PERFIDO!

A programme of concert arias
by Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven

SOPHIE BEVAN soprano

THE MOZARTISTS
Alison Bury (leader)
Rachel Chaplin (oboe solo, track 16)

IAN PAGE conductor

Recorded at the Church of St. Augustine, Kilburn, London, UK from 15 to 19 February 2016

Produced and engineered by Andrew Mellor
Assistant engineer: Claire Hay
Editing: Claire Hay and Andrew Mellor
Mixed and mastered by Andrew Mellor
Design: Toucan Live and Debbie Coates
Cover photograph: Amo
Session photography: Benjamin Ealovega

Harpsichord technician: Malcolm Greenhalgh

Orchestra playing on period instruments at A = 430 Hz

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* For Haydn’s alternative version, without the opening three bars, please omit track 1.
The Mozartists

Violin 1
Alison Bury (leader)
Daniel Edgar
Hannah Tibell
James Toll
Julia Kuhn
George Clifford

Violin 2
Sophie Barber
Marianna Szűcs
Kristin Deeken
Davina Clarke
Naomi Burrell
Mark Seow

Viola
Alfonso Leal del Ojo
Simone Jandl
Oliver Wilson
Marina Ascherson

Cello
Joseph Crouch
Jonathan Rees
Gavin Kibble

Double bass
Cecelia Bruggemeyer
Timothy Amherst

Flute
Katy Bircher
Georgia Browne

Oboe
Rachel Chaplin (solo, track 16)
Mark Baigent

Clarinet
Sarah Thurlow
Julian Wheeler

Bassoon
Philip Turbett
Zoe Shevlin

Horn
Gavin Edwards
Nick Benz

Harpsichord
Steven Devine
Sophie Bevan studied at the Royal College of Music in London, and won the Critics’ Circle award for Exceptional Young Talent in 2010, the Times Breakthrough Award at the 2012 South Bank Sky Arts Awards and the Young Singer award at the inaugural International Opera Awards in 2013. She first appeared with Ian Page and Classical Opera in 2005, singing the role of Publio in the UK premiere of Gluck’s La clemenza di Tito, and has worked with them every year since, including concerts at Wigmore Hall, the Barbican, Cadogan Hall and Kings Place. Her recordings with the company include ‘Blessed Spirit – a Gluck retrospective’, Hyacinthus (Apollo et Hyacinthus), Der Weltgeist (Die Schuldigkeit des ersten Gebots), Sifare (Mitridate, re di Ponto), and the title role in Zaide.

Her other opera roles have included Pamina (Die Zauberflöte), Ilia (Idomeneo), Susanna (Le nozze di Figaro) and Sophie (Der Rosenkavalier) at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Despina (Così fan tutte), Leila (The Pearl Fishers) and Hermione in the world première of Ryan Wigglesworth’s The Winter’s Tale at English National Opera, Micah (Saul) at the Glyndebourne Festival, Susanna, Pamina and the title role in The Cunning Little Vixen at Welsh National Opera, Pamina at the Teatro Real, Madrid, and Beatriz in the world première of Thomas Adés’ The Exterminating Angel at the 2016 Salzburg Festival.

Her extensive concert repertoire ranges from Handel to James MacMillan, and she has worked with such conductors as Sir Antonio Pappano, Andris Nelsons, Sir Neville Marriner, Sir Mark Elder, Ryan Wigglesworth, Daniel Harding and Sir Charles Mackerras. She has appeared at the BBC Proms and the Edinburgh, Aldeburgh and Tanglewood Festivals, and in recital she performs regularly with pianist Sebastian Wybrew.
The Mozartists was launched in 2017 as an extension of Ian Page’s internationally renowned period ensemble Classical Opera. While Classical Opera continues to perform and record complete operas, The Mozartists will present the company’s other concert work, enabling it to broaden its exploration of the works of Mozart and his contemporaries. “Perfido!” is The Mozartists’ first recording.

Classical Opera and Ian Page are among the world’s leading exponents of the works of Mozart and his contemporaries, and they are particularly renowned for their vibrant, fresh and stylish performances, for their ability to discover and nurture outstanding young artists, and for their imaginative and illuminating programming. They have performed most of Mozart’s stage works, as well as operas by J. C. Bach, Gluck, Haydn, Arne, Telemann and Jommelli, and in 2012 they embarked on a major new recording cycle of the complete Mozart operas. The company’s discography also includes ‘The A-Z of Mozart Opera’ (Sony Classics, 2007, re-launched on Signum Classics in 2014), ‘Blessed Spirit – a Gluck retrospective’ (Wigmore Hall Live, 2010), Thomas Arne’s Artaxerxes (Linn Records, 2011), and ‘Where’er You Walk’, a programme of arias composed for the celebrated English tenor John Beard, featuring tenor Allan Clayton (Signum Classics, 2016). The company has presented staged operas at Sadler’s Wells, The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Buxton Opera House and the Schwetzingen Rokokotheater, and regular concerts at Wigmore Hall, the Barbican, Cadogan Hall and Kings Place. In 2016 they were invited to present the opening three concerts of the prestigious Haydn Festival in Eisenstadt.

