

# WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 8 December 2022  
7.30pm

Supported by the Rubinstein Circle

## Eternal Heaven

Lea Desandre mezzo-soprano

Iestyn Davies countertenor

### Jupiter Ensemble

Thomas Dunford director, lute

Bruno Philippe cello

Louise Ayrton violin

Doug Balliett double bass

Ruiqi Ren violin

Tom Foster harpsichord, organ

Jasper Snow violin

George Frideric

Handel (1685-1759)

Eternal source of light divine from *Ode for the Birthday of Queen Anne*  
(*Eternal source of light divine*) HWV74 (1713 rev. 1714)

With Darkness from *Theodora* HWV68 (1749)

Yet can I hear that dulcet lay from *The Choice of Hercules* HWV69 (1750)

Joys of freedom, joys of pow'r from *Hercules* HWV60 (1744)

As with rosy steps the Morn from *Theodora* HWV68

Despair no more shall wound me from *Semele* HWV58 (1743)

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

To my chaste Susanna's praise from *Susanna* HWV66 (1748)

O Lord, whose mercies numberless from *Sau*/HWV53 (1738)

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

Thither let our Hearts aspire from *Theodora* HWV68

### Interval

Saraband from Suite in D minor HWV437 (1733)

From *Semele* HWV58

*Prepare then, ye immortal choir • Hence, Iris, hence away*

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

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

You've undone me from *Semele* HWV58

Who calls my parting soul from death from *Esther* HWV50  
(1718 rev. 1732-5)

From *Semele* HWV58

*No, no! I'll take no less • But hark! the heav'nly sphere turns round*

To Thee, Thou glorious Son of worth from *Theodora* HWV68

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At the start of the Baroque period in England, church and public traditions were as indivisibly linked as they had been for centuries. What began to change, though, as the 17th Century gave way to the 18th, was that different artforms began to synthesise into single wholes that shared a message. The adaptability of this new style and approach, with its capacity to move audiences, meant it had a home wherever receptive patrons encountered it, and this led to the increased accessibility of music in particular. Music for the public quickly became more concerned with issues of performativity, and the theatre became as much a place for this as the church. Although this primarily focused on the development and performance of opera, it also offered an opportunity for the development of forms of religious music - not least the oratorio. A mostly non-liturgical, unstaged presentation which shared much common ground technically and stylistically with opera. Musical techniques and devices for enacting narration, drama and reflection are shared in the parallel Baroque genres of opera and oratorio.

For **Handel**, this was the perfect state of affairs. A hiatus in opera production in England from the start of the 1730s meant he was able to marshal his vast range of musical experiences and focus them into a form that still made allowances for drama and theatricality. When he had arrived in London in 1710 it had been via Italy, where time in Rome in particular had brought him into contact with some of the most innovative composers of the period, including Arcangelo Corelli and Alessandro Scarlatti. The London in which he arrived, too, was still redolent of musical innovation in the shape of Henry Purcell, who had died 15 years earlier, and Handel recognised this in 'Eternal Source of Light Divine' that appears in his *Ode for the Birthday of Queen Anne*, which was written in a form that was even then still indivisibly associated with Purcell.

In general, though, while Handel was receptive to the cultural influences around him, they would generally filter through him into his own innovations. His earliest oratorio, *Esther* (1732), began a process in which Handel provided the blueprint for the oratorio in the form in which we now recognise it. The playbills for its first performance called it 'an Oratorio, or Sacred Drama', declaring that 'there will be no Action on the Stage, but the House will be fitted up in a decent Manner, for the Audience' and that 'the Musick to disposed after the Manner of the Coronation Service.'

