HANDEL

Total Eclipse: Music for Handel’s Tenor

Excerpts from Alexander’s Feast, Israel in Egypt, Saul, Messiah and Samson

Aaron Sheehan, Tenor
Stephen Stubbs, Conductor, Lute and Guitar
Pacific MusicWorks Orchestra
Alexander’s Feast, HWV 75 (excerpts)
1. Part II – Recitative: Give the vengeance due
2. Part II – Aria: The prince apparell’d with a furious joy
Israel in Egypt, HWV 54 (excerpt)
3. Part III: Moses’ Song – Air: The enemy said, I will pursue
4. Aria: Sharp violins proclaim their jealous pangs
Saul, HWV 53 (excerpts)
5. Act I – Accompanato: O filial piety!
6. Act I – Air: No, cruel father, no!
7. Act II – Recitative: Ah, dearest friend
8. Act II – Air: But sooner Jordan’s stream
Concerto Grosso in B flat major, Op. 3, No. 2, HWV 313
9. I. Vivace
10. II. Largo
11. III. Allegro
12. IV. Minuet
13. V. Gavotte
Messiah, HWV 56 (excerpts)
14. Part II – Recitative: Thy rebuke
15. Part II – Aria: Behold and see
16. Part II – Aria: But thou didst not leave his soul in hell
17. Part II – Aria: Thou shalt break them
Concerto Grosso in B flat major, Op. 6, No. 7, HWV 325
18. I. Largo
19. II. Allegro
20. III. Largo e piano
21. IV. Andante
22. V. Hornpipe
Samson, HWV 57 (excerpts)
23. Act I – Air: Torments, alas, are not confined
24. Act I – Air: Total eclipse!
25. Act I – Recitative: My griefs for this
26. Act I – Air: Why does the God of Israel sleep?
27. Act II – Air: Your charms to ruin led the way
28. Act III – Recitative: Let but that spirit
29. Act III – Air: Thus when the sun from’s wat’ry bed

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)
Total Eclipse: Music for Handel’s Tenor
A Note from the Artistic Director
In February 2015, my wife Maxine and I went to LA for the GRAMMY® Awards, as did Aaron Sheehan and his partner Adam Pearl. It’s true, Aaron and I had a recording which was nominated in the Best Opera Recording category, but I told Maxine, that though I thought we had little chance of winning, I wanted to attend because it is such an amazing experience and party! I don’t know for sure, but I think Aaron and Adam might have gone in much the same spirit. The reason I thought we were a long shot was that it was the smallest production in contention – the Chamber Opera La Descente d’Orphée aux enfers, by the relatively little-known Baroque composer Charpentier. No Baroque opera had ever won in the category before, never mind the fact that the other productions were two or three times the size of ours and sporting some household names of cast and conductors. Despite those odds – our names were called out and we had to think fast about what to say upon accepting the awards as we walked up the aisle.
After recovering from that exhilarating and terrifying experience, we began to think about what sort of project we might imagine to create as the first solo album for Aaron and simultaneously the first album of any kind for Pacific MusicWorks. I had worked with Aaron singing many different roles and styles, but when he came here in May of 2014 to sing the role of Jupiter in the Pacific MusicWorks production of Handel’s Semele, I recognised (especially in his sensuous rendition of Where e’re you walk) that Aaron was a born Handelian. Reading up on Handel’s tenor, John Beard, got us both excited about the prospect of making a profile of that artistic collaboration both as a concert and as a recording concept. This is the result!

