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EMMA BELL

HANDEL

OPERATIC ARIAS

## Handel Operatic Arias

Emma Bell *soprano*  
Scottish Chamber Orchestra  
Richard Egarr *director*



# Handel

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### George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Desterò dall' empia Dite ..... 5:51<br><i>from Amadigi di Gaula, HWV. 11</i>     | 7. Tutta raccolta ancor ..... 2:16<br><i>from Scipione, HWV. 20</i>    |
| 2. M'ai resa infelice ..... 4:22<br><i>from Deidamia, HWV. 42</i>                   | 8. Orrida a gl'occhi miei ..... 2:27<br><i>from Ariodante, HWV. 33</i> |
| 3. Piangerò la sorte mia ..... 5:23<br><i>from Guilio Cesare in Egitto, HWV. 17</i> | 9. Ah, crudel ..... 5:36<br><i>from Rinaldo, HWV. 7b</i>               |
| 4. Scherza in mar la navicella ..... 6:12<br><i>from Lotario, HWV. 26</i>           | 10. Sommi dei ..... 2:59<br><i>from Radamisto, HWV. 12</i>             |
| 5. Ombre, piante, urne funeste! ..... 6:16<br><i>from Rodelinda, HWV. 19</i>        | 11. Barbaro, partirò ..... 3:48<br><i>from Radamisto, HWV. 12</i>      |
| 6. Se'l mio duol non è sì forte ..... 6:11<br><i>from Rodelinda, HWV. 19</i>        |  |
- Total Running Time:** 52 minutes

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Emma Bell's earliest successes were in George Frideric Handel – Tigrane in *Radamisto* and Almirena in *Rinaldo* as well as an unforgettable *Rodelinda* (taken on with only five hours' notice for Glynebourn on Tour) – it is nice that her first operatic recital album should be devoted to that composer. The well-chosen extracts sample the whole of Handel's London operatic career, from his first (*Rinaldo*, 1711) to his last (*Deidamia*, 1741), and demonstrate his (and the singer's) wide range of moods, from defiance to resignation, from love to the wilder shores of hatred. It is especially nice that this collection includes Rodelinda's 'Se'l mio duol non è sì forte' since Bell's delivery of that heart-piercing aria remains the most vivid memory of those wonderful evenings at Glyndebourne.

### **AMADIGI (1715)**

*Amadigi* was last in the group of five early operas that Handel composed for London before the great period following the foundation of the Royal Academy of Music in 1720. It seems plain that Handel was seeking to repeat

the success of the first, *Rinaldo*: here too we have a lovesick sorceress, Melissa, laying amorous siege to a hero, Amadigi, who loves Princess Oriana. And *Amadigi* was a success, not least because of its visual spectacle: it was revived twice, and was also staged in Hamburg. Following two acts of intricate amorous intrigue, Amadigi persists in rejecting Melissa, and Oriana spiritedly defies the sorceress: Melissa closes the second act – as did Armida in *Rinaldo* – with an aria of fury, her rage enhanced by the trumpet obbligato and barely tempered by the more contemplative middle section.

### **DEIDAMIA (1741)**

*Deidamia* was Handel's last opera, given at the Theatre Royal in Lincoln's Inn Fields and a failure: there were only three performances. It was, maybe, ahead of its time rather than out of date in a period when public enthusiasm for *opera seria* was on the wane. The tone of the libretto is ironic, cynical even, adroitly mixing the comic and the serious in near-Mozartian manner. The hero Achilles is in hiding on the island of Skyros, in

disguise as the nymph Pyrrha, because prophecies have foretold both that he will die in Troy, and that the Greeks will not succeed without him. The king's daughter Deidamia has seen through his female disguise and they are in love. The wily Ulysses comes to Skyros to find Achilles and pays court to both Deidamia and 'Pyrrha', whose skill at the hunt and unfeminine interest in weapons of war betrays his identity. Lightly-treated gender confusion is indeed one of the opera's main attractions. In the finale Achilles leaves for Troy and Deidamia is heartbroken. In her third-act aria she berates Ulysses, whose courtship she took seriously, for having ruined her life; at this late stage Handel was adapting da capo form, and instead of ABA we have ABAB; *largo* followed by *allegro* with both repeated and decorated. Deidamia's reference to an 'unfaithful heart' is indeed ironic: Ulysses's wife was the constant Penelope.

