

CHAN 3078



CHANDOS
OPERA IN
ENGLISH

BAROQUE CELEBRATION

PETER MOORES FOUNDATION



Clive Barda/PAL

Yvonne Kenny in the title role of
The Royal Opera's production of
Handel's *Alcina*



BAROQUE CELEBRATION



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Sarah Walker as
Cornelia in English
National Opera's
production of
Julius Caesar



Clive Barada/PAL

John Tomlinson as Harapha in
The Royal Opera's production of
Handel's *Samson*



Zoe Dominic

Baroque Celebration

It was a combination of circumstances that determined that opera – a dramatic entertainment in which the actors sing throughout – did not establish itself in England during the seventeenth century, as it did in Italy, France and Germany. The strength of the native theatrical tradition, in which music played only an incidental role, was one factor; another was the existing tradition of courtly entertainment, in the masque (a combination of music, poetry, dance and spectacle). Wholly sung theatrical performances were rare in England. Even Henry Purcell, who composed one true opera, *Dido and Aeneas* (1689), for private performance, wrote only ‘semi-operas’ for the London theatre, works in which musical sections were interleaved into the main spoken drama.

But many Englishmen visiting Italy on the Grand Tour were taken by the operas they saw there and were anxious to import the new genre to London. When Handel settled in England in the early years of the eighteenth century it was essentially as a representative of Italian opera. Indeed one of his collaborators, Aaron Hill, who worked with him on his first

London opera, *Rinaldo* (1711), later suggested to him that opera might be composed in the English language; but Handel, it seems, was unenthusiastic at the prospect, at least as far as composing for the London theatre was concerned – although he did write one opera-like work in English, *Acis and Galatea* (1718), again for private use. All his true operas written for London are thus in the Italian language, to be sung by international singers, predominantly Italians. But the audience’s needs were to some extent catered for: on entering the theatre, one could buy a bilingual libretto, with an English translation printed opposite the sung Italian text; there were candles by the seats, so at least the action could be followed and the sense of the words understood.

Purcell *King Arthur*

Dryden wrote the drama of *King Arthur* in 1684; it was intended for the celebration the next year of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the restoration of the monarchy. But the king wanted a different kind of entertainment, and

it was not until 1691 that it was performed, at the Dorset Garden theatre, when it had acquired music by Purcell. The plot, drawing on Arthurian legend, deals with King Arthur’s freeing his beloved Emmeline from her evil captors. But in reality it is a charmingly prolonged excuse for good verse and superb music in praise of England. The music consists of a series of episodes – military, pastoral, meteorological, magical and finally simply loyal. The climax of the final celebration of Britannia’s triumph is the air ‘Fairest isle’, ☐ sung by Venus in the fifth and final act.

The Indian Queen

This, Purcell’s last substantial work, is like *King Arthur* a semi-opera; the words were adapted from a play by Dryden and Robert Howard. It was first performed at Drury Lane in 1695, just after Purcell’s death. The plot is concerned with conflicts between the Mexican Queen Zempoalla and the Peruvians. Purcell wrote music for three scenes, a masque, an incantation and a sacrifice, in Acts II, III and V. He also supplied an overture, dances and two songs, one of them the popular ‘I attempt from love’s sickness to fly’ ☐; but there are no means of discovering precisely where these fitted into the original play.

Handel

Julius Caesar (Giulio Cesare)

Of all Handel’s operas, *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (to give it its full title) has been the most admired and much the most often performed in modern times since its first modern revival, in Germany in 1922. It was composed in 1723–4, and first given at the King’s Theatre in the Haymarket, London, on 20 February 1724, with a glittering cast that included one of the greatest castratos of the day, Senesino, in the title role and Francesca Cuzzoni as Cleopatra. The libretto was by Nicola Haym, based on a Venetian one, by G.F. Bussani, dating back to 1677.

In Act I, Caesar lands in Egypt, in pursuit of Pompey. He agrees to a reconciliation with him, after pleas from Cornelia, Pompey’s wife; but the traitorous Ptolemy – who rules Egypt jointly with his sister Cleopatra – brings Caesar a welcoming gift: Pompey’s severed head. Caesar is horrified, and Sextus, Pompey’s son, swears vengeance. Ptolemy realises that his gift was misjudged and resolves to kill Caesar, but the Roman general, visiting Ptolemy’s palace, is suspicious of his motives. Meanwhile, Cleopatra has decided to woo Caesar in the hope that with his help she may become the sole ruler.

Act II begins with Cleopatra, disguised as a maidservant, Lydia, attempting to seduce Caesar. Later, a group of conspirators is heard and Caesar leaps out of the palace window into the sea; he is presumed to have drowned. The conflict between Ptolemy and Cleopatra grows more intense.

By the opening of Act III, Ptolemy has won victory over Cleopatra and she is in captivity, as also is Cornelia, on whom Ptolemy has designs. Caesar – of course – emerges unscathed from the sea; he encounters Sextus and Achilles, Ptolemy's former general. Taking Achilles's seal of command, Caesar goes to rescue Cleopatra and Cornelia. Finally, Sextus avenges Pompey's murder by killing Ptolemy, and Caesar and Cleopatra celebrate their union and Rome's guarantee of peace and liberty.

'Grief and woe' ('Priva son') [3], from Act I, introduces Cornelia: she has just seen her husband's severed head presented to Caesar, and has seized her son's sword in an attempt to kill herself. Here she expresses the depth of her grief; only death can free her from her sorrows.

'Wounded, the serpent' ('L'angue offeso') [5] is sung by Sextus – a soprano role in the first version of the opera (Handel later adjusted it

for a tenor) – early in Act II, as he swears vengeance on Ptolemy for his treachery in murdering Pompey. He draws a simile between himself, waiting patiently for the right moment, and the watchful serpent, ready to pounce and inject his venom.

'I shall tame your pride' ('Damerò la tua fierezza') [8] is sung by Ptolemy – originally an alto castrato role – at the beginning of Act III: he has his sister prisoner and tells her that her power is gone and she must now fear his cruelty.

'Flow, my tears' ('Piangerò') [9] is Cleopatra's response: captive, believing her last hope gone with Caesar presumed to be dead, and knowing too that Cornelia and Sextus are in Ptolemy's power, she gives way to despair in this poignant lament – although her fiery spirit finds expression too in the middle section of the aria where she threatens to come back to haunt her brother.

'How silently, how slyly' ('Va tacito e nascosto') [10] is sung by Caesar near the end of Act I when he is in Ptolemy's palace and knows he is under threat; this is a typical example of the 'simile aria' – Caesar draws a parallel between his own situation and that of the hunter's prey, aware of the danger. The

allusion to hunting provided Handel with the opportunity to introduce a solo horn, the instrument of the hunt: simile arias often afforded composers a chance to bring variety to the musical texture.

'Condemned to grieve' ('Son nata a lagrimar') [13] is one of the two duets in the opera; it is sung at the end of Act I by mother and son, Cornelia and Sextus. Pompey is cruelly dead; Cornelia is having to receive the unwelcome advances of men whom she finds repellent, and has been set to tend the palace gardens as a punishment for her intractability, and Sextus is a prisoner. They mourn their lot in this moving duet, typically in minor mode and *siciliana* rhythm.

'Stormy winds' ('Da tempeste') [14] is Cleopatra's final aria, sung close to the end of Act III: her loathsome brother is dead, she is restored to power and has won Caesar's heart. Her ship has come home to harbour after a tempestuous passage, and she celebrates it with duly brilliant vocal roulades. (It is worth noting, by the way, that both this aria and 'Flow, my tears' are in the rather unusual key of E major: Cuzzoni, creator of the role, was noted for the particular beauty of her tone on the note E, and clearly Handel was ready to take advantage of it.)

Semele

In his later years, when he was chiefly composing oratorios, Handel wrote a setting of William Congreve's opera libretto, *Semele*, written many years earlier; it was not to be staged but given in what we would call concert form. It was no great success when given, in 1744, but in recent times its freshness and its charm, and its sensuality, have come to be appreciated. It tells the classical story of Jupiter's wooing and winning of Semele, daughter of Cadmus, King of Thebes, his transporting of her to a palace on Mount Cithaeron, and her destruction by the jealous Juno, who deceitfully provokes her to aspire to immortality. Jupiter sings the much-loved air 'Where'er you walk' ([4]) to Semele in Act II, when she becomes restless: he creates an Arcadian environment to distract her, and sings of the delights of rural life.

Acis and Galatea

Composed in 1718 for performance, probably in concert form, at the country seat near Edgware of the Earl of Carnarvon (later Duke of Chandos), *Acis and Galatea* is a pastoral, telling of the classical lovers whose happiness is destroyed by the jealous cyclops Polyphemus, who kills Acis. In tune with the spirit of the

pastoral and its stylised nature, Polyphemus is not wholly wicked, and in his principal air, 'O ruddier than the cherry' [6], he is presented as a largely comic creature – give me, he says in the preceding recitative, 'a hundred reeds of decent growth, to make a pipe for my capacious mouth', and up pipes a tiny little recorder to accompany his song.

Rinaldo

Rinaldo (1711) was Handel's first London opera, and the first Italian opera composed for London. The plot comes from Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*. Handel put the work together in some haste, adapting much of the music from pieces in operas and other works he had written in Germany and Italy – including its most famous aria, 'Hear thou my weeping' ('Lascia ch'io pianga') [7]. In *Rinaldo*, where it achieved its most beautiful and expressive form, it is sung in Act II by the heroine Almirena, who loves Rinaldo, when she is held captive by the sorceress Armida and subject to the unwelcome attentions of Argante.

Xerxes

Serse (Xerxes, 1738) dates from near the end of Handel's operatic career in London. Based on a Venetian opera of the mid-seventeenth

century, the libretto is a tale of the wayward amours of King Xerxes and the confusion they cause. As the opera opens, Xerxes is resting beneath a plane tree, which he lovingly praises for the shade it provides for him: 'Under thy shade' ('Ombra mai fu') [11] – a song of simple but haunting beauty whose melody is universally known, under the title 'Handel's *Largo*'. (Its original tempo marking is actually *Larghetto*.)