In 2015 Classical Opera launched MOZART 250, a ground-breaking 27-year project following the chronological trajectory of Mozart’s life, works and influences, and this major initiative, aligned to an ever increasing expansion and commitment to concert work, has led to the creation of The Mozartists.
Ian Page

Ian Page is the founder, conductor and artistic director of Classical Opera and The Mozartists, and is emerging as one of the leading British conductors of his generation. He began his musical education as a chorister at Westminster Abbey, and subsequently studied English Literature at the University of York before completing his studies at the Royal Academy of Music in London. At the start of his career he worked on the music staff at Scottish Opera, Opera Factory and the Drottningholm Slottsteater in Sweden, and as assistant conductor at Glyndebourne.

With Classical Opera he has conducted most of Mozart’s early operas – including the world première of the ‘original’ version of Mitridate, re di Ponto and a new completion of Zaide – as well as the three Da Ponte operas and La clemenza di Tito. He has also conducted the UK premières of Gluck’s La clemenza di Tito, Telemann’s Orpheus and Jommelli’s Il Vologeso, as well as the first new staging for 250 years of Johann Christian Bach’s Adriano in Siria. In 2009 he made his Royal Opera House début conducting Arne’s Artaxerxes at the Linbury Studio Theatre, and his studio recording of the work was released in 2011 on Linn Records.

He devised and conducted Classical Opera’s recordings of ‘The A-Z of Mozart Opera’ (Signum Classics) and ‘Blessed Spirit – a Gluck retrospective’ (Wigmore Hall Live), both of which were selected for Gramophone magazine’s annual Critic’s Choice, and he recently embarked on an acclaimed new complete cycle of Mozart opera recordings with Classical Opera. He also created and devised MOZART 250, a ground-breaking 27-year journey through Mozart’s music and influences, which was launched in London in 2015.
Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) composed the *Scena di Berenice* during the second of his two visits to London, and it was first performed as part of his final benefit concert in England. This took place on Monday 4 May 1795 in the New Room of the King’s Theatre, Haymarket, and the programme also featured Haydn’s recently composed ‘Military’ and ‘London’ Symphonies (Nos.100 and 104) as well as concertos by Viotti and Ferlandis and songs by Paisiello and Rovedino. The text represents a dramatic evocation of a loving woman abandoned by her partner, and the work was written for the celebrated dramatic soprano Brigida Giorgi Banti, who had come to London the previous year.

Banti was born near Cremona at some point in the mid to late 1750s, the daughter of a street singer and mandolin player. She made her début at the Paris Opéra in 1776, singing between the acts of Gluck’s *Iphigénie en Aulide*, and in her early twenties she moved to London. There she met the dancer Zaccaria Banti, whom she married in Amsterdam in 1779. During the 1780s she enjoyed great success in Venice and Naples, and she also sang in Vienna, Turin, Milan, Warsaw and Madrid. In June 1792 she took part in the inauguration of the Teatro La Fenice in Venice, and from 1794 to 1802 she was engaged as the leading soprano at the King’s Theatre in London.

The musical reminiscences of the splendidly named Lord Mount-Edgcumbe, who himself composed an opera in which Banti sang the title role, recalled how “the most exquisite taste enabled her to sing with more effect, more expression, and more apparent knowledge of her art, than many much better professors; her voice had not a fault in any part of its unusually extensive compass”, while on the only surviving copy of the hand-bill for Haydn’s benefit concert, an anonymous commentator wrote: “Banti has a clear, sweet, equable voice, her low & high notes equally good, her recitative admirably expressive.”

To judge from the range and demands of the music Haydn wrote for her in the *Scena di Berenice* Banti must indeed have been a most accomplished artist, and yet she seems to have had an off-night at the 4 May concert, for the composer wrote in his diary that “she sang very scanty”. Nevertheless, Haydn was delighted with the overall success of the concert: “The hall was filled with a distinguished audience. The whole society was extremely pleased, and so was I. I netted four thousand florins on this evening. This one can make only in England.” Three months later, after much procrastinating, Haydn reluctantly left London to return to Vienna.

