



(LEMS 8055)

GLORIA HANDEL IN ROME

Handel's recently discovered Gloria and other cantatas

Julianne Baird, soprano

Marshall Coid, countertenor

Elaine Comparone, harpsichord

And The Queen's Chamber Band

PROGRAM NOTES BY JOHN OSTENDORF & ELAINE COMPARONE

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) may have been born on German soil (Halle), but his musical heart, as expressed in his vocal works, took its inspiration from Italy. In 1706 Handel traveled to Italy in a princely retinue, meeting such leading musical figures as Corelli and the Scarlattis. He spent time in Rome developing his mastery of Italian style in opera, chamber music and vocal music. At that time, a papal ban on opera forced composers to create either sacred works or secular chamber cantatas: florid pieces in operatic style that satisfied the appetites of the Italian public and its opera singers for vocal showcases while skirting the church's prohibition.

Among Handel's initial Roman patrons was Marchese Francesco Maria Ruspoli, one of the city's most wealthy aristocrats. Handel lived in Ruspoli's palace for several months in 1707-1708. There he composed several secular cantatas, two motets and a Salve Regina. He scored the latter three compositions for solo soprano, two violins and basso continuo, the same forces required in the Gloria in Excelsis Deo.

The Gloria is an ancient hymn of praise sung or recited in the Roman Catholic mass. Handel's setting, a long-lost work previously unknown to scholars, was rediscovered in connection with a project underwritten by the German Research Society. Both score and parts belong to the Royal Academy of Music in London. Bound in a collection of Handel arias owned by singer William Savage (1720-1789), the extant manuscript (in a hand other than Handel's) was left to the Academy by Savage's student R. J. S. Stevens upon the latter's death. Professor Hans Joachim Marx of Hamburg identified the Gloria as an early Handel work. Based on the Gloria's orchestration (specifically, the lack of a viola), the punctuated character of the final Alleluia and the piece's fresh exuberance, musicologists ascribe its compositional date to Handel's 1707 sojourn in Rome. When questions lingered among scholars about the identity of the work's composer, a number of compositional details, including the generous use of melodic and harmonic dissonance, all pointed unmistakably to the young Handel, who enthralled his listeners from the day he arrived in Rome.

The composer interpreted the sacred texts literally in terms of poetic rhetoric, separating praise of God from pleas for the forgiveness of sins. The resultant contrasts of mood as the piece progresses from movement to movement reinforce the work's underlying formal structure.

Mi palpita il cor (another product of Handel's Roman period) and *Pastorella vagha bella* are both examples of secular cantatas for solo voice with instrumental accompaniment. Typically, a cantata utilizes a basso continuo (which in this recording includes cello and harpsichord) in addition to any solo instruments, such as the oboe in *Mi palpita* or the violins in the Gloria. (In this recording, a double bass joins the cello and harpsichord for the Gloria.)

In *Mi palpita il cor*, the oboe, accompanied by cello and harpsichord, begins each of the two arias, inviting the countertenor to join in a duet of interweaving lines. The singer's line ultimately emerges as the primary voice when the oboe recedes into the background with comparatively simpler musical ideas. (At these moments, sensitive instrumentalists will always defer to the singer, taking seriously their role as accompanists.)

Pastorella vagha bella is unusual in that the composer provides for the keyboard a solo role with a written out "obbligato" part for the right hand. Normally, keyboardists use skill and imagination to create their own right hand parts, supplying the harmonic element of the basso continuo, since composers of this period rarely offered an obligatory part over the bass line as does Handel here. The elaborate broken chords of the composed line function as a lacy backdrop for the soprano's plaintive melodic line. While some dispute exists over the actual authorship of this piece, its beauty places it in a class with Handel's secular works of this period.

THE COUNTERTENOR

Countertenors have recently become a hot operatic commodity thanks to the current global craze for Baroque opera. The countertenor voice, occupying the highest male register and closer in sound to a soprano than to a regular tenor, ideally suits the florid demands that Baroque composers made of the warriors, villains and princes that populate these operas. Most of these roles were originally written for a phenomenon known as the castrato. This now-vanished category of operatic superstars was created by the process of selecting young pre-pubescent boys with unusually beautiful treble voices, castrating them and training them to become adult singers. Few successfully made the transition or found fame, but the temptation to take the risk, particularly among poor Italian families, was great. The most celebrated castrati became famous all over Europe as the pampered pets of kings and courtiers—singers of spectacular virtuosity whose voices combined the range and flexibility of a woman with the trumpeting power and volume of a man.

Countertenors have been with us since the 13th century, when the term was used in medieval manuscripts to designate the vocal part written just above the tenor line. The singers of these countertenor parts were invariably males who developed the highest register of their voices using a head tone technique most listeners recognize as falsetto. Since women were prohibited from singing in cathedral choirs, composers of sacred music combined the sound of the mature, high adult male voice with the more delicate tone of boy sopranos. After opera developed into a viable musical form around 1600, the greater theatrical virtuosity of the castrati captured the public imagination and somewhat obscured the countertenor. Even then, however, Handel and a few others wrote important parts expressly for countertenors when they were not able to secure the castrato of their choice for a specific role. For the most part, the countertenor survived in church music (especially English) or in early music ensembles of the 20th century.