Samson

Composed in 1741, and first performed in 1743 – Handel's journey to Dublin, when *Messiah* had its first performance, intervened – *Samson* was one of the most admired of Handel's Old Testament oratorios, and has remained so for the power and the vividness of its music. Handel was a dramatist in many of his oratorios, just as in his operas, and rarely failed to seize an opportunity for strong characterisation. The air 'Honour and arms' [12] offered him such an opportunity. Here, in Act II, the Philistine 'hero' Harapha is challenged by the blinded and chained Samson, but declines: 'Vanquish a slave that is half slain: so mean a triumph I disdain.' Handel's music tellingly conveys the bully and the coward.

Gluck

Orpheus and Eurydice

Gluck's first 'reform opera' was composed in 1762 for performance at the Viennese court opera. Like the very earliest opera, more than a century and a half before, it tells a story designed, symbolically, to illustrate the power of music. In it, Orpheus descends to Hades, persuading its guardians to admit him by the power of his song and his playing, rescues

Eurydice from the dead, but cannot resist her demands that (contrary to the gods' edict) he must look upon her face. When he does so, she again dies. 'What is life to me without thee' ('Che farò senza Euridice') [15], he poignantly sings: and in the Gluck version the power of his singing moves the gods again, and Eurydice is restored once more.

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Diana Montague
in the title role
of Glyndebourne
Festival Opera's
production of Gluck's
Orpheus and Eurydice



Guy Gravett

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Clive Barda/PAL



Della Jones as Sextus
in English National
Opera's production of
Julius Caesar

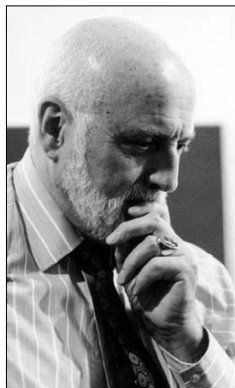
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PETER MOORES, CBE, DL

Peter Moores was born in Lancashire, the son of Sir John Moores, founder of the giant Littlewoods mail order, chain store and football pools group. He was educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford, where he read modern languages – he was already fluent in German and Italian. It was opera, however, which was his great love. He had worked at Glyndebourne Festival Opera before going up to university, and after Oxford he became a production student at the Vienna State Opera, combining this with a three-year course at the Vienna Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.

By the end of his third year at the Academy Moores had produced the Vienna premiere of Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, had worked as Assistant Producer at the San Carlo Opera House, Naples, the Geneva Festival and Rome Opera, and seemed set for a successful operatic career. At this point he received a letter from his father asking him to come home as he was needed in the firm. Family loyalty being paramount, he returned to Liverpool.

From 1981 to 1983 he was a Governor of the BBC, and a Trustee of the Tate Gallery from 1978 until 1985; from 1988 to 1992 he was a director of Scottish Opera. He received the Gold Medal of the Italian Republic in 1974, an Honorary MA from Christ Church, Oxford, in 1975, and was made an Honorary Member of the Royal Northern College of Music in 1985. In May 1992 he became Deputy Lieutenant of Lancashire, and in the New Year's Honours List for 1991, he was made a CBE for his charitable services to the Arts.



Bill Cooper/PMF

Peter Moores, CBE, DL

Whilst still in his early twenties, Peter Moores had started giving financial support to various young artists, several of whom – Joan Sutherland, Colin Davis and the late Geraint Evans amongst them – were to become world-famous. In 1964 he set aside a substantial part of his inheritance to establish the Peter Moores Foundation, a charity designed to support those causes dear to his heart: to make music and the arts more accessible to more people; to give encouragement to the young and to improve race relations.

PETER MOORES FOUNDATION

In the field of music, the main areas supported by the Peter Moores Foundation are:

the recording of operas from the core repertory sung in English translation; the recording or staging of rare Italian opera from the *bel canto* era of the early nineteenth century (repertoire which would otherwise only be accessible to scholars); the nurturing of promising young opera singers; new operatic work.

The Foundation awards scholarships annually to students and post-graduates for furthering their vocal studies at the Royal Northern College of Music. In addition, project awards may be given to facilitate language tuition in the appropriate country, attendance at masterclasses or summer courses, specialised repertoire study with an acknowledged expert in the field, or post-graduate performance training.

The Foundation encourages new operatic work by contributing to recordings, the publication of scores and stage productions.

Since 1964 the Foundation has supported the recording of more than forty operas, many of these sung in English, in translation. It has always been Peter Moores's belief that to enjoy opera to the full, there must be no language barrier, particularly for newcomers and particularly in the popular repertoire – hence the *Opera in English* series launched with Chandos in 1995. This includes many of the English language recordings funded by the Foundation in the 1970s and 1980s, and is now the largest recorded collection of operas sung in English.



Janet Baker in the title role of
English National Opera's production
of Handel's *Julius Caesar*

Clive Barda/PAL



Press Photo

Bruce Ford as Bajazet in
Maggio Musicale's production
of Handel's *Tamerlano*

Barockfest

Dass die Oper – eine dramatische Darbietung, in der die Handelnden durchgehend singen – es nicht vermochte, sich im England des 17. Jahrhunderts so durchzusetzen wie in Italien, Frankreich und Deutschland, hatte eine ganze Reihe von Gründen. Man denke zum Beispiel an die blühende einheimische Theatertradition, in der die Musik nur eine nebensächliche Rolle spielte. Ein weiterer Faktor war die bereits bestehende Tradition der höfischen Unterhaltung in der Form des Maskenspiels (das Musik, Lyrik, Tanz und Schauspiel verband). Theateraufführungen, bei denen ausschließlich gesungen wurde, waren in England selten. Selbst Henry Purcell, auf dessen Konto nur eine echte Oper geht (das für die Aufführung im privaten Kreis bestimmte Werk *Dido and Aeneas*, 1689), schrieb für das Londoner Theater nur “Halbopern” – Werke, in denen das eigentliche, gesprochene Drama sich mit musikalischen Einlagen abwechselte.

Aber viele Engländer, die auf Bildungsreisen Italien besuchten, waren von den dort angebotenen Opern begeistert und wollten das neue Genre unbedingt nach London bringen.

Als sich Georg Friedrich Händel im frühen 18. Jahrhunderts nach längerem Italien-Aufenthalt in England niederließ, galt er als Vertreter der italienischen Oper. Aaron Hill, der mit Händel u.a. an dessen erster Londoner Oper, *Rinaldo* (1711), zusammengearbeitet hatte, schlug dem Meister später vor, Opern vielleicht auch in englischer Sprache zu verfassen. Doch Händel konnte sich für diesen Plan offenbar nicht begeistern, zumindest nicht im Hinblick auf das Londoner Theater. Ein einziges opernähnliches Werk, *Acis and Galatea* (1718), schrieb er zwar in englischer Sprache, doch wieder nur für ein privates Publikum. Alle seine echten Londoner Opern beruhten auf italienischen Texten und waren für internationale, vor allem aus Italien stammende Interpreten bestimmt. Den Wünschen des Publikums trug man in anderer Form Rechnung: Beim Betreten des Theaters konnte man ein zweisprachiges Libretto kaufen, mit einer englischen Übersetzung neben dem gesungenen italienischen Text. Kerzen gaben an den Sitzen Licht, so dass man zumindest die Handlung verfolgen und den Text sinngemäß verstehen konnte.

Purcell King Arthur

Der Dichter John Dryden schrieb das Theaterstück *King Arthur* 1684. Eigentlich sollte es zur Feier des Jahr darauf anstehenden 25-jährigen Jubiläums der Wiederherstellung der Monarchie in Großbritannien gegeben werden, aber der König stellte sich eine andere Form der Unterhaltung vor, und das Stück, mittlerweile mit Musik von Purcell, wurde erst 1691 im Dorset Garden Theater uraufgeführt. Die Handlung geht auf die Artuslegende zurück und erzählt davon, wie König Artus seine Geliebte Emmeline aus der Hand übler Schurken befreit. Genauer betrachtet ist es ein charmant erweiterter Rahmen für schöne Lyrik und herrliche Musik zum Lob Englands. Die Musik umfasst eine Serie von Episoden, in der es um Militärisches, Pastorales, die Meteorologie, die Magie und schließlich einfach um die Treue geht. Den Höhepunkt der abschließenden Feier des Triumphs der Britannia bildet das Lied “Fairest isle”, ^[1] im fünften und letzten Akt von Venus gesungen.

The Indian Queen

Das letzte größere Werk von Purcell ist, wie schon *King Arthur*, ein opernähnliches Werk; als Textvorlage diente ein Theaterstück von

John Dryden und Robert Howard. Das Stück wurde 1695, kurz nach Purcells Tod, im Drury Lane Theatre uraufgeführt. Die Handlung dreht sich um Konflikte zwischen Zempoalla, der Königin von Mexiko, und den Peruanern. Purcell komponierte Musik für drei Szenen – ein Maskenspiel, eine Beschwörung und einen Opferritus – jeweils im 2., 3. und 5. Akt. Außerdem schrieb er eine Ouvertüre, Tänze und zwei Lieder, darunter das populäre “I attempt from love’s sickness to fly” ^[2]; heute lässt sich nicht mehr ermitteln, welche Stellen sie im Originalstück einnahmen.

Händel

Julius Caesar (*Giulio Cesare*)

Von allen Opern Händels hat *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (um den vollen Titel zu nennen) in unserer Zeit den Anklang gefunden; seit der ersten Wiederaufführung in neuerer Zeit (1922 in Deutschland) steht es auch bei weitem am häufigsten auf dem Spielplan. Das Werk entstand 1723/24 und wurde am 20. Februar 1724 im King’s Theater am Haymarket in London mit hervorragender Besetzung uraufgeführt: die Titelfigur sang einer der größten Kastraten der damaligen Zeit, Senesino, und Francesca Cuzzoni übernahm die Rolle der Kleopatra. Beim

Libretto von Nicola Haym handelte es sich um die Bearbeitung eines venezianischen Buchs von G.F. Bussani aus dem Jahre 1677.