The text is taken from Act 3, scene 9 of Metastasio’s *Antigono*, a libretto which had originally been set by Hasse in 1743 and subsequently by over thirty composers, including Jommelli (1746), Gluck (1756)*, Traetta (1764) and Paisiello (1785). Although betrothed to Antigono, Berenice is actually in love with his son, Demetrio. Torn between his feelings for Berenice and his filial duty, Demetrio can see no way out of his predicament, and has resolved to kill himself. In “Berenice, che fai?” the disconsolate heroine deliriously laments her fate and longs to die alongside her beloved.

Haydn’s setting of the scene ostensibly comprises two recitatives and two arias, but the effect is in practice far more organic and unified. From the outset the music is full of dramatic contrasts – from the string tremolo depicting Berenice’s icy shivers to the serene oboe and bassoon melody as she imagines the gods’ contentment at her lover’s death – and this recitative leads directly into the first aria, a tranquil yet impassioned largo in E major. A short linking recitative prefaces the final allegro, a fiery and virtuosic number which races headlong to its frenzied conclusion.

Haydn’s autograph manuscript of the *Scena di Berenice* contains several hand-written changes which were made at some point after 1797, probably for a concert which took place in Vienna’s Augarten on 22 September 1803. The most significant of these changes is that he cut the opening three bars, possibly because he feared that their soft dynamic might lack the impact to attract an outdoor audience’s immediate attention. For this recording we have put these opening bars on a separate track, to enable the listener to choose either version.

*Gluck’s setting of this scene is featured on Classical Opera’s CD ‘Blessed Spirit – a Gluck retrospective’ (Wigmore Hall Live, 2010)
Recitativo
BERENICE:
Berenice, che fai? Muore il tuo bene,
Stupida, e tu non corri? Oh Dio! Vacilla
L’incerto passo; un gelido mi scuote
Insolito tremor tutte le vene,
E a gran pena il suo peso il piè sostiene.

Dove son? Qual confusa
Folla d’idee tutte funeste adombra
La mia ragion? Veggo Demetrio: il veggo
Che in atto di ferir… Fermati! Vivi!
D’Antigono io sarò. Del core ad onta
Volo a giurargli fè: dirò che l’amo;
Dirò… Misera me, s’oscura il giorno,
Balena il ciel! L’hanno irritato i miei
Meditati spergiuri. Ahimè! Lasciate
Ch’io soccorra il mio ben, barbari Dei.

Ah, sarete contenti; eccolo ucciso.
Aspetta, anima bella: ombre compagne
A Lete andrem. Se non potei salvarti
Potrò fedel… Ma tu mi guardi, e parti?

Recitative
BERENICE:
Berenice, what are you doing? Your beloved is dying,
and yet you, like a fool, do not run to him? Oh God,
my uncertain footsteps falter! A strange,
icy chill courses through my veins, and
only with great pain can my feet support their burden.

Where am I? What muddled
foolly of dark thoughts clouds
my reason? I see Demetrios: I see him
in the act of striking… Stop! Live!
I shall marry Antigono. In spite of my true feelings,
I fly to swear my fidelity to him. I shall say I love him;
I shall say… Wretched me! The daylight fades,
the heavens flash with lightning! My intended perjury
has angered them. Alas! Let me
come to the aid of my beloved, cruel Gods!
You block my way, and meanwhile
perhaps some sudden blow…

Ah, you will be content: behold him, killed.
Wait, my beloved soul-mate; let our shades go as
companions to Lethe. Though I was unable to save you,
I can still be faithful… But you look at me, and leave?

Aria
Non partir, bell’idol mio:
Per quell’onda
All’altra sponda
Voglio anch’io
Passar con te.

Me infelice!
Che fingo? Che ragiono?
Dove rapita sono
Dal torrente crudel de’ miei martiri?
Misera Berenice, ah, tu deliri!

Perché, se tanti siete,
Che delirar mi fate,
Perché, non m’uccidete,
Affanni del mio cor?

Crescete, oh Dio, crescite
Finché mi porga aita
Con togliermi di vita
L’eccesso del dolor.

Unhappy me!
What am I pretending? What am I thinking?
Where am I being dragged off
by the cruel torrent of my anguish?
Wretched Berenice, ah, you are delirious!

Why, since you are so numerous,
you who cause me to rave,
why do you not kill me,
torments of my heart?

