

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 8 June 2023
7.30pm

Handel Chandos Anthems

Hilary Cronin soprano I

Hugo Hymas tenor II

Deborah Cachet soprano II

Raoul Steffani bass I

Samuel Boden tenor I

William Gaunt bass II

Arcangelo

Jonathan Cohen director,
harpichord

Jonathan Manson cello

Louis Creac'h violin I, leader

Tim Amherst double bass

James Toll violin I

Clara Blessing oboe

Jane Gordon violin I

Inga Maria Klaucke bassoon

Michael Gurevich violin II

Sergio Bucheli lute

Sophia Prodanova violin II

Tom Foster organ

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Chandos Anthem No. 4 'O sing unto the Lord' HWV249 (1717-8)

Trio Sonata in G minor HWV390 (pub. 1733)

I. Larghetto • II. Allegro • III. Adagio • IV. Allegro

Chandos Anthem No. 3 'Have mercy upon me, O God'
HWV248 (1717-8)

Interval

Trio Sonata in G minor HWV404 (c.1717)

I. Andante • II. Allegro • III. Adagio • IV. Allegro

Chandos Anthem No. 6 'As pants the hart' HWV251b (1717-8)

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The programme has changed slightly since these programme notes were written.

The years immediately following 1712, when he had decided to settle permanently in London, were unexpectedly uncertain for **George Frideric Handel**. The Italian opera style of which he had become his adopted city's most prominent exponent may have been wildly popular, but its fortunes were also unstable and unpredictable. Two years after presenting his first Italian opera for London, *Rinaldo*, the situation was still so precarious that after the second performance of his next, *Teseo*, a scene was reported in which the opera company manager, a Mr Swiny, 'Brakes & runs away & leaves ye Singers unpaid ye Scenes & Habits also unpaid for.' A new manager was engaged but the company was only able to struggle on for three more seasons before collapsing early in 1717.

Despite the Swiny affair and resulting chaos, London audiences remained enthusiastic about all things Italian, and its social elite plotted to restructure the company and relaunch it on an even grander scale. Meanwhile, Handel had been able to find secure employment elsewhere and in June 1717 entered the service of James Brydges, Earl of Carnarvon (and later 1st Duke of Chandos) as composer-in-residence at Cannons, his outrageously grand new house near Edgware. Brydges employed his own singers and orchestra, for which Handel was charged with writing works to use at the church of St Lawrence, Whitechurch that he had built next to Cannons as his private chapel.

The period Handel spent at Cannons between 1717 and 1720 yielded a catalogue of some of his most important works which, although primarily intended for devotional use on public and private occasions, were remarkably varied. The collection included a number of grand works such as the oratorio *Esther*, a *Te Deum*, and the work-without-portfolio known as *Acis and Galatea*. Handel's job, though, mainly required writing choral and instrumental incidental devotional music, and from this came some of his most enduringly popular works: the set of six *sonate da chiesa* known as the Op. 2 Trio Sonatas, and the 11 choral works collectively known as the Chandos Anthems.

Before he arrived at Cannons Handel had had relatively little experience of actual 'choral' writing and although most of the texts he used for his new anthems came from the *Book of Common Prayer's* version of the Psalms, they do not follow the Purcellian tradition of other composers writing similar works in this period. Instead, they reflect Handel's diverse background and his own roots in the German cantata style he had spent years studying with Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow during his days as a student in Halle.

The Op. 2 Trio Sonatas, although conceived for Cannons as flexible works to be spaced out through services, are similar to the anthems in that they hide a remarkable level of musical innovation. The English 18th-

century trio sonata had developed from one source alone: the Italian sonata, as perfected by Arcangelo Corelli. It was also the case, however, that by this time Handel was considered the most important contemporary foreign influence on English music, and it is in Op. 2 that his absolute command of the Italian style is particularly visible. As with the anthems, these little vignettes of perfect harmonic structure and melodic artistry provide the bases for many of Handel's thematic ideas in other works: the melody of the central movement of the Trio Sonata in G minor HWV390, for example, had first appeared in *Rinaldo*, and appeared frequently in other later works.