Im 1. Akt landet Cäsar bei der Verfolgung des Pompeius in Ägypten. Auf Bitten von Cornelia, der Gattin des Pompeius, stimmt er einer Versöhnung zu, aber der verräterische Ptolemäus, der gemeinsam mit seiner Schwester Kleopatra in Ägypten herrscht, überbringt Cäsar zur Begrüßung ein Geschenk: den Kopf des Pompeius. Cäsar reagiert mit Entsetzen, und Sextus, der Sohn des Pompeius, schwört Rache. Ptolemäus erkennt, dass das Geschenk ein Fehler war, und beschließt ein Attentat auf Cäsar, aber dieser schöpft bei einem Besuch im Palast des Ptolemäus Verdacht. Unterdessen hat Kleopatra beschlossen, Cäsar zu umwerben, um mit seiner Hilfe die Alleinherrschaft zu übernehmen.

Zu Beginn des 2. Akts hat Kleopatra sich als Magd mit Namen Lydia verkleidet und versucht, Cäsar zu verführen. Später macht sich eine Gruppe von Verschwörern geräuschvoll bemerkbar, und Cäsar springt aus dem Fenster ins Meer. Man nimmt an, dass er ertrunken ist, und der Konflikt zwischen Ptolemäus und Kleopatra verschärft sich.

Am Anfang des 3. Akts hat Ptolemäus

inzwischen Kleopatra besiegt, und sie befindet sich in Gefangenschaft – zusammen mit Cornelia, auf die Ptolemäus es abgesehen hat. Cäsar ist – selbstverständlich – den Fluten unversehrt entkommen und begegnet Sextus und Achilles, der Ptolemäus als General gedient hatte. Cäsar lässt sich dessen Amtssiegel geben und macht sich auf, um Kleopatra und Cornelia zu retten. Schließlich rächt Sextus den Mord an Pompeius, indem er Ptolemäus tötet, und Cäsar und Kleopatra feiern ihren Bund und den Frieden und die Freiheit, die von Rom verbürgt werden.

Mit “Grief and woe” (Priva son) (3) aus dem 1. Akt wird Cornelia vorgestellt: Gerade hat sie mit ansehen müssen, wie Cäsar der abgeschlagene Kopf ihres Mannes überreicht wurde, und sie hat das Schwert ihres Sohnes ergriffen, um damit Selbstmord zu begehen. Hier gibt sie ihrer tiefen Trauer Ausdruck; nur der Tod kann sie von ihrem Leid erlösen.

“Wounded, the serpent” (L’angue offeso) (5) wird am Anfang des 2. Akts von Sextus gesungen (in der ersten Fassung der Oper handelte es sich um eine Sopranrolle, die Händel erst später für Tenor umschrieb). Wegen der verräterischen Ermordung des Pompeius schwört Sextus, sich an Ptolemäus zu rächen. Er zieht einen Vergleich zwischen

sich selbst, der geduldig auf den richtigen Moment wartet, und der wachsam Schlange, die jederzeit bereit ist, zuzuschlagen und ihr Gift einzuspritzen.

“I shall tame your pride” (Damerò la tua fierezza) (8) wird am Anfang des 3. Akts von Ptolemäus (ursprünglich eine Kastratenrolle) gesungen. Er hält seine Schwester gefangen und lässt sie wissen, dass sie nun machtlos ist und seine Grausamkeit fürchten muss.

Kleopatra antwortet mit “Flow, my tears” (Piangerò) (9); sie ist gefangen und glaubt, dass ihre letzte Hoffnung dahin ist, denn Cäsar gilt als tot, und sie weiß, dass Ptolemäus auch Cornelia und Sextus in seiner Gewalt hat. In diesem bewegenden Klagelied gibt sie sich der Verzweiflung hin – obwohl im mittleren Teil der Arie mit der Drohung, als Geist zurück zu kommen und ihren Bruder zu verfolgen, auch ihr feuriger Mut zum Ausdruck kommt.

“How silently, how slyly” (Va tacito e nascosto) (10) wird gegen Ende des 1. Akts von Cäsar gesungen: Er ist nun im Palast des Ptolemäus und weiß, dass er in Gefahr ist. Es handelt sich um eine typische Gleichnisarie: Cäsar zieht eine Parallele zwischen seiner eigenen Situation und der des Beutetieres bei der Jagd, das sich der Gefahr bewusst ist. Der Hinweis auf die Jagd lieferte Händel die

Gelegenheit, ein Solohorn (also das bei der Jagd gespielte Instrument) einzuführen. Die Gleichnisarie bot den Komponisten oft die Möglichkeit, die Klangfarbe der Musik zu variieren.

Bei “Condemned to grieve” (Son nata a lagrimar) (13) handelt es sich um eines der beiden Duette in dieser Oper. Es wird am Ende des 1. Akts von Cornelia und Sextus, also von Mutter und Sohn gesungen. Pompeius hat einen grausamen Tod erlitten, Cornelia muss sich von Männern umwerben lassen, die sie abstoßend findet, und ist zur Strafe für ihren Starrsinn angewiesen worden, in den Palastgärten zu arbeiten; Sextus ist in Gefangenschaft. Die beiden beklagen ihr Schicksal in diesem bewegenden Duett, das auf typische Weise in Moll und als *Siciliana* ausgeführt ist.

“Stormy winds” (Da tempeste) (14) heißt die letzte Arie der Kleopatra, die sie kurz vor Ende des 3. Akts singt. Ihr Bruder ist tot, sie ist wieder an der Macht und hat Cäsars Herz gewonnen. Nach stürmischer Fahrt ist ihr Schiff wohlbehalten in den Hafen eingelaufen, und das feiert sie mit entsprechend brillanten Rouladen. (Übrigens ist zu bemerken, dass diese Arie und auch “Flow my tears” in der eher seltenen Tonart E-Dur geschrieben sind.

Die Cuzzoni, die als erste diese Rolle sang, war dafür bekannt, dass sie ein besonders wohlklingendes E von sich geben konnte, und offenbar war Händel geneigt, dieses Talent zu nutzen.)

Semele

In späteren Jahren, als er vor allem Oratorien komponierte, vertonte Händel ein bereits Jahre zuvor von William Congreve verfasstes Opernlibretto mit dem Titel *Semele*. Das Werk sollte nicht in Szene gesetzt, sondern, wie wir heute sagen, in konzertanter Form gegeben werden. Die Aufführung von 1744 war kein sonderlich großer Erfolg, aber in neuerer Zeit weiß man die Frische, den Charme und die Sinnlichkeit des Werkes immer mehr zu schätzen. Es erzählt die auf das klassische Altertum zurückgehende Geschichte von Jupiter, der um Semele, die Tochter des thebanischen Königs Cadmus, wirbt und sie auch gewinnt. Er bringt sie in ein Schloss auf dem Berg Cithaeron, wo sie ein Opfer der eifersüchtigen Juno wird, die sie hinterlistig dazu verleitet, eine Unsterbliche werden zu wollen. Als Semele im 2. Akt von Unruhe gequält wird, singt Jupiter ihr das beliebte Air "Where'er you walk" (4). Um sie abzulenken, lässt er eine arkadische Landschaft entstehen

und singt von den Freuden des Lebens auf dem Lande.

Acis and Galatea

Die Pastorale *Acis and Galatea* wurde 1718 für eine (wahrscheinlich konzertante) Aufführung auf dem in der Nähe von Edgware gelegenen Landsitz des Earl of Carnarvon (und späteren Duke of Chandos) komponiert. Es geht um zwei Liebende aus dem klassischen Altertum, deren Glück vom eifersüchtigen Zyklopen Polyphemus zerstört wird, der Acis tötet.

Im Geist einer als Genre hoch stilisierten Pastorale ist Polyphemus aber nicht durch und durch schlecht, und in seiner wichtigsten Arie, "O ruddier than the cherry" 6, wird er als eher komische Figur dargestellt: Gebt mir, verlangt er im vorausgegangenen Rezitativ, "a hundred reeds of decent growth, to make a pipe for my capacious mouth", und schon ertönt eine kleine Blockflöte als Begleitung für sein Lied.

Rinaldo

Rinaldo (1711) war nicht nur Händels erste Londoner Oper, sondern für dieses Publikum auch die erste italienische Oper überhaupt. Als Handlungsvorlage diente Tassos *Gerusalemme*

liberata. Händel stellte das Werk in einiger Eile zusammen. Bei der Musik handelt es sich im Wesentlichen um Stücke aus Opern und anderen Werken, die er in Deutschland und Italien verfasst hatte, in neuer Bearbeitung; das gilt auch für die bekannteste Arie, "Hear thou my weeping" (Lascia ch'io pianga) 7. In *Rinaldo*, wo sie ihre schönste und ausdrucksvollste Form erlangt, wird die Arie von der Heldin Almirena gesungen, die ihr Herz an Rinaldo verloren hat; sie stammt aus dem 2. Akt, als Almirena von der Zauberin Armida gefangen gehalten wird und das unerwünschte Werben des Argante über sich ergehen lassen muss.

Xerxes

Als er *Serse* (Xerxes, 1738) schrieb, neigte sich Händels Karriere als Opernkomponist in London bereits dem Ende zu. Als Vorlage für das Libretto diente eine venezianische Oper aus der Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts: Es geht um die Liebesabenteuer des Königs Xerxes und die dadurch ausgelöste Verwirrung. Am Anfang der Oper ruht Xerxes unter einer Platane, und er spricht dem Baum ein liebevolles Lob aus, weil dieser ihm Schatten spendet. Das Lied "Under thy shade" (Ombra mai fu) 11 ist von schlichter, aber ergreifender

Schönheit, und die Melodie ist allgemein bekannt, allerdings wohl eher unter dem Titel "Händels *Largo*". (Im Original ist das Tempo eigentlich als *Larghetto* angegeben.)