THE HARPSICHORD SUITE IN D MINOR

In the first biography of Handel, published in 1760, John Mainwaring wrote: Handel had an uncommon brilliancy and command of finger, but what distinguished him from all other players who possessed these same qualities was that amazing fullness, force and energy he joined with them. And this observation may be applied with as much justness to his compositions, as to his playing.

In 1703 Handel traveled to Lübeck with fellow composer and employee of the Hamburg Opera Johannes Mathieson to visit Dietrich Buxtehude, veteran organist at the Marienkirche. Buxtehude sought a successor but also a son-in-law. While neither Handel nor Mathieson was interested in the latter opportunity, they enjoyed the musical adventure, as recounted by Mathieson: We traveled together on 17th August of that year in Lübeck, and in the coach we composed many double fugues—in our heads, not written down...There we played almost all the organs and harpsichords and we arrived at a particular conclusion...namely, that he wanted to play only the organ and I the harpsichord.

In 1720 the 35 year-old Handel set about making an authoritative edition of his finest harpsichord music resulting in two collections of suites that appeared in print

during his lifetime. He claimed he was...obliged to publish...because surreptitious and incorrect copies...had got abroad. A Dutch publisher had published the suites without his consent. Handel's 1720 publication contained eight suites and the 1733 printing, nine more. Manuscript sources suggest that he composed most of the music by 1717 or 1718, with the Allemande and Courante of the D Minor Suite freshly composed in 1720. After that time Handel virtually abandoned keyboard solo composition.

Jean-Philippe Rameau, another virtuoso keyboardist and composer, had a similar relationship to his solo keyboard output, composing and publishing solo works early in his career. When his dreams of becoming an opera composer were realized, Rameau turned his back on publication for solo keyboard. Clearly, a composer's early career might not offer opportunities for large-scale performances, but the solo works provide fertile soil for the development of themes, ideas and general compositional finesse. Rameau frequently borrowed from his own works (as did J.S. Bach), recycling solo keyboard works in his operas. The D Minor Presto must have given Handel special pleasure, because he also used it for his overture to *Il Pastor Fido*, his *Concerto Grosso*, Op. 3, #6 and one of his organ concertos.

Handel's suites, like those of his French and German predecessors (e.g., the Couperins and Froberger) and his contemporaries (e.g., J.S. Bach), are collections of dance movements with such standard forms as Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue, interspersed with fugues, themes and variations, and movements with Italian tempo headings (a Handelian innovation) such as the D Minor Suite's last movement Presto.

The idea of splitting the Suite into three parts on this recording came about from a recollection of having seen a program printed during Mozart's time. One movement of a symphony appeared at the beginning of the program, to be followed by movements from a piano concerto and other works. Subsequent movements of the symphony appeared later. It was also Handel's own custom, in presenting his full length vocal concert works (i.e., the English oratorios), to intersperse smaller keyboard or instrumental selections between the acts or sections of the larger pieces. In any case, Handel probably never expected to hear someone sit down and play his Suite from beginning to end. These pieces, an intimate sharing of musical art born of improvisation and inspiration, are composed primarily for the delectation of the solitary keyboardist who would study and play Handel's works. The enjoyment of a listening audience compounds the gift.

THE TRACKS

Gloria (15:15)

1 Gloria in excelsis (2:34)

2 Et in terra pax (2:37)

3 Laudamus te/Gratias agimus (2:18)

4 Domine Deus (1:06)

5 Qui tollis peccata mundi (3:31)

6 Quoniam / Cum sancto spiritu (3:07)

Julianne Baird, soprano

The Queen's Chamber Band

Suite No. 3 in D minor

7 Prelude (1:08)
8 Allegro (3:18)
9 Allemande (4:40)
10 Courante (1:59)
Elaine Comparone, harpsichord

Mi palpita il cor (13:16)
11 Recitative: "Mi palpita il cor" (2:11)
12 Aria: "Ho tanti affanni in petto" (6:11)
13 Recitative: "Clori, di te mi lagno" (1:08)
14 Aria: "Se un di m'adora" (3:46)
Marshall Coid, countertenor; Marsha Heller, oboe;
Peter Seidenberg, cello; Elaine Comparone, harpsichord

Suite No. 3 in D minor
15 Air (3:54)
16 Variations (6:11)
Elaine Comparone, harpsichord

Pastorella vagha bella (8:24)
17 Aria: "Pastorella vagha bella" (3:20)
18 Recitative: "Cosi la bella Nicea" (1:14)
19 Aria: "Solo per voi per mille e mille" (3:50)
Julianne Baird, soprano
Peter Seidenberg, cello; Elaine Comparone, harpsichord

Suite No. 3 in D minor
20 Presto (6:13)
Elaine Comparone, harpsichord

CREDITS
Produced and recorded by John Ostendorf
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The Lyrichord Early Music Series

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291
email: nick@lyrichord.com Web: www.lyrichord.com

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