any meaningful way. His experiences in Italy as he crossed Europe from Germany left a lasting impression on all the forms in which he composed throughout his long career, but the early part of his success was predicated on these quintessential Italian *opera serie*, and of these, two in particular were to become among his most highly praised.

Rodelinda and *Tamerlano* were presented at the King's Theatre on Haymarket as part of the 1724 season. Handel's relationships with the theatre's star singers were famously tempestuous, and in later years there were frequent rows and stormings-out. In this relatively early season, though, those fiery relationships were still being used to constructive effect, and it was this process that took the most striking feature of Italian operatic style – the focus on the virtuoso solo voice – and crafted it into works of extraordinary insight and pathos which ensured Handel's enduring popularity.

Somewhat surprisingly, Handel wrote leading roles in both *Rodelinda* and *Tamerlano* for his favourite Italian tenor, Francesco Borosini. What the Royal Academy's star castrato, Senesino, famously lacked in acting skills, Borosini made up for in spades, and his ability to beguile audiences both visually and musically was enough to embolden Handel to take the unusual step of giving central roles in both operas to a tenor. In *Rodelinda*, this was Grimoaldo, the tyrannical Duke of Benevento, bent on winning the affections of Rodelinda, wife of the deposed Duke of Milan, to consolidate the position he had stolen from him. When the Duke of Milan returns in disguise to win back his position and family, he finds that Grimoaldo is not in the least concerned with proper human feeling, vowing instead to see him off in no uncertain terms in the aria 'Tuo drudo è mio rivale'. But as the drama unfolds, Grimoaldo's resolve to kill his rival overwhelms and leads him to deeds that wrack him with self-loathing. By the end of the opera, he is to be found in the garden of the Royal Palace, trying desperately to find solace in the 'Pastorello d'un povero Armento', his brutal determination reversed into honour and conscience.

Tamerlano, presented for the first time in the same season as *Rodelinda*, was equally successful and shared a similar central story of a tyrant whose rigid and self-serving beliefs are challenged to breaking point and subsequent road to rectitude. The story of Timur the Lame, however, and his feud with a Turkish sultan named Bajazet, was based on a far older legend. It was a very popular story, and by the time Handel came to the libretto of the Venetian poet Agostino Piovene, a stage version had been a familiar fixture on London the London circuit for over 20 years, performed every November to celebrate the deposition of the Catholic King James II (the tyrannical Bajazet) and accession of William III (the virtuous Tamerlano). Just as in *Rodelinda*, the central redemption story is given to the tyrant tenor and again the role went to Borosini, whose acting skills could

triangulate the depth of its story, universality of its themes, and Handel's deeply moving treatment of a story beginning with Bajazet's steadfast refusal of help in 'Forte e lieto' that ends transformed into an act of self-sacrifice undertaken for the greater good in 'Figlia mia, non pianger'.

Handel's Concerti Grossi Op. 3 may have been less obviously dramatic than the *opera serie* that drove his reputation during the 1720s and 30s, but they nevertheless contained the same Italian essence. The material for Concerto in F Op. 3 No. 4 is taken in its entirety from the overture to a much earlier Italian opera, *Amadigi*, and, like Telemann's Concerto in E minor for violin and two oboes TWV53:e2, is scored for similar forces including the distinctive oboe and bassoon.

Handel's last true opera, *Deidamia*, was performed in London in April 1741. But unlike his earlier productions it did not go well, with the failure hard to accept for Handel, who immediately set off to Dublin to regroup and engage with new audiences. When he returned a year later, he finished his oratorio *Samson* and put it on as a combination of 'Churche-Musicke' and 'Airs of the Stage' to great success, marking a triumphant new beginning as a composer of dramatic oratorio whose solo arias encompassed as much variety of human feeling as any of his grand operas, from Samson's despair over his blindness in 'Total eclipse' to the gentle redemption of 'Thus when the sun from's wat'ry bed'.

This change in compositional tack led Handel to start presenting dramatic oratorios in seasons of Lenten concerts staged at the Covent Garden Theatre, creating a new compositional calendar to which he stuck more or less until his final dramatic oratorio, *Jephtha*, was staged in 1751. By this time, he had almost completely lost his sight and was reliant on the help of his close collaborator, Thomas Morrell. Like his earlier operas, *Jephtha* concerns the redemption of a tyrannical leader. The central Biblical source is the Book of Judges, where Jephtha makes a deal with God in return for victory in battle. This deal is to sacrifice the first person to greet him on his return, but that person is his own daughter Iphis, and Jephtha is forced to kill her. Thankfully, Handel and Morrell create an alternative scenario in which 'sacrifice' becomes 'exile' and Iphis is banished to a convent, but the series of accompanied recitatives and aria that opens the final act as Jephtha says goodbye to his daughter, 'Deeper and deeper still', 'Hide thou thy hated beams', and 'Waft her, angels', are as complex as anything he wrote in his operatic heyday. It may have been Handel's last major work and his eyesight may have been failing, but his powers of human insight remained undimmed. Two years later, the musicologist William Hayes wrote: 'The Man - Who at the Age of *Seventy*, with a broken Constitution, produced such a Composition which no Man... is, or ever was... equal to, in his highest Vigour.'