### **GIULIO CESARE (1724)**

*Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, to give it its full title, was one of Handel's greatest successes, much revived in his lifetime,

performed in Germany and France as well as London, and still the most popular of his operas worldwide today. One reason is the character of Cleopatra, whose 'infinite variety' – she has eight arias – is conjured up in music utterly worthy of Shakespeare. She starts as a skittish teenager, matures as a skilled seductress, turns into a skilled politician, takes adversity in her stride, and ends in triumph as the second-most powerful ruler in the Mediterranean world. In the third-act 'Piangerò', one of Handel's most heart-stoppingly beautiful arias, her fortunes are at their lowest ebb: defeated in battle and imprisoned by her devious brother Ptolemy, she faces death with stoicism, but the fast middle section reminds us of the spirited young woman we met earlier on.

### **LOTARIO (1729)**

*Lotario* was the first opera of the so-called 'Second Academy' period; the original Academy had broken up, and Handel had to assemble an entirely new roster of singers for the venture, including Strada, who sang Adelaide. It

was a fair success but never revived, and Handel cannibalized the score for later works. For the plot he returned to early Italian history, already treated in *Ottone* and *Flavio*. The action is impenetrably convoluted even by the standards of *opera seria*. Adelaide, widowed Queen of Pavia, is besieged both physically and amorously by the family of Berengario, the rival King of Milan, and finally rescued by Lotario, King of Germany (in fact Otto, renamed to avoid confusion with the earlier opera). By the end of the first act Adelaide has been imprisoned by Berengario, and responds with a textbook 'simile aria': whatever threatens her, she will never give in.

### **RODELINDA (1725)**

Just as it is hard to find a bad opera amongst the thirty-six Handel wrote (*Silla*, perhaps, though it may never have been performed, at least not in public), so is it impossible to decide which is the best, but *Rodelinda* is definitely amongst the top half-dozen, one of a group of astonishing masterpieces from the first Academy period. As a hymn to conjugal love it ranks with Beethoven's

*Fidelio*, and the protagonist is one of opera's great heroines. The plot is drawn from Italian history. Rodelinda's husband, Bertarido King of Lombardy, has been deposed and has fled abroad, putting it about that he is dead. For most of the first act Rodelinda believes this to be true, but rejects the advances of the usurper Grimoaldo. She sings 'Ombre, piante, urne funeste!' by a memorial to her supposedly deceased spouse. But Bertarido returns and the bliss of their reunion is shattered by his imprisonment. In a dungeon scene foreshadowing *Fidelio*, Rodelinda finds bloodstained garments, and assumes that her rescue attempt has failed and ended in Bertarido's death. The effect of her heart-rending lament 'Se'l mio duol non è sì forte' is sharpened by the audience's knowledge that she is mistaken and that the happy end is in sight.

### **SCIPIONE (1726)**

*Scipione* was written in great haste to open the season following *Rodelinda*; the planned new opera, *Alessandro*, had to be postponed pending the arrival of

the new prima donna, Faustina. Closely based on history as retold by Livy, it tells of the Roman general Scipio's conquest of the Spanish port of Cartagena and his love for the captive Princess Berenice. But she, less historically, loves Lucejo, and so impressed is Scipio by her constancy that he surrenders her. The evident haste shows in an uneven score, but Berenice's gentle arioso 'Tutta raccolta ancor', sung in prison while awaiting a fraught interview with Scipio, shows Handel at his simplest, his most eloquent and indeed his greatest.

### **ARIODANTE (1735)**

*Ariodante* was the first opera Handel wrote for John Rich's new and well-appointed Covent Garden Theatre; his old stamping ground, the King's, had been taken over by the rival Opera of the Nobility, to whom many of his singers defected. Rich soon recruited a new team and incorporated Marie Sallé's dance troupe into one of his richest scores. *Ariodante*, too, has to be in Handel's top ten, if not half-dozen. The plot, taken from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, is lucid and well worked-

out. In the opening scene Ginevra, daughter of the King of Scotland, dismisses the rashly ardent Duke Polinesso with extreme, not to say insulting haughtiness (Tesifone was a notoriously ugly Fury), so much so that you feel she needs taking down a peg. Polinesso's revenge takes her down to the very depths of despair, falsely accused of fornication and disowned by her father. Not even the jauntiness of this aria deserves that.

