

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 8 September 2022
7.30pm

Season Opening Concert Cleopatra

Carolyn Sampson soprano

La Folia Barockorchester

Zsuzsanna Czentrár director, violin

Heinrich Kubitschek violin

Rodolfo Richter violin

Enikő Molnár violin

Sibille Klepper viola

Florent Laplanche viola

Philipp Comploi violoncello

Sophia Scheifler double bass

Fernando Olivas theorbo

Wouter Verschuren bassoon

Katerina Ghannudi harp

Kathryn Elkin oboe

Daniel Ramírez oboe

Joan Boronat-Sanz harpsichord

Carl Heinrich Graun (c.1703-1759)

Sinfonia from *Cleopatra e Cesare* (1742)

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Da tempeste il legno infranto from *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*
HWV17 (1724 rev. 1725-30)

Giovanni Legrenzi (1626-1690)

Se tu sarai felice from *Antioco il grande* (1681)

George Frideric Handel

Overture from *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* HWV17

Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725)

Antonio, e qual destino ... Vò goder senza contrasto from
Marc'Antonio e Cleopatra (1707)

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

I. Allegro from Concerto in G minor for strings RV156

Squarciami pure il seno from *Il Tigrane* RV740 (1724)

Interval

Johann Adolf Hasse (1699-1783)

From *Marc'Antonio e Cleopatra* (1725)

Sinfonia • Lascia, Antonio, deh lascia •
Quel candido armellino

Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762)

Concerto grosso in D minor after Corelli's 'La Follia' Op. 5 No. 12
(pub. 1729)

George Frideric Handel

Che sento? Oh Dio! ... Se pietà di me non senti from *Giulio*
Cesare in Egitto HWV17

Johann Adolf Hasse

Morte col fiero aspetto from *Marc'Antonio e Cleopatra*

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Please note the programme has changed slightly since these notes were written.

Cleopatra was the name of three queens of ancient Egypt who were heroines in the early years of opera from 1680 to 1750, all of whom are impersonated in this programme by Swiss soprano Regula Mühlemann. One was notorious for her affairs with Romans - Julius Caesar in 49BC (the story set here by Handel and Graun) and in 45BC with Mark Antony (Scarlatti and Hasse). The others - no less passionate apparently - are Cleopatra of Antioch and Cleopatra Pontus, and feature in operas by Legrenzi and Vivaldi.

In Berlin, **Carl Heinrich Graun's** *Cleopatra e Cesare* inaugurated the city's first opera house in 1742, built by the young King of Prussia, Frederick the Great, who was flattered by comparison with Caesar. The house still stands as the 'Lindenoper'. Graun's opening *Sinfonia* is in four sections - a tantalising slow intro, a palpitating allegro, a heavy dramatic largo and an innocent, skipping frolic in six-eight time.

The Cleopatra in the 1681 opera *Antiocho il grande* ('Antiochus the Great') by **Giovanni Legrenzi** lived 150 years before her more famous namesake. She is still an Egyptian heiress but now involved in political intrigue with the Assyrians. She loves the satrap, or provincial governor, Araspe and sings to him the short simple aria 'Se tu sarai felice' which is in embryonic *da capo* form: a melody repeated round a modulation to the minor. Legrenzi illustrates the word 'costante' with the constancy of a long note. He taught at the Ospedale dei Mendicanti, one of the conservatoire-orphanages in Venice which Antonio Vivaldi would make famous.

Alessandro Scarlatti's sweet harp-accompanied *da capo* aria 'Vò goder senza contrasto' from his cantata *Marc'Antonio e Cleopatra* was composed in 1707 while the composer was visiting his son Pietro, director of music at Urbino. Cleopatra, having finished with Caesar, seduces his general Mark Antony who is fighting Octavian for control of Rome. Cleopatra's longing for a peaceful life is forlorn; Mark Antony's and her fleet is defeated and both commit suicide. The concerto resumes. The finale is a three-time *Allegro* with a long virtuosic cadenza.

Cleopatra of Pontus (110-58BC) appears in **Antonio Vivaldi's** 1724 'pastiche' opera *Il Tigrane* staged with a different composer for each act. Vivaldi (Act II) sets the lyric as the raving of a distraught lover, veering from the angry challenge ('rip open my breast') over spiky staccato chords with silent pauses to subdued legato self-pity ('banish a just passion from my soul').