Increase, oh God, increase,
until the surfeit of grief
at least comes to my aid
by taking away my life.
Thirty years before the composition of Haydn’s Scena di Berenice, the eight-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91) had also come to London, where he was to spend fifteen formative months. It was here that he wrote his first symphonies and the concert aria for tenor, “Va, dal furor portata”, K.21. Equally significantly he was exposed to a wide array of opera in London’s theatres and salons, and he reportedly took singing lessons with the celebrated castrato Giovanni Manzuoli. On his homeward journey from London to Salzburg, during an extended stay in The Hague in Holland, Mozart composed two concert arias whose texts are taken from Artaserse, an opera whose popular English setting by Thomas Arne would almost certainly have been heard by Mozart during his stay in London; Mozart, however, set Metastasio’s original Italian. “Oh, temerario Arbace” is the second of these arias.

Even at such a tender age Mozart was already astonishingly fluent and accomplished in setting words to music, and Dr Daines Barrington’s fascinating eyewitness report submitted to the Royal Society in London described how the young Wolfgang had performed for him “an Extemporary opera to nonsense words... [with] an overture of three movements, recitative, Graziosa, Bravura and Pathetic Airs together with accompanied Recitatives, all full of good taste and imagination”.

“Oh, temerario Arbace” begins with Mozart’s first surviving accompanied recitative, a style of writing in which he was to become unsurpassed. It is sung by Arbaces, who has been wrongly imprisoned for the murder of Xerxes. This crime has actually been committed by his own father, Artabanes, but Arbaces refuses to betray him and nobly accepts his fate. As was sometimes the case with arias written for concert performance, the singer assumes both roles in the scene so as to preserve dramatic continuity.

Recitativo

ARBACE:
Oh, temerario Arbace!
Dove trascorri? Ah, genitor, perdona:
Eccomi a’ piedi tuoi; scusa i trasporti
D’un insano dolor. Tutto il mio sangue
Si versi pur, non me ne lagno; e invece
Di chiamarla tirannia,
Io bacio quella man che mi condanna.

ARTABANO:
Basta, sorgi; purtoppo
Hai ragion di lagnarti:
Ma sappi... (Oh Dio!)... Prendi un abbraccio.

Aria

ARBACE:
Per quel paterno amplesso,
Per questo estremo addio,
Conservami te stesso,
Placami l’idol mio,
Difendimi il mio re.

Recitative

ARBACES:
Oh reckless Arbace,
where are you going?... Ah forgive me, father,
here I am at your feet. Excuse the ravings
of a desperate grief – even if all my blood
is shed I shall not complain; and instead
of calling it tyrannical,
I kiss the hand that condemns me.

ARTABANES:
Enough, arise! Unfortunately
you have plenty of reason to complain.
But know... (Oh God!)... Let me embrace you.

Aria

ARBANCES:
With that paternal embrace,
with this final farewell,
take care of yourself for me,
console my beloved,
and defend for me my king.
Beethoven: “No, non turbati… Ma tu tremi, o mio tesoro?”, WoO 92a

It was with the intention of studying with Mozart that Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) first came to Vienna in April 1787. In the event his visit was soon cut short when he was called to return to his ailing mother in Bonn, and there is no absolute proof that the two men ever met; by the time Beethoven returned to Vienna five years later – this time for good – Mozart was dead. Although he had already composed some impressive and distinctive works, including the Cantata on the Death of Emperor Joseph II, Beethoven clearly still felt the need for further study, and he continued to have lessons throughout his first decade in Vienna, voraciously plugging the gaps in his musical education. These lessons focused on two main areas – initially with Haydn and subsequently with Johann Georg Albrechtsberger he studied strict counterpoint, and with the court Kapellmeister Antonio Salieri he studied Italian prosody and vocal composition. All three teachers seem to have had a similar impression of the young firebrand, for several years later Beethoven’s own pupil, Ferdinand Ries, was to recall how “they all said that Beethoven was so headstrong and wilful that he often had to learn through bitter experience what he had refused to accept when it was presented to him during the course of his lessons”.

Lessons with Salieri were probably quite sporadic; in his later years Salieri set aside three mornings a week to give free tuition to talented young composers and singers, and Beethoven continued to take advantage of this generosity at a surprisingly late stage in his development. We know this from the aria “No, non turbarti”, which was composed under Salieri’s supervision between 1801 and 1802, by which time Beethoven had already composed many important works, including his first symphony, the first two piano concertos, Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus and indeed the concert aria “Ah! perfido”. The autograph manuscript even contains Salieri’s corrections, although in truth not all of his changes are improvements (for this recording we have in several instances retained Beethoven’s original). The work is scored for soprano and strings, and the text is taken from Metastasio’s La tempesta. In the opening accompanied recitative Beethoven seizes the various opportunities to evoke in his orchestral writing the thunderstorm that is brewing, and this is carried through into the aria, marked ‘andante agitato’, in which the poet, having persuaded his beloved Nice to take shelter with him in a nearby cave, seeks to pursue his amorous ambitions.