Handel’s Tenor, John Beard (c. 1716–1791)
John Beard first came to Handel’s attention at a performance in 1732 of his oratorio Esther in a performance to celebrate Handel’s 47th birthday. At that point Beard was a chorister in the Chapel Royal, just 16 years old, and was given a cameo solo part of the Israelite Priest. Two years later he left royal service and shortly afterwards assumed the role of Silvio in Handel’s Il pastor fido at the Covent Garden Theatre. The young tenor impressed Handel sufficiently that he soon wrote a part specifically for him in Alexander’s Feast which premiered in February 1736, selections from which began our concert here. This role also gave Beard his first success with the public, and he would remain in demand, by the public as well as by Handel and other composers, for the remainder of Handel’s long life.
Handel’s interest in Beard’s talents caused him to give a new focus on the tenor voice within his works, particularly the English oratorio which had begun to replace Italian opera in the centre of Handel’s prodigious output. Instead of the dueling divas and castrati of the Italian genre, English oratorio gave first priority to the clear articulation of the text, and Beard’s tenor became his ideal. As the contemporary music historian, Sir John Hawkins, put it: ‘He [Handel] hoped to please by songs, the beauties whereof were within the comprehension of less tastifidious hearers than frequent the opera, namely such as were adapted to a tenor voice, with an articulate utterance of the words and a just expression of the melody; and he was happy in the assistance of a singer possessed of these and many other valuable qualities.’
Over the following years Beard appeared in each of Handel’s oratorio seasons in roles created for him, most of which are represented in our programme. Throughout this time Beard was also under contract to the Drury Lane Theatre where he was required to perform in comic pieces almost every evening. One day in 1739 was particularly eventful for him, during which he rehearsed the new
The C olumbine C ourtesan
until H andel’s death, but w e end our survey w ith the first
morning, got m arried to Lady H enrietta H erbert of H ow is
in the afternoon, and still appeared as The Spaniard in
B eard the first truly great tenor part as the hero in
Samson, and m ost importantly gave B eard the responsibility of carrying the
drama in the title role – the first role of this kind for a tenor
artist over many years of constant collaboration. It is
breathtaking to consider that all of the music on this
programme was created in less than a decade.

The most substantial instrumental pendant to the
opera and oratorio in Handel’s English years was the genre
of the concerto grosso. The Op. 3 publication, printed by
Walsh in 1734, was a rather haphazard collection of
Handel’s recent concertos, and Walsh may have pursued
this publication with little or no input from Handel. But five
years later, in 1739, when Walsh implored Handel to
publish a new collection (based on the enormous popularity
of the earlier set), Handel took it as an occasion to make a
grand statement of his artistic vision. Concertos were often
used as entr’acte music at the performance of Handel’s
oratorios as they serve here as well.

Stephen Stubbbs

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Alexander’s Feast (1736)

\[ \text{Give the vengeance due} \]
\[ \text{Give the vengeance due} \]
\[ \text{To the valiant crew;} \]
\[ \text{Behold how they toss their torches on high,} \]
\[ \text{How they point to the Persian abodes,} \]
\[ \text{And gilding temples of their hostile gods!} \]

\[ \text{The princes applaud with a furious joy} \]

\[ \text{The princes applaud with a furious joy;} \]
\[ \text{And the king’s dies d a flambeau, with zeal to destroy.} \]

Israel in Egypt (1738)

\[ \text{The enemy said, I will pursue} \]
\[ \text{Exodus xx: 9} \]
\[ \text{The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake,} \]
\[ \text{I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon} \]
\[ \text{them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.} \]

Ode for St Cecilia’s Day (1739)

\[ \text{Sharp violins proclaim their jealous pangs} \]
\[ \text{Sharp violins proclaim} \]
\[ \text{Their jealous pangs, and desperation,} \]
\[ \text{Fury, frantic indignation,} \]
\[ \text{Depths of pain, and height of passion,} \]
\[ \text{For the fair disdainful dame.} \]

\[ \text{Saul (1738–39)} \]

\[ \text{O filial piety!} \]
\[ \text{O filial piety! O sacred friendship!} \]
\[ \text{How shall I reconcile you? Cruel father!} \]
\[ \text{Your just commands I always have obeyed:} \]
\[ \text{But to destroy my friend, the brave, the virtuous,} \]
\[ \text{The godlike David, Israel’s defender,} \]
\[ \text{And terror of her foes! To disobey you —} \]
\[ \text{Your just commands I can’t obey.} \]
\[ \text{Shall I with sacrilegious blow} \]
\[ \text{Take pious David’s life away?} \]
\[ \text{No, cruel father, no!} \]
\[ \text{No, with my life I must defend} \]
\[ \text{Against the world my best, my dearest friend.} \]