Samson

Samson wurde 1741 komponiert, aber erst 1743 uraufgeführt – Händels Reise nach Dublin anlässlich der Uraufführung des *Messias* kam dazwischen. Das Werk zählte damals zu seinen beliebtesten Oratorien mit alttestamentarischer Thematik, und das gilt dank der Eindringlichkeit und Lebendigkeit der Musik auch heute noch. Ebenso wie in seinen Opern bewies Händel in vielen seiner Oratorien dramatisches Talent, und nur selten ließ er sich die Gelegenheit zur prägnanten Charakterisierung entgehen. In der Arie "Honour and arms" 12 bot sich eine solche Gelegenheit. Hier wird im 2. Akt der 'Held' der Philister, Harapha, vom blinden, in Ketten liegenden Samson zum Kampf herausgefordert, lehnt aber ab, weil er es angeblich für unter seiner Würde hält, mit einem Blinden zu kämpfen: "Vanquish a slave that is half slain: so mean a triumph I disdain." Händels Musik verrät ganz deutlich den Feigling, der den starken Mann markiert.

Gluck

Orpheus and Eurydice (*Orfeo ed Euridice*)

Glucks erste Reformoper wurde 1762 für eine Aufführung an der Wiener Hofoper komponiert. Wie die allererste Oper, die mehr als 150 Jahre zuvor entstanden war, erzählt sie eine Geschichte, in der die Macht der Musik symbolisch veranschaulicht werden soll: Orfeo steigt hinab in den Hades und überredet die wachhabenden Mächte durch die Eindringlichkeit seines Gesangs und seines Spiels, ihm Zutritt zu gewähren. Er rettet Eurydice aus dem Reich der Toten, kann sich

aber ihrer Forderung nicht widersetzen, sie unter Missachtung des Gebots der Götter doch anzuschauen. In diesem Moment stirbt sie ein zweites Mal. "What is life to me without thee" (*Che farò senza Euridice*) ^[15], singt er untröstlich, und in der Gluck'schen Fassung gelingt es ihm noch einmal, durch die Macht seines Gesangs das Mitleid der Götter zu erregen, und Eurydice wird erneut zum Leben erweckt.

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Übersetzung: Andreas Klatt



Clive Barak/PAL

Valerie Masterson as
Cleopatra in English
National Opera's production
of *Julius Caesar*

Une célébration baroque

Si l'opéra – divertissement dramatique dans lequel les acteurs chantent du début jusqu'à la fin – ne s'est pas ancré en Angleterre au XVII^e siècle, comme ce fut le cas en Italie, en France et en Allemagne, c'est à la suite d'un concours de circonstances. L'une des raisons tient à la force de la tradition théâtrale du pays, dans laquelle la musique ne jouait qu'un rôle mineur; une autre raison repose sur l'existence d'une tradition de divertissement de cour, avec le masque (mélange de musique, de poésie, de danse et de spectacle). Les représentations théâtrales entièrement chantées étaient rares en Angleterre. Même Henry Purcell, qui composa un véritable opéra, *Dido and Aeneas* (Didon et Énée, 1689), destiné à être représenté en privé, n'écrivit pour la scène londonienne que des "semi-opéras", des ouvrages dans lesquels les sections musicales étaient intercalées dans le drame parlé principal.

Mais beaucoup d'Anglais qui se rendaient en Italie en faisant le tour de l'Europe furent captivés par les opéras qu'ils y virent et voulurent absolument importer ce genre nouveau à Londres. Lorsque Haendel s'installa

en Angleterre au tout début du XVIII^e siècle, ce fut essentiellement en tant que représentant de l'opéra italien. En fait, l'un de ses collaborateurs, Aaron Hill, qui travailla avec lui à son premier opéra londonien, *Rinaldo* (1711), lui suggéra par la suite qu'il serait possible de composer des opéras en langue anglaise; mais, cette idée suscita, semble-t-il, assez peu d'enthousiasme chez Haendel, tout au moins en ce qui concerne la composition pour la scène londonienne – même s'il écrivit une sorte d'opéra en anglais, le masque *Acis and Galatea* (Acis et Galatée, 1718), une fois encore pour un usage privé. Ainsi tous ses véritables opéras composés pour Londres sont en italien, destinés à être interprétés par des chanteurs internationaux, pour la plupart italiens. Mais on prit soin néanmoins de pourvoir aux besoins du public: en entrant dans le théâtre, le spectateur pouvait acheter un livret bilingue, sur lequel la traduction anglaise était imprimée en regard du texte chanté en italien; il y avait des bougies près des sièges ce qui permettait au moins de suivre l'action et de comprendre le sens des mots.

Purcell King Arthur

Dryden écrivit le drame *King Arthur* en 1684; il était destiné à célébrer l'année suivante le vingt-cinquième anniversaire de la restauration de la monarchie. Mais le roi voulait un genre de divertissement différent et ce n'est qu'en 1691 qu'il fut représenté, au Dorset Garden Theatre, enrichi de la musique de Purcell. L'intrigue, inspirée de la légende arthurienne, raconte comment le roi Arthur délivre sa bien-aimée Emmeline de ses ravisseurs maléfiques. Mais tout ceci n'est en réalité qu'un prétexte prolongé de façon charmante pour faire de la bonne poésie et une musique superbe à la louange de l'Angleterre. La musique se compose d'une série d'épisodes – militaire, pastoral, météorologique, magique et enfin simplement loyal. Le point culminant de la célébration finale du triomphe de ce qui sera la Grande-Bretagne est l'air "Fairest isle" (1) que chante Vénus au cinquième et dernier acte.

The Indian Queen

Cet ouvrage, la dernière œuvre importante de Purcell, est, comme *King Arthur*, un "semi-opéra"; le livret est adapté d'une pièce de théâtre de Dryden et Robert Howard. Il fut

créé à Drury Lane en 1695, juste après la mort de Purcell. L'intrigue traite des conflits entre la reine mexicaine Zampoalla et les Péruviens. Purcell écrivit la musique de trois scènes, d'un masque, d'une incantation et d'un sacrifice, aux actes II, III et V. Il composa également une ouverture, des danses et deux airs, notamment le fameux air de soprano "I attempt from love's sickness to fly" (2); mais il n'y a aucun moyen de savoir avec précision où se situaient ces musiques dans la pièce originale.

Haendel Giulio Cesare

De tous les opéras de Haendel, *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (pour reprendre son titre complet) est celui qui a connu le plus de succès et qui a été le plus souvent représenté aux temps modernes depuis sa première reprise moderne, en Allemagne, en 1922. Composé en 1723–24, il fut créé au King's Theatre de Haymarket, à Londres, le 20 février 1724, avec une brillante distribution comprenant notamment l'un des plus grands castrats de l'époque, Senesino, dans le rôle-titre et Francesca Cuzzoni dans celui de Cléopâtre. Le livret de Nicola Haym s'inspire principalement d'un livret vénitien de G.F. Bussani, datant de 1677.

À l'acte I, César débarque en Égypte, à la poursuite de Pompée. La femme de Pompée, Cornélia, le supplie de se montrer clément et César accepte de se réconcilier avec lui; mais le traître Ptolémée, qui règne sur l'Égypte avec sa sœur Cléopâtre – apporte à César un cadeau de bienvenue: la tête tranchée de Pompée. César est horrifié et Sextus, fils de Pompée, jure de se venger. Ptolémée comprend que son cadeau a été malvenu et décide d'assassiner César, mais le général romain, invité au palais de Ptolémée, se méfie des motifs de cette invitation. Pendant ce temps, Cléopâtre a décidé de séduire César dans l'espoir de devenir, avec son aide, la seule et unique souveraine.

Au début de l'acte II, Cléopâtre se fait passer pour Lydia, l'une de ses servantes, et tente de séduire César. Plus tard, on entend un groupe de conspirateurs et César saute d'une fenêtre du palais dans la mer; tout le monde le croit noyé. Le conflit s'intensifie entre Ptolémée et Cléopâtre.

Dès le début de l'Acte III, Ptolémée a remporté la victoire sur Cléopâtre; elle est prisonnière, tout comme Cornélia, sur laquelle Ptolémée a des vues. César émerge – bien sûr – indemne de la mer; il rencontre Sextus et Achilles, ancien général de Ptolémée. Prenant

le sceau du commandement, César va voler au secours de Cléopâtre et de Cornélia. Finalement, Sextus venge l'assassinat de Pompée en tuant Ptolémée; César et Cléopâtre célèbrent leur union ainsi que la paix et la liberté garanties par Rome.

“Grief and woe” (Priva son) [9], à l'acte I, est l'air de présentation de Cornélia: elle vient de voir la tête tranchée de son mari offerte à César et s'est emparée de l'épée de son fils pour essayer de se tuer à son tour. Elle exprime ici la profondeur de son chagrin; seule la mort peut la libérer de ses peines.

“Wounded, the serpent” (L'angue offeso) [5] est chanté par Sextus – un rôle de soprano dans la première version de l'opéra (Haendel l'attribua ensuite à un ténor) – au début de l'acte II, lorsqu'il jure de se venger de Ptolémée pour avoir traîtreusement assassiné Pompée. Il fait une comparaison entre lui-même, qui attend patiemment le bon moment, et le serpent vigilant prêt à se jeter sur sa victime et à lui injecter son venin.

“I shall tame your pride” (Domerò la tua ferezza) [4] est chanté par Ptolémée – à l'origine un rôle de castrat alto – au début de l'acte III: il détient sa sœur prisonnière et lui dit que n'ayant plus aucun pouvoir elle doit désormais craindre sa cruauté.

“Flow, my tears” (Piangerò) [9] est la réponse de Cléopâtre, captive, qui croit ses derniers espoirs évanouis avec la mort présumée de César. En outre, elle sait que Ptolémée détient Cornélia et Sextus en son pouvoir, et elle laisse libre cours à son désespoir dans cette complainte poignante – bien que son caractère impétueux trouve aussi son expression dans la section centrale de l'air, où elle menace de revenir hanter son frère.