Recitativo

No, non turbarti, o Nice; io non ritorno
A parlarti d’amor. So che ti spiace;
Basta così. Vedi che il ciel minaccia
Improvvisa tempesta: alle capanne
Se vuoi ridurre il gregge, io vengo solo
Ad offrir l’opra mia. Che! Non pавenti?
Osserva che a momenti
Tutto s’oscura il ciel, che il vento in giro
La polve innalza, e le cadute foglie;
Al fremer delle selve, al volo incerto
Degli augelli smarriti, a queste rare,
Che mi cadon sul viso, umide stille,
Nice, io prevedgo… Ah non tel dissi; o Nice?
Ecco il lampo, ecco il tuono. Or che farai?
Vieni, senti; ove vai? Non è più tempo
Di pensar alla greggia. In questo speco
Riparati trattando; io sarò teco.

Aria

Ma tu tremi, o mio tesoro?
Ma tu palpiti, cor mio?
Non tremar; con te son io,
Nè d’amor ti parlerò.
Mentre folgori, e baleni,
Sarò teco, amata Nice;
Quando il ciel si rassereni,
Nice ingrata, io partirò.

Recitativo

No, don’t be upset, Nice; I shall never again come to speak to you about love. I know it displeases you; enough is enough! Look at the sudden storm that is threatening in the sky; if you want to lead the flock back to the huts, I alone will come to offer my help. What? Are you not afraid? Look how in a few moments the sky becomes completely dark, the wind lifts all the dust and fallen leaves up into the air; from the quivering of the forest, from the unsteady flight of the fluttering birds, from these few wet drops that fall on my face, Nice, I foresee… Ah, does it not tell you, Nice? Here is the lightning, here the thunder. Now what will you do? Come, listen; where are you going? It’s too late to be thinking of the flock. In this cave take cover for a while; I shall be with you.

Aria

But you are trembling, my treasure?
But you are shaking, my darling?
Don’t be afraid; I am with you,
but I won’t talk about love.
While the thunder roars and the lightning flashes,
I shall be with you, beloved Nice;
and when the sky becomes bright again,
ungrateful Nice, I shall leave.
Mozart: “Basta, vincesti... Ah, non lasciarmi, no”, K.486a/295a

This aria was written in Mannheim in February 1778, and is the only concert aria that Mozart wrote for the German soprano Dorothea Wendling (1736-1811); two-and-a-half years later she was to create the role of Ilia in Idomeneo. She was the daughter of a Stuttgart horn-player and his lutenist wife, and was married to the principal flautist in the Mannheim orchestra, Johann Baptist Wendling, whose playing was greatly admired by the Mozarts. She had been appointed a court singer at Mannheim in 1752, and by the time Mozart met her she had enjoyed two decades as the undisputed leading soprano there, performing major roles in operas by Jommelli, Holzbauer, Piccinni and J. C. Bach. The poet and novelist Christoph Martin Wieland wrote in 1777: “Her manner of singing surpasses anything I have ever heard… This alone is true singing – the language of the soul and the heart.”

The text of “Basta vincesti” is taken from Act 2, scene 4 of Metastasio’s Didone abbandonata. Dido, Queen of Carthage, has been rejected by her beloved Aeneas. Seeking to provoke a reaction from him she has signed a document accepting the marriage proposal of Jarba, King of the Moors, and the jealous Aeneas has duly demanded that she retract this acceptance. As she succumbs to her true feelings and hands the document over for Aeneas to destroy, she begs him to remain faithful and not to abandon her. Her anguish, anxiety, insecurity and tenderness are beautifully captured by the plaintive yearning of the melodic line and the burnished orchestral texture, featuring flutes, bassoons and muted violins.

Recitativo

DIDONE:
Basta, vincesti, eccoti il foglio.
Vedi quanto t’adoro ancora, ingrato.
Con un tuo sguardo solo
Mi togli ogni difesa e mi disarmi.
Ed hai cor di tradirmi? E puoi lasciarmi?

Recitative

DIDO:
Enough! You have won. Here, take the letter.
See how much I still adore you, ungrateful one!
With just one glance from you
you disarm me and leave me defenceless. And have you the heart to betray me? And can you leave me?
Aria
Ah no, do not leave me,
my beautiful darling;
in whom can I trust
if you deceive me?