Ideas from *Have mercy upon me, O God* HWV238 appear later in the oratorio *Deborah*, and illustrate the broad range of stylistic influences that make the Chandos Anthems the unique collection of choral works it is. While the soprano and tenor duet 'Wash me thoroughly' is old-fashioned in its English church style, the chorus 'Thou shalt make me hear of joy and gladness' is an intricate fugue, the first part of which can be found in the earlier *Utrecht Te Deum* (along with the soprano aria 'Make me a clean heart').

Handel and John Brydges enjoyed a mutual friendship with Dr John Arbuthnot, a doctor and polymath with whom they both socialised and collaborated professionally. In September 1717, Brydges wrote to Arbuthnot about Handel's activities at Cannons, mentioning a number of 'overtures to be plaid at the first lesson'. Although its original function is not completely known for sure, the Trio Sonata in G minor HWV404 comes from the small and exclusive stable of chamber works written during this period and is likely to have been intended for this purpose. Although it does not subvert any traditional styles, it is still an elegant example of Corellian style, its opening *Andante* bearing both a strong resemblance to the trio 'The flocks shall leave the mountain' from *Acis and Galatea* and displaying the Italian *bel canto* sensibilities that were still so much in fashion at the time.

Brydges also mentions that 'Mr Hendle has made me two new Anthems very noble ones,' of which one is likely to have been *As pants the Hart* HWV251b. This quickly became the most popular of the collection, and was continually adapted and expanded by Handel to afford it more frequent, flexible and grander use. It seems that Brydges gradually realised the quality of the composer he had managed to secure and had rushed to employ more singers and instrumentalists to facilitate such an expansion and allow Handel to explore the new forms with which he was working. As Basil Lam, the scholar and early broadcaster, said: 'Considered as a set, the Chandos Anthems represent almost every aspect of Handel's work, and his greatness in its various aspects of power, charm and pathos could be measured here, were all his other works lost.'

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George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Chandos Anthem No. 4 'O sing unto the Lord' HWV249 (1717-8)

Liturgical texts

Sonata

O sing unto the Lord a new song! O sing unto the Lord all the whole earth.

Declare his honour unto the heathen, and his wonders unto all the people. For the Lord is great, and cannot worthily be praised. He is more to be fear'd than all Gods.

The waves of the sea rage horribly, but yet the Lord who dwells on high is mightier.

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

Let the whole earth stand in awe of him.

Let the heav'ns rejoice, and let the earth be glad, let the sea make a noise and all that therein is.

Trio Sonata in G minor HWV390 (pub. 1733)

I. Larghetto

II. Allegro

III. Adagio

IV. Allegro

Chandos Anthem No. 3 'Have mercy upon me, O God' HWV248 (1717-8)

Liturgical text

Sonata

Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness: according to the multitude of thy mercies do away mine offences.

Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness: and cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my faults: and my sin is ever before me.

Against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified in thy saying, and clear'd when thou art judg'd.

Thou shalt make me hear of joy and gladness: that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

Make me a clean heart, O God: and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence: and take not thy holy spirit from me. O give me the comfort of thy help again: and stablish me with thy free Spirit.

Then shall I teach thy ways unto the wicked: and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

Interval

Trio Sonata in G minor HWV404 (c.1717)

I. Andante

II. Allegro

III. Adagio

IV. Allegro

Chandos Anthem No. 6 'As pants the hart' HWV251b (1717-8)

Liturgical text

Sonata

As pants the hart for cooling streams, so longs my soul for thee O God.

Tears are my daily food, while thus they say: where is now thy God?

Now, when I think thereupon, I pour out my heart by myself, for I went with the multitude and brought them out into the house of God.

In the voice of praise and thanksgiving among such as keep holy-day.

Why so full of grief, O my soul? Why so disquieted within me?

Put thy trust in God, for I will praise him.