The German composer **Johann Adolf Hasse** learned to write Italian opera from Scarlatti in Naples. His debut work was the 1725 serenata *Marc'Antonio e Cleopatra*, opening with a *Sinfonia* in three sections, the first a stately march with skidding upward scales, the second an invigorating three-time allegro with phrases echoing through the parts and a lyrical third anticipating the tragedy ahead.

In opera, the recitatives progress the action, as in the ensuing 'Lascia, Antonio, deh lascia'. Over glowing chords, Cleopatra interrupts her lover's pillow talk, which was fine when they had Asia, but declares it vain now that cruel destiny is crashing about their head illustrated by bitter, tumbling scales on 'nostro capo'.

Choosing suicide over Octavian, Cleopatra compares herself in 'Quel candido armellino' to the ermine which accepts its fate to spare its fur. The minor key reflects her sombre mood, the controlled sequence of scales on 'abbandonar' and the long steady note on 'lieto' ('happy') her resignation. The middle section turns to the major for her steely bright defiance ('volto fiero') with another long note for her unwavering nerve.

Meanwhile in London, Italian music was big business. In 1726-9 the immigrant violinist **Francesco Geminiani** published orchestral versions of Corelli's violin sonatas, including the 25 variations on the *La Follia* ground bass, a repeating sequence of eight notes. Two soloists engage with the ensemble in syncopations and divisions as they race through the episodes with no slow movement until the eighth and no departure from three-time until the eleventh.

When Geminiani played for King George I he was accompanied by the German **George Frideric Handel** who, more than any, had popularised Italian opera here. Handel first staged *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* in 1724 at the King's Theatre Haymarket. Cleopatra has a premonition of death over agitated chords in the recitative 'Che sento?', softening when she asks the gods to protect Caesar. The desolate aria 'Se pietà di me non senti' has an exquisite melisma on 'morirò' ('I shall die') repeated in the orchestra.

The programme ends with Cleopatra's first appearance in the Hasse opera, 'Morte col fiero aspetto'. Her death fixation breaks when she considers over rising chromatic phrases her successes as ruler. 'Libertà' is illustrated with a free melisma. The middle section is an elaboration of the opening, the soul ('anima') replacing death, while the finale is a thrilling recapitulation with the exclamations more defiant with each iteration.

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Carl Heinrich Graun (c.1703-1759)
Sinfonia from *Cleopatra e Cesare* (1742)

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)
Da tempeste il legno infranto from *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* HWV17
(1724 rev. 1725-30)

Da tempeste il legno infranto, Se poi salvo giunge in porto Non sa più che desiar.	A storm-battered vessel, if it at least arrives safely in port, has nothing left to desire.
Così il cor tra pene, e pianto, Or che trova il suo conforto Torna l'anima a bear.	So my heart, through suffering and weeping, now that it has found comfort, returns to make my soul happy at last.

Giovanni Legrenzi (1626-1690)
Se tu sarai felice from *Antioco il grande* (1681)
Girolamo Frisari

Se tu sarai felice Costante anch'io sarò. Se m'hai piagata l'Alma, Di questo sen la Palma, Mio bene, a te darò. Se tu sarai fedele Costante anch'io sarò.	If you will be happy, I in turn shall be constant. If with Love's arrow you have wounded my soul, I shall give you, my dearest, my heart as your trophy. If you will be faithful, I in turn shall be constant.
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George Frideric Handel
Overture from *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* HWV17

Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725)
Antonio, e qual destino
... Vò goder senza
contrasto from *Marc'Antonio e Cleopatra* (1707)

Antonio, e qual destino Vibrò sopra di voi gl'influssi rei? Perché crudo t'involi à gl'occhi miei? Vò goder senza contrasto Te mia vita in dolce pace. D'ogn'Impero abborro il fasto Sol d'Amor bramo la face.	Antonio, what destiny has wielded its evil influence over you? Why, cruel man, do you flee my sight? I wish to enjoy you, my life, without conflict, in gentle peace. I abhor the trappings of power, I yearn only for the torch of love.
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Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)
I. Allegro from Concerto in G minor for strings
RV156

Squarciami pure il seno
from *Il Tigrane* RV740
(1724)
Pietro Andrea Bernardoni

Squarciami pure il seno, Ecco te l'offro ignudo, Senza riparo o scudo, Eccoti ancora il cor.	Rip open my breast, then Rip open my breast, then, behold, I bare it to you, without shield or protection, behold, I offer you my heart.
Ferro o veleno Mi ponno uccidere, Ma non dividere Dall'alma un giusto ardor.	Steel or poison may kill me, but will not banish a just passion from my soul.