My life will end
if I have to say farewell to you,
for I could not live
among so many torments!

Haydn: “Solo e pensoso” (Petrarch Sonnet No.28)

According to the work’s autograph manuscript it was a Russian ‘Grand Prince’ who suggested to Haydn that he set Petrarch’s sonnet “Solo e pensoso”. Composed in 1798, this was to be Haydn’s final Italian aria, and it was not actually published until 1961. It was first performed at the two Christmas concerts of the Tonkünstler-Societät in Vienna, on 22 and 23 December 1798, with a certain Antonie Flamm as soloist. She seems to have been a contralto, in which case she must have been tested by the range of the aria; this perhaps accounts for the subsequent report submitted by the Society on 12 February 1799, which asserts that “Mademoiselle Flamm was found very unsatisfactory by the audience”.

“Solo e pensoso” was one of the many sonnets inspired by Petrarch’s unrequited love for a woman called Laura. It follows the standard Italian sonnet form which Petrarch made famous, consisting of eight lines (comprising two quatrains rhyming A B B A) followed by a contrasting sestet comprising two sets of three lines. This natural division into two parts lends itself well to musical setting, and the beguiling charm of Haydn’s second section, with chirping clarinets and bassoons to the fore, contrasts effectively with the soulful isolation and introspection of the first part. If this opening section evokes the tonal palette and spiritual depth of Haydn’s late masses – indeed the opening melodic figure is almost identical to the opening of the Agnus Dei from the ‘Nelson’ Mass – the second part recalls the bucolic naivety and open-heartedness of The Creation, which had received its first performance earlier in 1798.

Solo e pensoso i più deserti campi
Vo misurando a passi tardi e lentì
E gli occhi porto per fuggir intenti
Dove vestigio uman l’arena stampi.

Altro schermo non trovo che mi scampi
Dal manifesto accorger delle genti:
Perché negli atti d’allegrezza spenti
Di fuor si legge com’io dentro avvampi:

Si ch’io mi credo omai che monti e piagge
E fiumi e selve sappian di che tempre
Sia la mia vita: ch’è celata altrui.

Ma pur si aspre vie, nè si selvagge
Cercar non so, ch’Amor non venga sempre
Ragionando con meco, ed io con lui.

Alone and lost in thought I pace the most isolated regions with slow and dragging steps, and I keep my eyes alert, ready to flee if ever there is a trace of human footprints in the sand.

I find no other respite which enables me to escape the palpable scrutiny of other people, for in my expressions of expired joy one can read externally how I suffer inside.

As a result of this I now believe that mountains and meadows, rivers and woods comprehend the humours of my life, which are hidden from others.

Nor have I ever found a path so craggy and wild that Love has not been by my side, speaking with me, and I with him.
Mozart: “Ah, lo previdi... Ah, t’involà agli’occhi miei”, K.272

This was the first of the two great concert arias which Mozart wrote for the celebrated Czech soprano Josefa Dušek. She was two years older than Mozart, having been born in Prague in 1754, and had married the well-known Czech composer and pianist Franz Xaver Dušek (1731-1799) in 1776. In August of the following year the couple met the Mozarts while visiting Josefa’s grandfather in Salzburg, and this meeting resulted in the composition of “Ah, lo previdi”.

The text was taken from a libretto by Vittorio Cigna-Santi (who had previously written the libretto for Mozart’s Mitridate, re di Ponto) for the opera Andromeda. This libretto had already been set by at least four composers – most recently by Giovanni Paisiello in 1774 – and the story of Perseus’ rescue of Andromeda from a sea monster had been one of the most popular subjects throughout early opera; by 1800 over twenty-five independent librettos had been written on the subject. In Cigna-Santi’s version of the story, Andromeda is in love with Perseus but is obliged to marry Euristeo, the successor to the King of Argos. When Euristeo tells Andromeda that he has seen Perseus wandering about dementedly with an unsheathed sword, she supposes that Perseus has killed himself. She turns her fury on Euristeo for not having prevented the imagined suicide, before subsiding into resignation and acceptance as she envisages following her beloved on his journey to Hades. In an exquisite cavatina, she begs Perseus to await her arrival so that they can cross the River Lethe together, a sorrowful oboe solo plaintively interweaving with her expressions of grief and yearning.