“How silently, how slyly” (Va tacito e nascosto) [10] est chanté par César presque à la fin de l'acte I, lorsqu'il se trouve dans le palais de Ptolémée et se sait menacé; c'est un exemple typique d'“air à métaphores” – César fait un parallèle entre sa propre situation et celle de la proie du chasseur, consciente du danger. L'allusion à la chasse offre à Haendel l'occasion d'introduire un cor solo, l'instrument de la chasse: les airs à métaphores permettaient souvent aux compositeurs d'apporter une certaine variété à la texture musicale.

“Condemned to grieve” (Son nata a lagrimar) [13] est l'un des deux duos de l'opéra; Cornélia et Sextus, la mère et le fils, le chantent à la fin de l'acte I. Pompée est mort cruellement; Cornélia doit subir les avances importunes d'hommes qui la déçoivent et, à

cause de son caractère inflexible, elle est réduite à l'entretien des jardins du palais. Quant à Sextus, il est prisonnier. Ils se lamentent sur leur sort dans ce duo émouvant, écrit dans le mode mineur, comme c'est l'usage, et sur un rythme de sicilienne.

“Stormy winds” (Da tempeste) [14] est l'air final de Cléopâtre, qu'elle chante presque à la fin de l'acte III: son ignoble frère est mort, elle est revenue au pouvoir et a conquis le cœur de César. Son navire est rentré au port après avoir essuyé une tempête, ce qu'elle célèbre avec des vocalises brillantes, comme on pouvait s'y attendre. (Il est intéressant de noter au passage que cette aria et “Piangerò” sont écrits dans la tonalité assez inhabituelle de mi majeur: Cuzzoni, créatrice du rôle était célèbre pour la beauté particulière de ses “mi” et il est évident que Haendel voulait en tirer profit.)

Semele

À la fin de sa vie, lorsqu'il composait surtout des oratorios, Haendel mit en musique un livret d'opéra, *Semele*, que William Congreve avait écrit plusieurs années auparavant; il ne fut pas représenté sur scène, mais donné dans ce que l'on pourrait appeler une forme de concert. Il ne remporta guère de succès lorsqu'il fut présenté en 1744, mais,

récemment, sa fraîcheur et son charme, ainsi que sa sensualité, ont fini par le faire apprécier. C'est l'histoire classique de Jupiter qui courtise et gagne le cœur de Sémélé, fille de Cadmos, roi de Thèbes; il la transporte dans un palais sur le Mont Cithéron; Junon, jalouse, l'anéantit en la poussant avec duplicité à aspirer à l'immortalité. Jupiter chante l'air très fameux "Where'er you walk" (4) à Sémélé à l'acte II, lorsqu'elle commence à donner des signes d'impatience: il crée un environnement arcadien pour la distraire et chante les délices de la vie champêtre.

Acis and Galatea

Composé en 1718 pour être donné, probablement en concert, dans la résidence de campagne proche d'Edgware du comte de Carnarvon (qui deviendra par la suite duc de Chandos), *Acis and Galatea* est une pastorale, racontant l'histoire classique de deux amoureux dont le bonheur est détruit par la jalousie du cyclope Polyphème, qui tue Acis. Conformément à l'esprit de la pastorale et à sa nature stylisée, Polyphème n'est pas totalement mauvais et, dans son air principal, "O ruddier than the cherry" (5), il est présenté comme une créature en grande partie comique – dans le récitatif qui précède, il dit: "Bring me a

hundred reeds of decent growth, to make a pipe for my capacious mouth" ("Donnez-moi une centaine de roseaux de taille décente afin de faire une flûte pour ma vaste bouche"), et il se met à jouer d'une petite flûte pour accompagner son chant.

Rinaldo

Rinaldo (1711) fut le premier opéra londonien de Haendel et le premier opéra italien composé pour Londres. L'intrigue s'inspire de la *Gerusalemme liberata* du Tasse. Haendel composa cet ouvrage un peu à la hâte, réutilisant et adaptant pour une grande part de la musique d'opéras et d'autres œuvres qu'il avait écrites en Allemagne et en Italie – notamment la très célèbre aria, "Hear thou my weeping" (*Lascia ch'io pianga*) (7). Dans *Rinaldo*, où elle atteint sa forme la plus belle et la plus expressive, elle est chantée à l'acte II par l'héroïne Almirena, qui aime Rinaldo; elle est alors prisonnière de la sorcière Armida et fait l'objet des attentions importunes d'Argante.

Xerxès

Serse (Xerxès, 1738) date de la fin, ou presque, de la carrière lyrique de Haendel à Londres. Inspiré d'un opéra vénitien du milieu du

XVII^e siècle, le livret raconte les liaisons amoureuses volages du roi Xerxès et la confusion qu'elles suscitent. Au début de l'opéra, Xerxès se repose sous un platane, à l'ombre duquel il adresse un éloge affectueux: "Under thy shade" (*Ombra mai fu*) (11) – un air d'une beauté simple mais obsédante, dont la mélodie est universellement connue, sous le nom de "*Largo* de Haendel". (À l'origine, l'indication de tempo donnée par Haendel est en réalité *Larghetto*.)

Samson

Composé en 1741 et créé en 1743 – le voyage de Haendel à Dublin, pour la création du *Messie*, eut lieu entre-temps –, *Samson* fut l'un des oratorios de Haendel sur l'Ancien Testament qui suscita le plus d'admiration, et c'est encore le cas de nos jours en raison de la puissance et de la vigueur de la musique. Haendel se comporta en dramaturge dans un grand nombre de ses oratorios, tout comme dans ses opéras, et il laissa rarement passer l'occasion de faire une forte caractérisation de ses personnages. L'air "Honour and arms" (12) lui offrit une telle opportunité. Ici, à l'acte II, le "héros" philistin Harapha est défié par Samson, aveugle et enchaîné, mais il refuse: "Vanquish a slave that is half slain: so mean a

triumph I disdain." La musique de Haendel dépeint d'une manière impressionnante le tyran et le lâche.

Gluck

Orpheus and Eurydice

Le premier opéra de Gluck qui s'inscrit dans le cadre de sa réforme de l'opéra fut composé en 1762 pour être représenté à l'Opéra de la cour de Vienne. Comme le tout premier opéra de l'histoire, plus d'un siècle et demi auparavant, il raconte une histoire destinée à illustrer symboliquement le pouvoir de la musique. Dans cet ouvrage, Orphée descend aux Enfers, parvient à convaincre les Furies de le laisser y pénétrer par le pouvoir de son chant et de son jeu, et sauve Eurydice de la mort; mais lorsqu'elle lui demande de regarder son visage, il ne peut lui résister bien que ce soit contraire aux exigences des dieux. Et lorsqu'il se tourne vers elle, elle meurt aussitôt. Il chante alors de manière poignante "What is life to me without thee" (*Che farò senza Euridice?*) (15); et, dans la version de Gluck, la puissance de son chant émeut à nouveau les dieux et Eurydice revient une fois encore à la vie.

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Traduction: Marie-Stella Pâris

Festa barocca

Diversamente da quanto si verificò in Italia, in Francia e in Germania, nel XVII secolo, un insieme di circostanze diverse ostacolò in Inghilterra l'affermazione dell'opera lirica, uno spettacolo drammatico in cui l'interpretazione degli attori è affidata esclusivamente al canto. Uno dei fattori va ricercato nella forza della tradizione teatrale nazionale, in cui la musica aveva solo un ruolo incidentale; un altro è rappresentato dalla tradizione dello spettacolo di corte, con il masque (una combinazione di musica, poesia, danza e spettacolo). Gli spettacoli teatrali interamente cantanti erano rari in Inghilterra. Persino Henry Purcell, autore di una sola vera opera, *Dido and Aeneas* (1689), per esecuzione privata, compose solo delle "opere a metà" per il teatro di Londra, in cui alcune sezioni musicali si inframmezzavano alla vicenda principale parlata.

Ma molti inglesi che all'epoca viaggiavano per visitare l'Italia furono conquistati dalle opere a cui ebbero la possibilità di assistere e non vedevano l'ora di importare il nuovo genere a Londra. Quando si stabilì in Inghilterra, nei primi anni del XVIII secolo, Händel si propose sostanzialmente in veste di rappresentante

dell'opera italiana. Anzi, uno dei suoi collaboratori, Aaron Hill, che lavorò con lui alla prima opera londinese, *Rinaldo* (1711), gli suggerì in seguito di comporre in lingua inglese; ma Händel, così sembra, non era entusiasta della prospettiva, per lo meno per quanto riguardava le composizioni destinate al teatro londinese, anche se compose un lavoro simile a un'opera in inglese, *Acis and Galatea* (1718), anche questa volta per uso privato. Tutte le sue vere opere composte per Londra sono quindi in lingua italiana, e dovevano essere interpretate da cantanti internazionali, prevalentemente italiani. Ma in qualche modo si teneva conto delle esigenze del pubblico: all'ingresso del teatro era possibile acquistare un libretto nelle due lingue, con una traduzione in inglese del testo cantato in italiano a fronte; vicino alle poltrone venivano collocate delle candele, per consentire di seguire l'azione e di comprendere il senso delle parole.

Purcell *King Arthur*

Il dramma *King Arthur* di Dryden risale al 1684; era destinato ai festeggiamenti dell'anno successivo in occasione del venticinquesimo

anniversario della restaurazione della monarchia. Ma il re desiderava un tipo diverso di spettacolo e il dramma fu rappresentato solo nel 1691, presso il teatro del Dorset Garden, con l'aggiunta di musiche di Purcell. La trama, che si ispira alla leggenda arturiana, narra la liberazione di Emmeline, amata da re Artù e imprigionata da malvagi carcerieri. Ma in realtà si tratta di una scusa deliziosamente prolungata per proporre buoni versi e superba musica ad esaltazione dell'Inghilterra. La musica consiste in una serie di episodi, militari, pastorali, meteorologici, magici e infine semplicemente dichiarazioni di fedeltà. Il culmine della celebrazione finale del trionfo di Britannia è l'aria "Fairest isle" ^[1], cantata da Venere nel quinto e ultimo atto.