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George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Overture from *Rodelinda* HWV19 (1725)

Nicola Francesca Haym, after Antonio Salvi

**Forte e lieto from
Tamerlano HWV18**

(1724)

*Nicola Francesco Haym,
after Agostino Piovene and
Nicolas Pradon*

Forte, e lieto a morte
andrei
Se celassi ai pensier
miei
Della figlia il grande
amor.
Se non fosse il suo
cordoglio,
Tu vedresti in me più
orgoglio,
Io morrei con più valor.

Strength and joy

With strength and joy
would I meet my death
could I but suppress the
thoughts
of my great love for my
daughter.
Were it not for my
anguish for her
I would bear myself with
more pride,
would die with more
courage.

**Ouverture from Concerto Grosso in F
Op. 3 No. 4** (1740)

**Figlia mia, non pianger
from *Tamerlano*
HWV18**

*Nicola Francesco Haym,
after Agostino Piovene and
Nicolas Pradon*

Figlia mia non pianger, no,
Lascia allora uscire il pianto,
Quando morto io nol vedrò.

**My daughter, do not
weep**

My daughter, do not weep,
let your tears run freely
when I am dead and
cannot see them.

From Concerto Grosso in F Op. 3 No. 4

*Andante
Allegro*

**Fatto inferno è il mio
petto ... Pastorello d'un
povero armento from
Rodelinda HWV19**

*Nicola Francesca Haym,
after Antonio Salvi*

Pastorello
D'un povero armento
Pur dorme contento
Sotto l'ombra d'un faggio o
d'alloro;
Io, d'un regno monarca
fastoso,
Non trovo riposo
Sotto l'ombra di porpora e
d'oro.

**The shepherd of a
poor flock**

The shepherd
of a poor flock
may sleep content
beneath the shade of a
beech or laurel;
I, king of a magnificent
realm,
can find no peace
under the shade of purple
and gold.

Minuetto from Concerto Grosso in F Op. 3 No. 4

**Tuo drudo è mio rivale
from *Rodelinda* HWV19**

*Nicola Francesca Haym,
after Antonio Salvi*

Tuo drudo è mio rivale,
Tuo sposo è mio nemico,
E morte avrà.

Your lover is my rival

Your lover is my rival,
your husband is my enemy,
and shall have death.

L'amplesso tuo fatale,
Legittimo o impudico,
Or reo ti fa.

Your fatal embrace,
legitimate or improper,
now makes you guilty.

Interval

Georg Phillip Telemann (1681-1767)

**Allegro from Concerto in E minor for violin
and 2 oboes TWV53:e2**

George Frideric Handel

Total eclipse from *Samson* HWV57 (1741-2)

Newburgh Hamilton, after John Milton

Total eclipse! No sun, no moon!
All dark amidst the blaze of noon!
Oh, glorious light! No cheering ray
To glad my eyes with welcome day!
Why thus depriv'd Thy prime decree?
Sun, moon, and stars are dark to me!

*Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment
have ended.*

Georg Phillip Telemann

From Concerto in E minor for violin and 2 oboes TWV53:e2

Andante

Menuet

George Frideric Handel

Thus when the sun from's wat'ry bed from
Samson HWV57

Newburgh Hamilton, after John Milton

Thus when the sun from's wat'ry bed
All curtain'd with a cloudy red,
Pillows his chin upon an orient wave;
The wand'ring shadows ghastly pale,
All troop to their infemal jail
Each fetter'd ghost slips to his sev'ral grave.

From *Jephtha* HWV70 (1751)

Thomas Morell, after George Buchanan and liturgical text

Overture

Deeper and deeper still

Deeper, and deeper still, thy goodness, child,
Pierceth a father's bleeding heart, and checks
The cruel sentence on my falt'ring tongue.
Oh, let me whisper it to the raging winds,
Or howling deserts; for the ears of men
It is too shocking. Yet have I not vow'd?
And can I think the great Jehovah sleeps,
Like Chemosh and such fabled deities?
Ah no; Heav'n heard my thoughts, and wrote them down;
It must be so. 'Tis this that racks my brain,
And pours into my breast a thousand pangs
That lash me into madness. Horrid thought!
My only daughter, so dear a child,
Doom'd by a father! Yes, the vow is past,
And Gilead hath triumph'd o'er his foes.
Therefore, tomorrow's dawn... I can no more.

Hide thou thy hated beams

Hide thou thy hated beams, O sun, in clouds
And darkness, deep as is a father's woe;
A father, off'ring up his only child
In vow'd return for victory and peace.

Waft her, angels

Waft her, angels, through the skies,
Far above yon azure plain,
Glorious there, like you, to rise,
There, like you, for ever reign.