This work was clearly close to Mozart’s heart. A year after its composition he sent a copy of the music to Aloysia Weber – with whom he had fallen deeply in love – urging her to study the aria. In his only surviving letter to her, dated 30 July 1778, he offers her impassioned guidance on how to prepare the music, writing: “I advise you to observe the expression marks – to think carefully of the meaning and the impact of the words – to put yourself in all seriousness into Andromeda’s situation and position! – and to imagine that you really are that very person.” This document offers a fascinating insight into the depth and intensity with which Mozart connected to his material, and the work remains one of the composer’s most extraordinary, though curiously little-known, masterpieces.
Recitative

ANDROMEDA:
Ah, lo previdi!
Povero Prence, con quel ferro istesso,
Che me salvò, ti lacerasti il petto.
[ad Euristeo]
Ma tu si fiero scempio
Perché non impedir? Come, o crudele,
D’un misero a pietà non ti movesti?
Quale tigre to nodrì? Dove nascesti?

Aria

Ah, t’invola agl’occhi miei,
Alma vile, ingrato cor!
La cagione, oh Dio, tu sei
Del mio barbaro dolor.
Va, crudele! Va, spietato!
Va, tra le fiere ad abitar.

Recitative

Me infelice! Si oscura
Il giorno agli occhi miei,
E nel barbaro affanno il cor vien meno.
Ah, non partir, ombra diletta, io voglio
Utrimi a te. Sul grado estremo, intanto
Che m’uccide il dolor, fermiti alicant!

Cavatina

Deh, non varcar quell’onda,
Anima del cor mio.
Di Lete all’altra sponda,
Ombra, compagna anch’io
Voglio venir con te.

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Mozart: “Bella mia fiamma... Resta, o cara”, K.528

When Mozart came to Prague in 1787 for the première of Don Giovanni, he and his wife stayed with the Dušeks at Villa Betramka, their summer residence on the outskirts of the city; Mozart reportedly put the finishing touches to the opera while seated in the garden of the villa. Following the opera’s triumphant première on 29 October, the Mozarts remained in Prague for several weeks. Josefa Dušek, however, insisted that Wolfgang was not allowed to leave Betramka until he had composed a new aria for her, and she is said to have locked him in the pavilion in the villa’s garden until he had completed the work. Mozart’s son later recollected how his father “retorted that if she could not sing the song correctly and well at first sight he would not give it to her”, and this story of Mozart’s impish humour is given credence by a remarkably bold and harmonically complex passage in the aria which would have caused problems for even the most accomplished sight-reader. The manuscript of “Bella mia fiamma” is dated 3 November, but the speed with which it was composed belies the work’s depth and mastery.
The text is taken from *Cerere placata* (‘Ceres Appeased’), a ‘festa teatrale’ composed in 1772 by Niccolò Jommelli to words by Michele Sarcone. Titano is the mortal lover of the goddess Proserpina, whose mother Ceres has decreed that the pair must separate and that Titano must die. Titano here laments his fate and consoles his beloved Proserpina as he takes his final leave of her, but any sense of heroic fortitude is imbued with a profound sense of pain and anguish at his plight, a sense heightened by the pathos and chromatic intensity of Mozart’s remarkable music.

Recitativo

**TITANO:**
Bella mia fiamma, addio;
Non piaçque al cielo
Di renderci felici. Ecco reciso,
Prima d’esser compito,
Quel purissimo nodo,
Che strinsero fra lor gli animi nostri
Con il solo voler.
Vivi; cedi al destin, cedi al dovere.
Dalla giurata fede
La mia morte t’assolve;
A più degno consorte... oh pene! unita
Vivi più lieta e più felice vita.
Ricordati di me; ma non mai turbi
D’un infelice sposo
La rara rimembranza il tuo riposo.
Regina, io vado ad ubbidirti; ah tutto
Finisca il mio furor col morir mio.
Cerere, Alfeo, diletta sposa, addio!

Recitative

**TITANO:**
My beautiful darling, farewell!
It did not please heaven
to make us happy. Look, severed
before being completed
is that purest of knots,
which bound our souls together
in a single wish.
Live! Yield to fate, yield to duty.
My death will absolve you
from the loyalty you pledged;
with a more worthy husband – oh woe! –
live an easier and happier life.
Remember me, but never let
the occasional memory
of an unfortunate lover disturb your peace.
Queen, I go to obey you. Ah, may all
my anguish come to an end with my death.
Ceres, Alfeo, beloved bride – farewell!

Aria

(a Proserpina)
Resta, o cara; acerba morte
Mi separa, oh Dio! da te.
(a Ceres)
Prendi cura di sua sorte,
Consolarla almen procura.
(ad Alfeo)
Vado... ahi lasso! addio per sempre...
Quest’affanno, questo passo
È terribile per me.
Ah! Dov’è il tempio, dov’è l’ara?
(a Ceres)
Vieni, affretta la vendetta!
Questa vita così amara
Più soffribile non è.
(a Proserpina)
Oh cara, addio per sempre!