Under Handel's care, an 'oratorio' usually comprised three acts of sacred drama, with a musical setting that combined elements of opera and English church music. The only exception to this was the *Occasional Oratorio* (1746) which, as with the *Messiah*, used a non-dramatic text. Were it not for its heavy reliance on larger-scale chorus parts - which became bigger and bigger the later the oratorio had been written - Handel's oratorios would have been an

even closer approximation to opera than they already were. As it was, though, the form's primary intention was to provoke an ethical or religious response, so by the time he came to write the latest of his oratorios such as *Susanna* and *Solomon* (both 1748), the role of the chorus was so prominent and the message so universal that it had truly become a form with broad appeal and singular accessibility.

The position the oratorio gained over the course of the middle of the 18th Century was particularly attractive to those opera-sceptics still struggling to adapt to the relatively new and liberal cultural landscape of 18th-century London. The oratorio tutored them in matters of drama and pathos by means of exclusively Biblical narratives such as *Saul* (1738) and *Joseph and his Brethren* (1743) without offending or challenging their spiritually minded, concert-going sensibilities. This was not the case, though, with *Semele* (1743), which opened in the same series of Lenten subscription concerts offering *Joseph and his Brethren* along with revivals of *Saul* and *Samson*. Described as no more than a 'bawdy opera' by Handel's long-time collaborator and patron Charles Jennens, its secular story of adultery taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was not only generally felt to be a bad fit for the solemn feast of Lent, but also managed equally to offend London's opera devotees who saw it as a form of cultural boundary infringement and those opera-sceptics who had committed to oratorio as a form where they could find lectures on religion and ethics and were conflicted on the basis of its intimate subject matter.

Handel was undaunted, though, and resolutely continued to set Classical stories within the framework of the oratorio form. As well as *Semele*, the later oratorios *Hercules* (1744) and *The Choice of Hercules* (1750) were both set to Classical texts. To that end, *The Triumph of Time and Truth* (1757), which Handel adapted from one of his earlier works in a similar way to *The Choice of Hercules*, falls into a similar category in that it deals with more abstract ideals of ethics and morals, although it could not be referred to as 'secular' in the way the former are now. Similarly *Theodora* (1749) was not specifically Biblical in the manner of his earlier works, but was religious inasmuch as it was taken from the story of two early Christian martyrs told in Robert Boyle's novel *The Martyrdom of Theodora and of Didymus* of 1687. Despite Handel's faith in the quality of what was his own favourite of his works, though, it was not well received. This may have been due to the unusual choice of libretto or its downbeat ending but nevertheless, the vast array of human responses drawn by Handel's enormous and colourful output in this genre undoubtedly made a material contribution to the socially inclusive and cohesive concert culture that was developing at the time.

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**George Frideric Handel** (1685-1759)

**Eternal source of light divine from *Ode for the Birthday of Queen Anne (Eternal source of light divine)* HWV74** (1713 rev. 1714)

*Ambrose Phillips*

Eternal source of light divine,  
With double warmth thy beams display,  
And with distinguish'd glory shine,  
To add a lustre to this day.

**With Darkness from *Theodora* HWV68** (1749)

*Thomas Morell, after Robert Boyle*

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.

**Yet can I hear that dulcet lay from *The Choice of Hercules* HWV69** (1750)

*attr. Thomas Morell, after Robert Lowth*

Yet can I hear that dulcet lay,  
As sweet as flows the honey dew?  
Can I those wilds of joy survey,  
Nor wish to share the bliss I view?

**Joys of freedom, joys of pow'r from *Hercules* HWV60** (1744)

*Thomas Broughton, after Sophocles and Ovid*

*Dejanira:*

Joys of freedom, joys of pow'r,  
Wait upon the coming hour  
And court thee to be blest.

*Iole:*

What heav'nly-pleasing sounds I hear,  
How sweet they steal upon my ear  
And charm my soul to rest!

**As with rosy steps the Morn from *Theodora* HWV68**

*Thomas Morell, after Robert Boyle*

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!

**Despair no more shall wound me from *Semele* HWV58** (1743)

*William Congreve*

Despair no more shall wound me,  
Since you so kind do prove.  
All joy and bliss surround me,  
My soul is tun'd to love.