### **RINALDO (1711)**

*Rinaldo* was the first opera Handel wrote for London, and he was out to impress, re-using some of the best music from his Italian period and setting a libretto by Aaron Hill drawn from Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* that gave many opportunities for stage spectacle. It was a huge success, and much revived in the composer's lifetime. It also introduced Armida, the first of Handel's sorceress power-women and forerunner of Melissa, Medea and Alcina. Inevitably, this Syrian enchantress falls in love with her intended victim, the crusader knight

Rinaldo, and in 'Ah, crudel' prays that he take pity on her, with bassoon adding its own air of aching melancholy. The fast and furious middle section gives due warning of Rinaldo's fate should he remain obdurate.

### **RADAMISTO (1720)**

1719 saw of the foundation of the Royal Academy of Music and the start of one of Handel's most fertile periods. *Radamisto* was the first of the operas he wrote for the company, and one of his most successful, frequently revived. The plot, based at some remove on Tacitus's *Annals*, is extremely complex, but revolves around events in Asia Minor in the first century AD. Tiridate, King of Armenia and a ruthless tyrant, persecutes Radamisto, Prince of Thrace, whose wife Zenobia Tiridate desires. Perhaps the most interesting character is Tiridate's wife Polinessa, who launches the opera with the sombre arioso 'Sommi dei'. Her heart grieves not least because of her husband's brutality and serial infidelities. A faithful wife, she sticks by him, at one point even saving him

from assassination, but by the third act she has had enough, hurling 'Barbaro, partirò' at him and leaving to help incite the rebellion of his own troops that will lead to his downfall. At curtain-fall they are none too convincingly reconciled, and return to rule Armenia as if nothing had happened.

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# Libretto

## 1. Desterò dall' empia Dite

*from Amadigi di Gaula, HWV. 11*

### MELISSA

Desterò dall' empia Dite  
Ogni furia, a farmi guerra  
Crudi, perfidi, si si;

Ombre tetre, omai sortite  
Dall' anello che vi serra  
A'dar pene,  
A colui che mi scherni.

I will summon from hell  
Every Fury to make war  
On these heartless traitors.

Arise, dark shadows  
From your dungeons,  
And wreak revenge  
On those who scorn me.

## 2. M'ai resa infelice

*from Deidamia, HWV. 42*

### DEIDAMIA

M'hai resa infelice;  
Che vanto n'avrai?  
Oppressi, dirai, un'alma fedel.

Le vele se darai  
De' flutti al seno infido,  
Sconvolga orribil vento  
L'instabil elemento,  
E inanzi al patrio lido  
Sommergati, crudel.

You have brought me misery,  
But with what honour to you?  
Suppress, you said, a faithful love.

If the waves speed you  
To an unfaithful heart,  
Then may the unstable elements  
Unleash a fierce gale,  
And as you approach your homeland  
May you drown, you monster.

### 3. Piangerò la sorte mia

*from Giulio Cesare in Egitto, HWV. 17*

#### **CLEOPATRA**

Piangerò la sorte mia,  
Sì crudele e tanto ria,  
Finchè vita in petto avrò.

Ma poi morta, d'ogn'intorno  
Il tiranno e notte e giorno  
Fatta spettro agiterò.

I will lament my fate,  
So cruel and harsh,  
As long as there is life in me.

But if I die, at every turn  
By night and day  
My ghost will haunt the tyrant.

### 4. Scherza in mar la navicella

*from Lotario, HWV. 26*

#### **ADELAIDE**

Scherza in mar la navicella,  
Mentre ride aura seconda;  
Ma se poi fiera procella  
Turba il ciel, sconvolge l'onda  
Va perduta a naufragar.

Non così questo mio core  
Cederà d'un empia sorte  
Allo sdegno, ed al furore,  
Che per anco in faccia a morte  
Sa da grande trionfar.

A little ship dances on the waves  
While favourable breezes blow;  
But should a fierce gale  
Cloud the sky and arouse a storm  
The ship is wrecked and lost.

Not in this way will my heart  
Yield to a pitiless fate,  
To anger and to fury,  
For even in the face of death  
It will proudly triumph.