The Indian Queen

Quest'ultima composizione di Purcell di una certa consistenza è, come *King Arthur*, un'opera a metà; le parole furono adattate da una commedia di Dryden e Robert Howard. Fu eseguita per la prima volta a Drury Lane nel 1695, poco dopo la morte di Purcell. La trama riguarda il conflitto tra la regina del Messico Zempoalla e i peruviani. Purcell musicò tre scene, un masque, un incantesimo e un sacrificio, per gli atti II, III e V. Fornì

anche un'ouverture, alcune danze e due canzoni (una delle due, "I attempt from love's sickness to fly" ^[2], è famosa); ma non c'è modo di scoprire esattamente dove fossero inserite nella commedia originale.

Händel

Giulio Cesare (Julius Caesar)

Tra tutte le opere di Händel, *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (questo il titolo completo) è la più ammirata e quella eseguita più spesso in epoca contemporanea dal 1922, anno del suo primo revival moderno, avvenuto in Germania. Fu composta nel 1723–1724, ed eseguita per la prima volta al King's Theatre di Haymarket, a Londra, il 20 febbraio 1724, con un brillante cast che comprendeva uno dei grandi castrati dell'epoca, il Senesino, nel ruolo del protagonista, e Francesca Cuzzoni nella parte di Cleopatra. Il libretto, ispirato a un testo veneziano di G.F. Bussani del 1677, era di Nicola Haym.

Nel primo atto, Cesare sbarca in Egitto, all'inseguimento di Pompeo e accetta una riconciliazione, dopo le suppliche della moglie di quest'ultimo, Cornelia. Il traditore Tolomeo, che regna sull'Egitto con la sorella Cleopatra, gli consegna come dono di benvenuto la testa mozzata di Pompeo. Cesare è sconvolto e Sesto,

figlio di Pompeo, giura vendetta. Vedendo che il dono non ha sortito l'effetto desiderato, Tolomeo decide di uccidere Cesare, ma il generale romano, in visita al palazzo di Tolomeo, sospetta le sue intenzioni. Nel frattempo Cleopatra ha deciso di sedurre Cesare, nella speranza di impadronirsi del potere assoluto con il suo aiuto.

All'inizio del secondo atto Cleopatra, che ha preso il nome di Lidia e si è travestita da ancella, tenta di sedurre Cesare. Più tardi dopo aver sentito avvicinarsi un gruppo di congiurati, Cesare fugge dalla finestra del palazzo in mare e si pensa che sia annegato. Il conflitto tra Tolomeo e Cleopatra si inasprisce.

All'inizio del terzo atto, Tolomeo ha sconfitto Cleopatra che è prigioniera, come Cornelia, su cui Tolomeo ha delle mire. Cesare, naturalmente, emerge illeso dal mare; incontra Sesto e Achilla, ex generale di Tolomeo. Prendendo il suo sigillo di comando, Cesare si reca a liberare Cleopatra e Cornelia. Infine, Sesto vendica l'assassinio di Pompeo uccidendo Tolomeo. Cesare e Cleopatra celebrano la loro unione e la garanzia di pace e libertà per Roma.

“Priva son” (Grief and woe) [3], dall'atto I, presenta Cornelia: la donna ha appena visto presentare a Cesare la testa mozzata del marito

e ha preso la spada di suo figlio per tentare di uccidersi. Qui esprime il suo profondo dolore; solo la morte può liberarla.

“L'angue offeso” (Wounded, the serpent) [5] è interpretato da Sesto – un ruolo per soprano nella prima versione dell'opera (successivamente Händel lo modificò per tenore) – verso l'inizio dell'atto II. Si tratta del giuramento di vendetta contro Tolomeo che ha fatto assassinare Pompeo a tradimento. Sesto attende pazientemente il momento giusto; come un serpente, è pronto a slanciarsi per iniettare il proprio veleno.

“Domerò la tua fiera” (I shall tame your pride) [8] è affidato a Tolomeo – in origine un ruolo per contralto castrato – all'inizio dell'atto III. Dopo aver imprigionato la sorella, le annuncia che il suo potere è finito e che adesso deve temere la sua crudeltà.

“Piangerò” (Flow, my tears) [9] è la replica di Cleopatra: prigioniera, convinta che la sua ultima speranza sia svanita con la notizia della morte presunta di Cesare, e sapendo anche che Cornelia e Sesto sono nelle mani di Tolomeo, si lascia prendere dalla disperazione in questo straziante lamento, ma il suo spirito fiero trova espressione anche nella sezione centrale dell'aria in cui minaccia di tornare dall'aldilà ad ossessionare il fratello.

“Va tacito e nascosto” (How silently, how slyly) [10] è cantata da Cesare verso la fine dell'atto I, quando si trova nel palazzo di Tolomeo e sa di essere minacciato. Si tratta di un tipico esempio di aria “metaforica”: Cesare paragona la sua situazione a quella di una preda, consapevole del pericolo rappresentato dal cacciatore. L'allusione alla caccia fornì ad Händel la possibilità di introdurre un assolo di corno, lo strumento della caccia: le arie di questo tipo spesso concedevano ai compositori una possibilità di aggiungere varietà alla tessitura musicale.

“Son nata a lagrimar” (Condemned to grieve) [13] è uno dei due duetti dell'opera; viene eseguito alla fine dell'Atto I da madre e figlio, Cornelia e Sesto. Dopo la crudele morte di Pompeo, Cornelia è costretta ad accettare le profferte indesiderate di uomini che le sono ripugnanti ed è stata obbligata a curare il giardino del palazzo come punizione per la sua intrattabilità; Sesto è prigioniero. Entrambi lamentano il proprio destino in questo commovente duetto nel normale modo minore e in ritmo alla siciliana.

“Da tempeste” (Stormy winds) [14] è l'ultima aria che Cleopatra canta verso la fine dell'atto III: l'odiato fratello è morto, le è stato restituito il potere e ha conquistato il cuore di

Cesare. La sua nave è ormai in porto dopo un viaggio tempestoso e l'avvenimento viene festeggiato con gorgheggi doverosamente brillanti. (Vale la pena di sottolineare, a proposito, che quest'aria e “Son nata a lagrimar” sono in mi maggiore, tonalità piuttosto inconsueta: la Cuzzoni, creatrice del ruolo, era famosa per la particolare bellezza del suo tono in questa chiave e chiaramente Händel era pronto a sfruttare questa qualità.)

Semele

Nei suoi ultimi anni, che dedicò prevalentemente alla composizione di oratori, Händel musicò *Semele*, un libretto realizzato da William Congreve molti anni prima; l'opera non era destinata alla rappresentazione, ma allo spettacolo in quella che definiremmo la forma concertistica. Non fu un grande successo quando fu eseguita, nel 1744, ma negli ultimi tempi la sua freschezza, il suo fascino e la sua sensualità sono stati più apprezzati. La trama narra la storia classica del corteggiamento e della conquista di Semele, figlia di Cadmo, re di Tebe, da parte di Giove, che la trasporta in un palazzo sul Monte Citeria. Semele viene distrutta dalla gelosa Giunone, che la provoca con l'inganno ad aspirare all'immortalità. Giove canta a Semele

un'aria molto amata, "Where'er you walk" ^[4] nell'Atto II, quando la donna è irrequieta: crea un ambiente arcadico per distrarla e le parla delle gioie della vita rurale.

Acis and Galatea

Composta nel 1718 per essere eseguita, probabilmente in forma di concerto, nella casa di campagna dell'Earl of Carnarvon (in seguito Duca di Chandos) nei pressi di Edgware, *Acis and Galatea* è un'opera pastorale ispirata alla storia di due innamorati dell'antichità. La loro felicità viene distrutta dalla gelosia del ciclope Polifemo, che uccide Acis. In sintonia con lo spirito della composizione pastorale e la sua natura stilizzata, Polifemo non è totalmente malvagio e nella sua aria principale, "O ruddier than the cherry" ^[5], viene presentato in maniera comica. Dopo aver dichiarato, nel recitativo precedente, "Bring me a hundred reeds of decent growth, to make a pipe for my capacious mouth", tira fuori un minuscolo flauto per accompagnarsi.

Rinaldo

Rinaldo (1711) fu la prima opera londinese di Händel e la prima opera italiana composta per il teatro di Londra. La trama si ispira alla

Gerusalemme liberata di Tasso. Händel realizzò il lavoro piuttosto in fretta, adattando gran parte della musica da altri brani composti in Germania e Italia, compresa l'aria più famosa, "Lascia ch'io pianga" ("Hear thou my weeping") ^[7]. Nel *Rinaldo*, in cui raggiunge la sua forma più bella ed espressiva, l'aria viene eseguita nell'Atto II dall'eroina Almirena, prigioniera della maga Armida e costretta a subire le indesiderate attenzioni di Argante.

Xerxes

Serse (1738) si colloca verso la fine della carriera operistica di Händel a Londra. Basato su un'opera veneziana della metà del Seicento, il libretto narra gli amori dell'incostante Serse e la confusione che suscitano. All'inizio dell'opera Serse riposa sotto un platano che loda con amore per l'ombra che gli offre: "Ombra mai fu" (Under thy shade) ^[11] – un brano di semplice ma persistente bellezza la cui melodia, famosissima, è anche nota come "*Largo* di Händel" (anche se l'indicazione effettivamente dice *Larghetto*.)

Samson

Composto nel 1741 ed eseguito per la prima volta nel 1743 – interrotto dal viaggio di Händel a Dublino, dove si svolse la prima del

Messiah – Samson fu e rimane uno dei più ammirati oratori sull'Antico testamento per la potenza e la vivacità della musica. L'arte drammatica di Händel si manifesta in molti oratori, come nelle opere; il compositore raramente si lasciava sfuggire una possibilità di caratterizzazione. L'aria "Honour and arms" ^[12] gli offrì tale opportunità. Qui, nell'Atto II, Harapha, "eroe" filisteo, viene sfidato da Sansone ormai cieco e in catene, ma rifiuta: "Vanquish a slave that is half slain: so mean a triumph I disdain." La musica di Händel chiaramente comunica la sua codardia e prepotenza.