Aria

[a Proserpina]
Stay, my dearest; bitter death
separates me, o God, from you!
[a Ceres]
Take care of her,
and try at least to console her.
[a Alfeo]
I go... alas! Farewell forever...
This torment, this suffering
is terrible for me.
Ah! Where is the temple, where is the altar?
[a Ceres]
Come, may revenge be swift!
So bitter a life as this
I can no longer endure.
[a Proserpina]
My dearest, farewell forever!
Beethoven: “Ah! perfido”, Op.65

Following Mozart’s “Ah, lo previdi” (1777) and “Bella mia fiamma” (1788), the third great concert aria written for Josefa Dušek was composed by the young Beethoven in 1796. Early that year he embarked on a tour to Prague and Berlin (with stops at Dresden and Leipzig) which was intended to last for six weeks but in the event took six months. He composed “Ah! perfido” in Prague, and although it was dedicated to the local patron and music-lover Countess Josephine de Clary it was first performed – in Leipzig on 21 November 1796 – by Josefa Dušek, and it was surely for Dušek, herself a native of Prague, that Beethoven conceived the work.

Beethoven’s compositional studies with Haydn during 1793 may have proved singularly unsuccessful – the demanding student had felt (evidently with some justification) that his teacher was not providing the rigid discipline and attention to detail that he craved, and the composer and teacher Johann Baptist Schenk subsequently claimed that during this period Beethoven had started taking extra lessons with him behind Haydn’s back – but he was still able to learn a great deal from Haydn’s compositions. Haydn had written his Scena di Berenice in London the year before Beethoven wrote “Ah! perfido”, and he had brought the score back with him when he returned to Vienna. “Ah! perfido” is modelled on a very similar structure and harmonic design; like Haydn’s work it is a lengthy and highly charged dramatic monologue delivered by a distraught lover, and the music has an exquisitely poised nobility of utterance. The text for the opening recitative is again by Metastasio, this time from a widely admired soliloquy in Achille in Sciro; the source and authorship of the ensuing text, however, has not been identified, and it was possibly created specifically for Beethoven’s composition. The work was not published until 1805, hence its misleadingly high opus number.
Recitative
Ah! perfido, spergiuro,
Barbaro traditor, tu partì? E son questi
G’ultimi tuoi congedi? Ove s’intese
Tirannia più crudel? Va’, scellerato!
Va’, pur fuggi da me, l’ira de’ Numi
Non fuggirai. Se v’è giustizia in ciel,
Se v’è pietà, congiureranno a gara
Tutti a punirti! Ombra segua sevace!
Presente, ovunque vai,
Vedrò le mie vendette; io già le godo
Immaginando; i fulmini ti veggo
Gia balenar d’intorno. Ah no! Ah no! femmale,
Vindici Dei!
Risparmiate quel cor, ferite il mio!
S’ei non è più qual era, son’ io qual fui;
Per lui vivea, voglio morir per lui!

Aria
Per pietà, non dirmi addio,
Di te priva che farò?
Tu lo sai, bell’idol mio,
Io d’affanno morirò.

Ah crudel! tu vuoi ch’io mora!
Tu non hai pietà di me?
Perché rendi a chi t’adora
Così barbara mercé?
Dite voi, se in tanto affanno
Non son degna di pietà?

Ah, cruel one! Do you want me to die?
Have you no pity for me?
Why do you so harshly repay the one who adores you?
Say, all of you, whether in such distress
I am not worthy of pity?

NOTES AND TRANSLATIONS BY IAN PAGE
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Limelight (Where’er You Walk)

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1-5 Haydn Scena di Berenice, Hob.XXIVa:10 12'33
6-7 Mozart “Oh, temerario Arbace… Per quel paterno amплессo”, K.79 6'00
8-9 Beethoven “No, non turbati… Ma tu tремi, o mia tesorо?”, WoO 92a 5'05
10-11 Mozart “Basta, vincerò… Ah, non lasciarmi, no”, K.486a/295a 5'59
12 Haydn “Solo e pensoso”, Hob.XXIVb:20 6'41
13-16 Mozart “Ah, lo previdi… Ah, l’invola agli’occhi miei”, K.272 12'02
17-18 Mozart “Bella mia fiamma… Resta, o cara”, K.528 9'15
19-21 Beethoven “Ah! perfido”, Op.65 12'22

TOTAL TIMING 69'57

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THE MOZARTISTS
IAN PAGE conductor

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