### 5. Ombre, piante, urne funeste!

*from Rodelinda, HWV. 19*

#### **RODELINDA**

Ombre piante, urne funeste!  
Voi sareste  
Le delizie del mio sen,  
  
Se trovassi in voi raccolto,  
Come il volto  
Anco il cener del mio ben.

Sombre groves, funereal tombs,  
You would be  
A comfort to my heart  
  
Were I to find in you  
The image  
And the ashes of the man I love.

### 6. Se'l mio duol non è sì forte

*from Rodelinda, HWV. 19*

#### **RODELINDA**

Se'l mio duol non è sì forte,  
Chi trafigge, oh Dio!  
Chi svena per pietà questo mio cor?  
  
Ah! Che un duol peggior di morte  
Involare a un sen  
Che pena, è pietà, non è rigor.

Since my grief is not enough to kill me,  
Who, oh God, will show sufficient pity  
To stop my heartbeat?  
  
Ah, to free a suffering heart  
From sorrow worse than death  
Would be an act of pity, not cruelty.

### 7. Tutta raccolta ancor

*from Scipione, HWV. 20*

#### **BERENICE**

Tutta raccolta ancor  
Nel palpitante cor  
Tremante ho l'alma.

Still wholly contained  
Within a beating heart  
Is my trembling soul.

## 8. Orrida a gl'occhi miei

*from Ariodante, HWV. 33*

### **GINEVRA**

Orrida a gl'occhi miei,  
Quanto, Signor, tu sei  
Tesifone non è!

Amor, di noi per gioco  
Il core a te di foco  
Di gello fece a me.

To my eyes  
Not even Tesifone  
Is as horrible as you, sir.

Cupid, as a joke on us,  
Gives you a heart of fire,  
And one of ice to me.

## 9. Ah, crudel

*from Rinaldo, HWV. 7b*

### **ARMIDA**

Ah, crudel,  
Il pianto mio,  
Deh, ti mova per pietà.

O infedel  
Al mio desio  
Proverai la crudeltà.

Oh, cruel man,  
May my tears  
Move you to pity.

Or, if you spurn  
My desire, in turn  
You will feel my cruelty.

## 10. Sommi dei 2:59

*from Radamisto, HWV. 12*

### **POLINESSA**

Sommi dei,  
Che scorgete i mali miei,  
Protegete un mesto cor.

Great gods,  
Who know of my misfortunes,  
Protect a grieving heart.

**11. Barbaro, partirò 3:48**

*from Radamisto, HWV. 12*

**POLINESSA**

Barbaro, partirò,  
Ma sdegno poi verrà  
Che amore cangerà  
Tutto in fierezza.

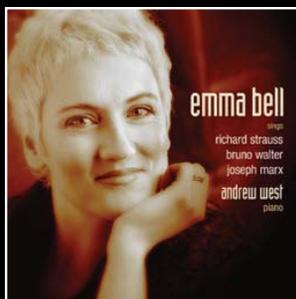
E quando tornerò,  
Punita si vedrà  
La cieca infedeltà  
Che mi disprezza.

Monster, I go,  
But soon you will see  
How love can change  
Into fierce pride.

And when I return,  
You will see punished  
The blind disloyalty  
With which you humiliate me.

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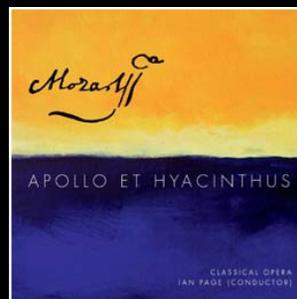
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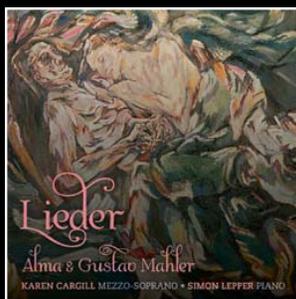
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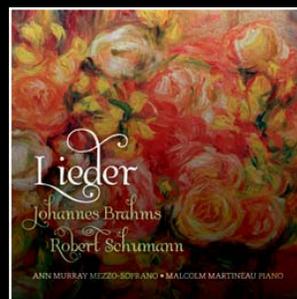
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