Gluck

Orpheus and Eurydice

La prima opera della "riforma" di Gluck fu composta nel 1762 per essere eseguita al teatro

della corte viennese. Come la prima opera in assoluto, composta più di un secolo e mezzo prima, narra una storia pensata, simbolicamente, per illustrare il potere della musica. Orfeo scende nel regno dei morti e convince i suoi guardiani a farlo entrare con il potere del canto e la musica; riesce poi a riprendere Euridice, ma non resiste quando lei lo supplica di guardarla in viso (in deroga all'ordine degli dei). A causa di questa debolezza, la donna muore ancora una volta. "Che farò senza Euridice?" (What is life to me without thee) ^[15], è il lamento straziante di Orfeo. Nella versione di Gluck, il potere del suo canto commuove ancora una volta gli dei ed Euridice gli viene restituita.

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Traduzione: Emanuela Guastella

Sarah Walker as
Cornelia and Della
Jones as Sextus in
English National
Opera's production
of *Julius Caesar*



Clive Barda/PAL

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Clive Barda/PAL

James Bowman as
Ptolemy in English
National Opera's
production
of *Julius Caesar*

43

from *King Arthur*, Act V

Air

Venus

- [1] Fairest isle, all isles excelling,
seat of pleasure and of love,
Venus here will choose her dwelling,
and forsake her Cyprian grove.
Cupid from his fav'rite nation
care and envy will remove;
jealousy, that poisons passion,
and despair, that dies for love.

Gentle murmurs, sweet complaining,
sighs that blow the fire of love,
soft repulses, kind disdainings,
shall be all the pains you prove.
Ev'ry swain shall pay his duty,
grateful ev'ry nymph shall prove;
and as these excel in beauty,
those shall be renown'd in love.

John Dryden

from *The Indian Queen*, Act I

Solo

Aerial Spirit

- [2] I attempt from love's sickness to fly in vain,
since I am myself my own fever and pain.

No more now, fond heart, with pride no more
swell,
thou canst not raise forces enough to rebel.

I attempt from love's sickness *etc.*

For love has more pow'r and less mercy than fate,
to make us seek ruin and love those that hate.

I attempt from love's sickness *etc.*

John Dryden and R. Howard

from *Julius Caesar*

Cornelia

- [3] Grief and woe all hope deny me;
Death would free me from my sorrow,
Yet alas, I may not die.
Though I mourn, though sorrow try me,
Though I weary of complaining,
Welcome Death will ne'er draw nigh.

da capo

translation by Brian Trowell,
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from *Semele*

Jupiter

- [4] Where'er you walk, cool gales shall fan the glade;
Trees where you sit shall crowd into a shade.
Where'er you tread, the blushing flow'rs shall
rise,
and all things flourish where'er you turn your
eyes.

Where'er you walk, cool gales shall fan the glade;
Trees where you sit shall crowd into a shade.

W. Congreve after Ovid

from *Julius Caesar*

Sextus

- [5] Wounded, the serpent ne'er reposes,
Ere his venom spread its anguish
Through the body of his foe.

My right arm shall never languish
Till my sword has proved its valour:
On my dagger blood will flow.

da capo

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from *Acis and Galatea*

Recitative

Polyphemus

- [6] I rage, I rage, I rage, I melt, I burn!
The feeble god has stabb'd me to the heart.
Thou trusty pine, prop of my godlike steps,
I lay thee by!
Bring me a hundred reeds of decent growth,
to make a pipe for my capacious mouth;
in soft, enchanting accents let me breathe
sweet Galatea's beauty, and my love.

Air

O ruddier than the cherry,
O sweeter than the berry,
O nymph more bright than moonshine night,
like kidlings blithe and merry!

Ripe as the melting cluster,
no lily has such lustre;
yet hard to tame as raging flame,
and fierce as storms that bluster!

da capo

J. Gay *et al.*, after Ovid

from *Rinaldo*, Act II

Aria

Almirena

- [7] Hear thou my weeping as here I languish,
all vainly sighing to be free again!

I dwell in torment, in cruel anguish,
ah, hear my crying and end my pain.

da capo

G. Rossi, translation by Andrew Porter

from *Julius Caesar*

Aria

Ptolemy

- [8] I shall tame your pride unbending,
Rack and scourge you with pain unending:
You'll learn to fear me when I frown.

Like an eagle you would fly
To snatch the sun from heaven's eye:
But I'll clip your wings and bring you down.

da capo

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Aria

Cleopatra

- [9] Flow, my tears, cease not your grieving;
Though my sorrow be past relieving,
While I breathe still let me mourn.

I shall haunt him, sleeping, waking,
As a spectre my vengeance taking,
Till with terror his heart is torn.

da capo

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Aria

Caesar

- [10] How silently, how slyly,
When once the scent is taken,
The huntsman tracks the spoor!
A traitor shrewd and wily,
Ne'er lets his prey awaken
Unless the snare be sure.

da capo

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from Xerxes

Recitative and aria

Xerxes

- [11] May the Fates be kind, my plane tree,
and preserve thy leafy splendour,
nor e'er thy glory surrender.

Thunder, lightning and rough weather
must henceforth be required ne'er to erode thee,
and may no howling tempest e'er incommode thee.
Under thy shade,
dearly beloved tree,
Beauty and Harmony
are both displayed.

adapted from N. Minato,
translation by Nicholas Hytner
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from Samson, Act II

Air

Harapha

- [12] Honour and arms scorn such a foe,
though I could end thee at a blow;
poor victory, to conquer thee,
or glory in thy overthrow!

Vanquish a slave that is half slain:
so mean a triumph I disdain.

da capo

J. Milton, adapted by N. Hamilton

from Julius Caesar

Duet

Cornelia

- [13] Condemned to grieve and cry,
My love, my consolation
Forever I shall mourn.

Sextus

Condemned to weep and sigh,
My love, my consolation
Forever I shall mourn.

Cornelia and Sextus

How fate our love betrays,
Serene and golden days,
No more will you return!

da capo

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Aria

Cleopatra

- [14] Stormy winds my ship had shaken:
Safe to harbour now I'm sailing,
To the crown of all desire.

So my heart by grief o'ertaken,
Safe enfolded now in love unfailing,
May at last to joy aspire.

da capo

translation by Brian Trowell,
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from Orpheus and Eurydice

Orpheus

- [15] What is life to me without thee,
what is left if thou art dead?
What is life; life without thee;
What is life without my love?
What is life if thou art dead?
Eurydice! Eurydice!
Ah, hear me! Make answer!
Thy dear lord am I so faithful,
thy faithful lord who loves thee,
who doth love thee!

What is life to me without thee,
what is left if thou art dead?
What is life; life without thee;
What is life without my love?
What is life if thou art dead?
Eurydice! Eurydice!
In my dread anguish none can comfort,
none can aid me,
earth is cruel, heav'n is cold!
What is life to me without thee,
what is left if thou art dead?
What is life; life without thee;
What is life if thou art dead?

Calzabigi, translation by Claude Aveling



Yvonne Kenny



Della Jones



Sarah Walker



Valerie Masterson

Andrew March

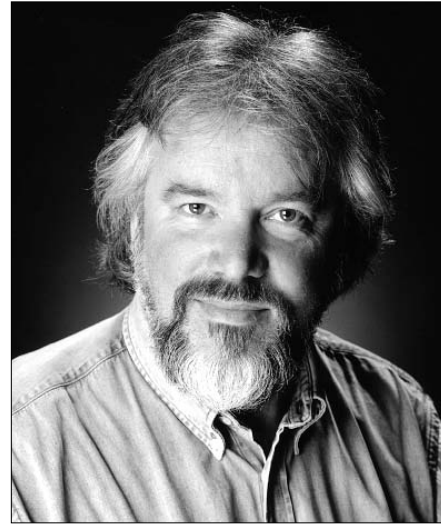


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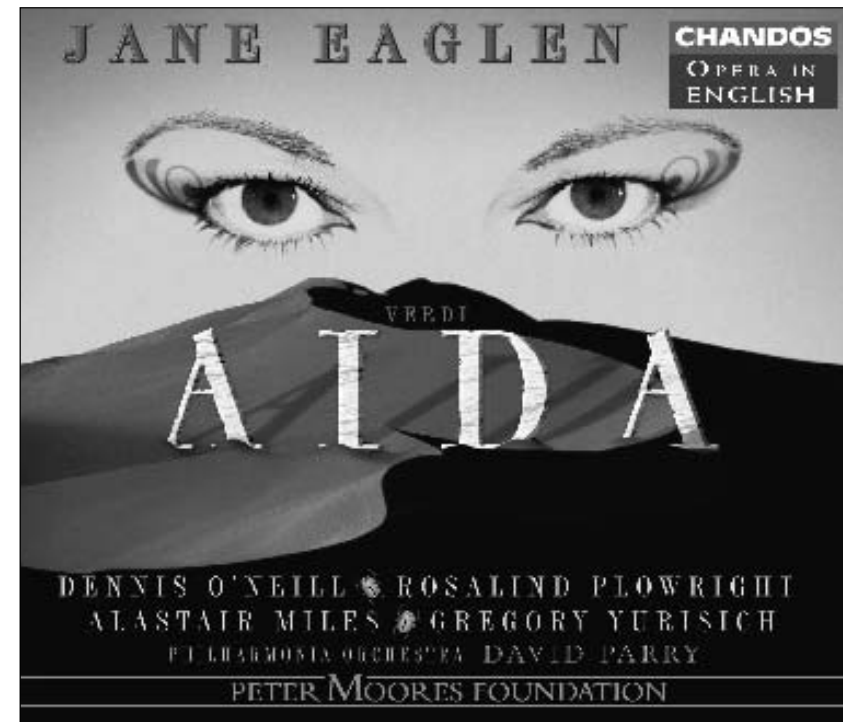
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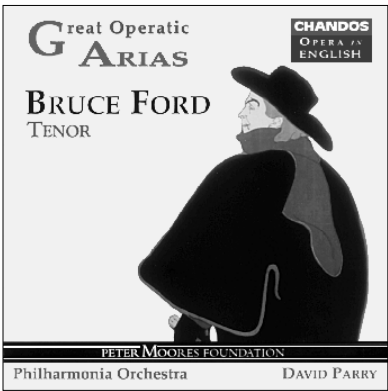