Interval

Johann Adolf Hasse (1699-1783)
From *Marc'Antonio e Cleopatra* (1725)
Francesco Ricciardi

Sinfonia

Lascia, Antonio, deh
lascia

Stop, Antonio, ah stop

Lascia, Antonio, deh lascia Di sì teneri accenti il mesto sfogo. Potemmo già, quando dell'Asia il trono Illustrato splendea dalle nostre armi E da' trionfi nostri, Tra le pompe e tra gl'ostri Di prospera fortuna Su l'ali del favore Le dolcezze gustar d'un dolce amore.	Stop, Antonio, ah stop this sad flow of loving words. Once, when the great throne of Asia glittered with our arms and our triumphs, amid the pomp and splendour of prosperous fortune, borne on the wings of favour we could taste all the sweetness of love.
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Or infelici siamo, Tutta già piove sovra del nostro capo Di sdegnato destin l'ira crudele. D'inutili querele vano è lo sfogo. Altro a noi far non resta, Che con anima forte Gir gloriosi ad affrontar la morte.	Now we are in despair, all the cruel anger of a spurned destiny rains down upon our heads. There is no use in uttering vain laments. There is nothing for us to do but to summon our courage and go in glory to confront death.
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Quel candido armellino

The snow-white ermine

Quel candido armellino,
Per non macchiar la spoglia
Al rischio sta vicino,
Ne di fuggir s'invoglia,
Ma lieto al cacciatore
Abbandonar si sa.
Pria ch'un superbo impero
Macchi il mio regio onore,
Di morte il volto fiero
Non mi spaventerà.

The snow-white ermine,
so as not to stain its fur,
stays close to danger
and is not tempted to flee,
but happily chooses
to surrender to the hunter.
Rather than let a proud ruler
stain my royal honour,
I shall fearlessly confront
the terrible face of death.

Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762)

Concerto grosso in D minor after Corelli's 'La Follia'
Op. 5 No. 12 (pub. 1729)

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Che sento? Oh Dio! ... Se pietà di me non senti from
***Giulio Cesare in Egitto* HWV17** (1724 rev. 1725-30)
Nicola Francesco Haym

Recitativo

Che sento? Oh Dio!
Morrà Cleopatra ancora.
Anima vile, che parli mai? Deh
taci!
Avrò, per vendicarmi in
bellicose parte,
Di Bellona in sembianza un cor
di Marte.
Intanto, oh Numi, voi che il ciel
regette,
Difendete il mio bene,
Ch'egli è del seno mio conforto
e speme.

Recitative

What do I hear? Oh God!
Cleopatra too will die.
Cowardly spirit, what are you
saying? Ah, be silent!
To take my revenge in this
time of war,
I shall have the heart of Mars in
the form of Bellona.
Meanwhile, O Gods, you who
rule
heaven, protect my beloved,
for he is my comfort and my
hope.

Aria

Se pietà di me non senti,
Giusto ciel, io morirò.
Tu da pace a miei
tormenti,
O quest'alma spirerò.

Aria

Righteous heaven, if you do not
take pity on me, I shall die.
You must put an end to my
torments,
or I shall give up my soul.

Johann Adolf Hasse

Morte col fiero aspetto
from *Marc'Antonio e*
Cleopatra
Francesco Ricciardi

Death's fearful aspect

Morte col fiero aspetto
Orror per me non ha,
S'io posso in libertà
Morir sul trono mio,
Dove regnai.
L'anima uscir dal petto
Libera spera ognor,
Sin dalle fasce ancor
Sì nobile desio
Meco portai.

Death's fearful aspect
holds no horror for me,
if I can die in freedom
upon the throne
from which I have ruled.
The soul always hopes
it will depart its body in freedom;
and I too have cherished
that noble desire
since I lay in my cradle.