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

*Anonymous*

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.

**To my chaste Susanna's praise from *Susanna* HWV66** (1748)

*Anonymous*

*Joacim:*

To my chaste Susanna's praise  
I'll the swelling note prolong.

*Susanna:*

While my grateful voice I raise,  
Thy dear name shall grace the song.

*Joacim:*

Echo, catch the tender strains,

*Susanna:*

On thy wings, the music bear,

*Both:*

'Til it reach the distant plains,  
Dying, in the void of air.

## O Lord, whose mercies numberless from *Saul*

**HWV53** (1738)

*Charles Jennens*

O Lord, whose mercies numberless  
O'er all thy works prevail:  
Though daily man Thy law transgress,  
Thy patience cannot fail.  
If yet his sin be not too great,  
The busy fi end control;  
Yet longer for repentance wait,  
And heal his wounded soul.

## Prophetic raptures swell my breast from

***Joseph and his Brethren* HWV59** (1743)

*James Miller, after Apostolo Zeno*

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.

## Thither let our Hearts aspire from *Theodora*

**HWV68**

*Thomas Morell, after Robert Boyle*

Thither let our hearts aspire:  
Objects pure of pure desire,  
Still increasing,  
Ever pleasing,  
Wake the song, and tune the lyre  
Of the blissful holy choir.

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## Interval

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## Saraband from Suite in D minor HWV437 (1733)

## From *Semele* HWV58

*William Congreve*

## Prepare then, ye immortal choir

Prepare then, ye immortal choir,  
Each sacred minstrel tune his lyre,  
And all in chorus join!

## Hence, Iris, hence away

Hence, Iris, hence away,  
Far from the realms of day!  
O'er Scythian hills to the Maeotian lake  
A speedy flight we'll take!

There Somnus I'll compel  
His downy bed to leave, and silent cell;  
With noise and light I will his peace molest,  
Nor shall he sink again to pleasing rest,  
Till to my vow'd revenge he grants supplies,  
And seals with sleep the wakeful dragons' eyes.

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

*attr. Thomas Morell, after Benedetto Pamphili*

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.

## Fly from the threat'ning vengeance, fly from

***Occasional Oratorio* HWV62** (1746)

*Newburgh Hamilton, after John Milton and Edmund Spenser*

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.

## You've undone me from *Semele* HWV58

*William Congreve*

*Ino:*

You've undone me,  
Look not on me!  
Guilt upbraiding,  
Shame invading,  
You've undone me,  
Look not on me!

*Athamas:*

With my life I would atone  
Pains you've borne, to me unknown.  
Cease to shun me!

*Both:*

Love alone  
Has both undone!

## Who calls my parting soul from death from

*Esther* HWV50 (1718 rev. 1732-5)

Alexander Pope and John Arbuthnot, after Jean Racine

*Esther:*

Who calls my parting soul from death?

*Ahasuerus:*

Awake, my soul, my life, my breath!

*Esther:*

Hear my suit, or else I die.

*Ahasuerus:*

Ask, my queen, can I deny?

## From *Semele* HWV58

William Congreve

### No, no! I'll take no less

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.

### But hark! the heav'nly sphere turns round

But hark, the heav'nly sphere turns round,  
And silence now is drown'd  
In ecstasy of sound.  
How on a sudden the still air is charm'd  
As if all harmony were just alarm'd!  
And ev'ry soul with transport fi ll'd,  
Alternately is thaw'd and chill'd.

## To Thee, Thou glorious Son of worth from

*Theodora* HWV68

Thomas Morell, after Robert Boyle

*Theodora:*

To thee, thou glorious son of worth,  
Be life and safety giv'n.

*Didymus:*

To thee, whose virtues suit thy birth,  
Be every blessing giv'n.

*Both:*

I hope again to meet on earth,  
But sure shall meet in Heav'n.