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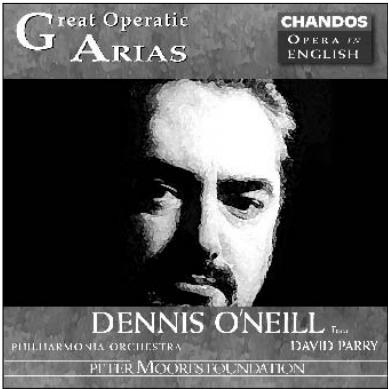
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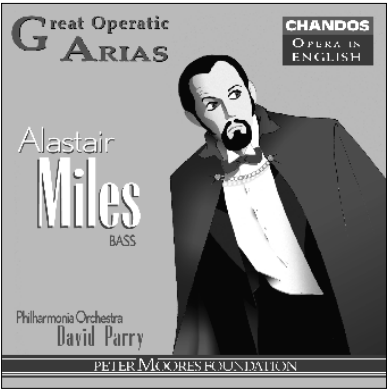
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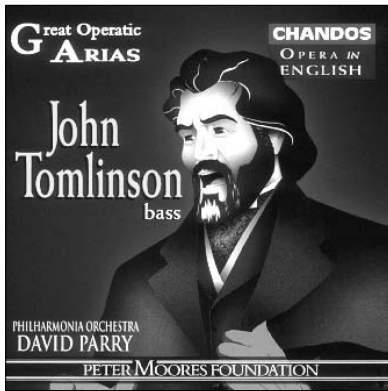
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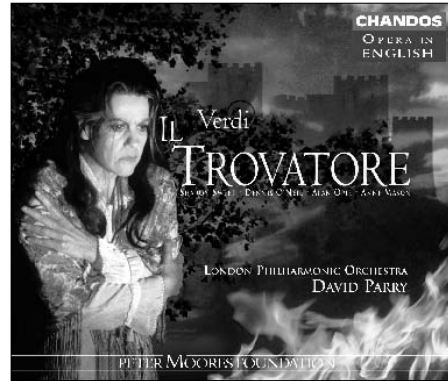


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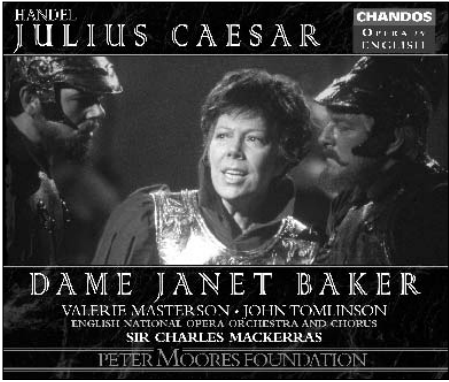
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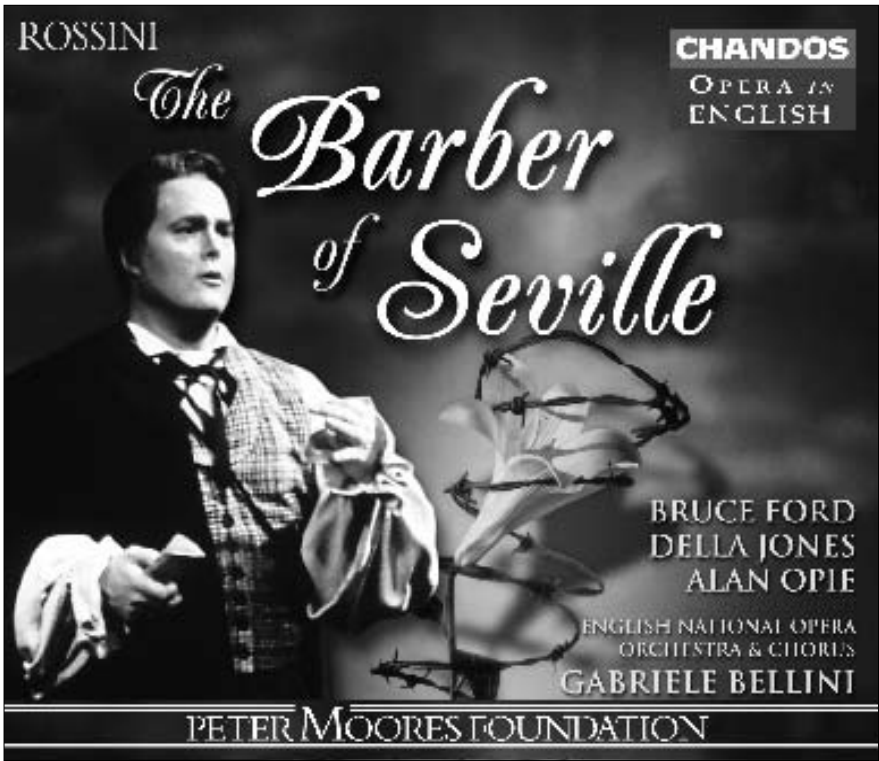


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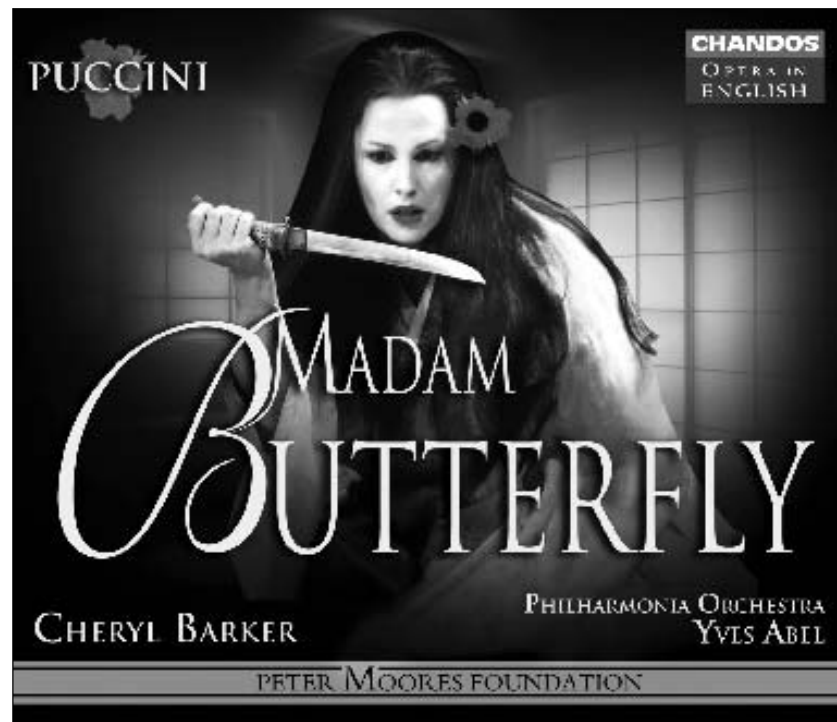
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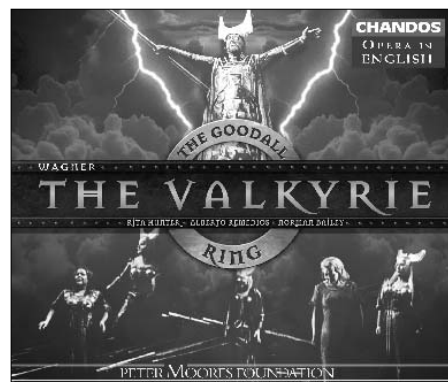


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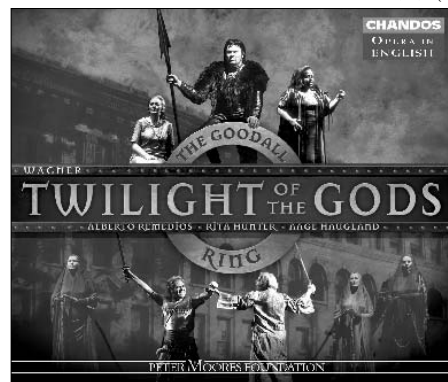
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- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1 Henry Purcell (1659–1695)
<i>from King Arthur, Act V</i>
'Fairest isle'
Yvonne Kenny
3:04</p> <p>2 <i>from The Indian Queen, Act I</i>
'I attempt from love's sickness'
Yvonne Kenny
1:31</p> <p>3 George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)
<i>from Julius Caesar</i>
'Grief and woe all hope deny me'
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6:10</p> <p>4 <i>from Semele</i>
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'Wounded, the serpent ne'er reposes'
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'I rage, I rage, I rage, I melt, I burn' –
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Valerie Masterson,
6:53</p> <p>10 'How silently, how slyly'
Janet Baker
6:32</p> <p><i>from Xerxes</i>
'May the Fates be kind' –
11 'Under thy shade' (Ombra mai fu)
Della Jones
3:38</p> <p>12 <i>from Samson</i>
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13 'Condemned to grieve and cry'
Sarah Walker, Della Jones
7:44</p> <p>14 'Stormy winds my ship had shaken'
Valerie Masterson
6:26</p> <p>Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–1787)
<i>from Orpheus and Eurydice</i>
15 'What is life to me without thee'
(Che farò senza Euridice?)
Diana Montague
4:12</p> |
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TT 76:15

Philharmonia Orchestra with David Parry (tracks 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 12 & 15)

English National Opera Orchestra with Sir Charles Mackerras (tracks 3, 5, 8–10, 13 & 14)

London Philharmonic Orchestra with David Parry (track 11)

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