\[ \text{Ah, dearest friend} \]
\[ \text{Ah, dearest friend, undone by too much virtue!} \]
\[ \text{Think you, an evil spirit was the cause} \]
\[ \text{Of all my father’s rage? It was, indeed,} \]
\[ \text{A spirit of envy, and of mortal hate.} \]
\[ \text{He has resolv’d your death; and sternly charg’d} \]
\[ \text{His whole retnine, me especially.} \]
\[ \text{To execute his vengeance.} \]

\[ \text{But sooner Jordan’s stream} \]
\[ \text{But sooner Jordan’s stream, I swear,} \]
\[ \text{Back to his spring shall swiftly roll,} \]
\[ \text{Than I consent to hurt a hair} \]
\[ \text{Of thee, thou darling of my soul.} \]

Messiah (1741)

\[ \text{Thy rebuke} \]
\[ \text{Psalm 69:20} \]
\[ \text{Thy rebuke hath broken his heart; he is full of heaviness.} \]
\[ \text{He looked for some to have pity on him, but there was} \]
\[ \text{no man, neither found he any to comfort him.} \]

\[ \text{Behold and see} \]
\[ \text{Lamentations 1:12} \]
\[ \text{Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto his} \]
\[ \text{sorrow.} \]

\[ \text{But thou didst not leave his soul in hell} \]
\[ \text{Psalm 16:10} \]
\[ \text{But thou didst not leave his soul in hell, nor didst thou} \]
\[ \text{suffer thy Holy One to see corruption.} \]
Thou shalt break them
Psalm 2:9
Thou shalt break them with a rod iron; thou shalt dash
them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.

Samson (1742)

Thou shalt break them with a rod iron; thou shalt dash
them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.

Samson (1742)

Samson (1742)

Why does the God of Israel sleep?
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Critically acclaimed violinist Tekla Cunningham enjoys a multi-faceted career as a chamber musician, concertmaster, soloist and educator devoted to music of the Baroque, Classical and Romantic eras. She is concertmaster and orchestra director of the Pacific MusicWorks Orchestra, an ensemble of specialists from across the US that presents historically informed Baroque performances. Cunningham is also an artist-in-residence at the University of Washington. She is the founder and director of the Whidbey Island Music Festival, now entering its 14th season, producing and presenting vibrant period-instrument performances of music from the 17th through to the 19th centuries, and plays regularly as concertmaster and principal player with the American Bach Soloists in California. Cunningham received her undergraduate degree in History and German Literature at Johns Hopkins University while attending Peabody Conservatory. She also studied at the Hochschule für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien in Austria and earned a Master’s degree in violin performance at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. She plays on a Sanctus Seraphin violin made in Venice in 1746.
John Beard (c. 1716–1791) was a young tenor who came to George Frideric Handel’s attention when still a teenager. He inspired the great composer to give new focus to the tenor voice within his English oratorios. Beard was Handel’s ideal in his demands for ‘articulate utterance of the words and a just expression of the melody’ – a collaboration that climaxed in Handel's creation of the first truly great tenor part as the hero in Samson. GRAMMY® Award-winning tenor Aaron Sheehan steps into John Beard’s shoes equipped with a voice of ‘shining quality and deep sensitivity’ (The New York Times).

George Frideric

HANDEL

(1685–1759)

1–2 Alexander’s Feast, HWV 75 (excerpts) 3:30
3 Israel in Egypt, HWV 54: The enemy said, I will pursue 2:04
4 Ode for St Cecilia’s Day, HWV 76: Sharp violins proclaim their jealous pangs 4:23
5–8 Saul, HWV 53 (excerpts) 6:07
14–17 Messiah, HWV 56 (excerpts) 7:21
18–22 Concerto Grosso in B flat major, Op. 6, No. 7, HWV 325 12:06
23–29 Samson, HWV 57 (excerpts) 21:00

Aaron Sheehan, Tenor 1–8 14–17 23–29
Stephen Stubbs, Conductor, Lute and Guitar
Pacific MusicWorks Orchestra
(Tekla Cunningham, Orchestra Director)

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