

# THE BRANDENBURG CHOIR



The Brandenburg Choir is renowned for its astonishing vocal blend and technical virtuosity. Established by Artistic Director Paul Dyer in 1999 to perform in the first-ever *Noël! Noël!* Brandenburg Christmas concert, the Choir has become a regular part of the Brandenburg year. The first *Noël! Noël!* concert combined medieval chant and polyphony as well as carols from around the world in their original settings and languages.

"Music from earlier centuries often requires the sound of the human voice. I wanted to put a group of excellent singers together adding a rich complement to our period instruments. Our Choir is a ravishing blend of radiant Sydney singers", says Paul Dyer.

Originally 13 voices, the Choir joined our Orchestra and wowed audiences with truly beautiful renditions of both familiar Christmas favourites and rarely-heard sacred works, performing music from the eleventh century to the baroque. It was an instant success, combining musical, literary and scholarly performances that thrilled audiences and critics alike.

"There was vigour and passion in this performance just as there was great subtlety and finely shaded nuances of feeling and colour."

8 Sydney Morning Herald

*Noël! Noël!* has proven to be so popular, the Brandenburg have released their second live recording of the concert at City Recital Hall Angel Place. *A Celtic Christmas* was recorded in 2013. This beautiful collection of festive music is available in leading music stores. In addition to the annual *Noël! Noël!* concerts, the Choir now regularly performs as part of the Brandenburg's annual subscription season. Bach Cantatas, Handel Coronation Anthems, and Mozart's great *Requiem* and *Coronation Mass* are among the best loved performances of the Choir. Their performance of Handel's *Ode for St Cecilia's Day* received critical acclaim, with the Sydney Morning Herald declaring: "[The Brandenburg Choir is] one of the finest choruses one could put together in this town".

The current members of the Brandenburg Choir are all professional singers, many of whom also hold music degrees, but they do not all sing full time. From music teachers to lawyers, business managers to medical doctors and nurses, each member looks forward to the opportunity to perform with the Brandenburg throughout the year.

"The Brandenburg Choir was polished and responsive, powerfully conveying the work's celebratory magnificence in their full-voiced climaxes sung in unison." The Australian

# HANDEL: HEAVEN AND HARMONY

**GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL** (1685–1759)

When we think of Handel, most of us probably think first of the oratorios, especially *Messiah*, and then perhaps of instrumental pieces such as the *Water Music*, but instrumental compositions formed only a relatively small portion of Handel's total output of some six hundred works. He saw himself primarily as a vocal composer, and to his contemporaries he was one of the finest opera composers of the age, writing forty two operas in all. His first opera was produced in Hamburg in 1705, when he was only twenty, but his career as both composer and impresario really took off when he moved to London in 1711, where he mounted a series of phenomenally successful Italian opera seasons which included masterpieces such as *Giulio Cesare* (Julius Caesar) and *Alcina*. In 1733 a rival opera company was set up, the Opera of the Nobility, which poached Handel's best singers and drew the support of wealthy patrons away from Handel's own company. Handel managed to keep his company afloat, seeing out the rival company which collapsed in 1737, but he sustained heavy financial losses and the stress took its toll on his health.

The ingenious Mr. Handell is very much indispos'd, and it's thought with a Paralectick Disorder, he having at present no Use of his Right Hand.

*The London Evening Post, 14 May 1737*

With finances tight and being forced to use mainly English singers rather than expensive Italian imports, Handel decided to introduce English oratorios, a genre which he invented, into his subscription seasons of opera. They proved to be popular not just with the upper class audience which patronised the opera but with the newly well-off middle class, and made him so much money, for relatively little effort, that he gradually stopped composing operas altogether.

# HEAVEN AND HARMONY

## “The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba” Sinfonia to Act III of *Solomon*, HWV 67

The oratorio *Solomon* was first performed in 1749 during what had by then become Handel's regular concert season in Lent. Although he mounted only twelve to fifteen concerts over a seven week period, they were so well attended that they gave him a better financial return than a fifty performance season of Italian opera. The first half of 1749 was a high point in Handel's career, both artistically and in terms of his popularity. His oratorio season included performances of *Samson*, *Hercules* and *Messiah* as well as *Solomon*, and his *Music for the Royal Fireworks* attracted an audience of 12,000 for the rehearsal alone.

### WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Handel was an inveterate recycler of his own and other composers' work, and he originally wrote the Sinfonia which opens Act III of *Solomon* for another oratorio. Full of anticipation and excitement, strings and oboes announce the arrival of the legendary Queen of Sheba and her splendid retinue, as told in the Book of Kings from the Old Testament of the Bible: “And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that carried spices, and very much gold, and precious stones”.

### SAINT CECILIA

St Cecilia is venerated as an early Roman Christian martyr. There is some doubt as to whether she ever existed, and claims that she invented the organ stem from a mistranslation of a Latin text about her dating from the sixth century. Nevertheless she was honoured as the patron saint of music from the fifteenth century and by the seventeenth century her connection with music was well established in the popular imagination. St Cecilia's Day celebrations were held annually in London from 1683 to 1713 and occasionally after that, and featured commemorative odes written by celebrated poets and composers, including Henry Purcell, John Dryden, William Congreve, Hubert Parry, and of course Handel.

## Look Down Harmonious Saint, Cantata for solo tenor, HWV 124

In 1736 Handel's opera subscription season included both Italian operas and works in English, one of which was *Alexander's Feast*, an ode to St Cecilia with text by the great seventeenth-century English poet John Dryden. It was in only two acts, too short to satisfy an eighteenth-century audience used to spending four or five hours at an evening at the opera. To extend the performance Handel programmed two cantatas on the same subject, *Cecilia, volgi un sguardo*, and *Look down harmonious saint*, and padded out the evening even further with three concertos. In the end it appears that he did not perform *Look Down Harmonious Saint* on that occasion, and instead subsumed it into *Cecilia, volgi un sguardo* which we hear later in this program.

### WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

A cantata was a small scale vocal work which usually consisted of two or three arias linked with recitative (sung speech), scored for solo voice and continuo or small ensemble. A cantata was often performed at ceremonial occasions, for example to celebrate the birthday of a prince, and the text was secular. (JS Bach's sacred cantatas are an exception). *Look Down Harmonious Saint* consists of an accompanied recitative and just one long *da capo* aria which calls for virtuosic singing from the tenor. In the fast first section, long florid passages match the meaning of the word “trembling”. This is a compositional technique known as word painting, common in Renaissance and Baroque music, and one in which Handel excelled. The aria's contrasting middle section, “It charms the soul”, uses particularly rich harmonies as if to underline that this is music's greatest benefit. A *da capo aria* such as this one was always in two sections followed by a repeat of the first section, and it was customary for the singer to vary their part in some way on the repeat.

#### Recitative

*Look down, look down, harmonious Saint,  
Whilst we do celebrate thy art and thee!  
Of Musick's force the wonders show,  
The most of Heav'n we here can know.*

*Musick! that all persuading art,  
Which soothes our griefs, inspires our joys,  
Soft love creates, stern rage destroys,  
And moulds at will each stubborn heart.*

#### Air

*Sweet accents all your numbers grace,  
Touch every trembling string:  
Each note in justest order place  
Of Harmony we'll sing.*

*It charms the soul, delights the ear,  
To it all passions bow.  
It gives us hope, it conquers fear,  
And rules we know not how.*

*Sweet accents all your numbers grace etc.*

# HANDEL: HEAVEN AND HARMONY

## **Ode for St Cecilia's Day for tenor, soprano, choir and orchestra, HWV 76**

At the Theatre-Royal in Lincolns Inn Fields, this Day, November 22,  
(being St. Cecilia's Day) will be perform'd  
An ODE of MR. DRYDEN'S,  
With two new CONCERTO'S for several Instruments.  
Which will be preceded by  
ALEXANDER'S FEAST.  
And a CONCERTO on the ORGAN.

\*Particular care has been taken to have the House well-air'd; and the Passage  
from the Fields to the House will be covered for better Conveniency.

To begin at Six O'Clock.

Handel's 1739–40 season of performances was announced in the *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* on 22 November 1739. By this time his oratorios had become so successful that this season contained only works in English with an all-English cast, and no operas at all. Handel composed and staged only two more operas in England, the last in 1741, the year in which he wrote *Messiah*.

The opening performance featured a revival of *Alexander's Feast* and the *Ode for St Cecilia's Day*, which Handel composed in less than two weeks the previous September. The winter of 1739-40 was bitterly cold. The Thames froze over, and severe frosts caused some performances to be cancelled. Later in the season Handel assured audiences that the theatre would be "secur'd against the Cold, by having Curtains plac'd before every Door, and constant Fires will be kept in the House 'till the time of Performance", and that "particular care will be taken to have Guards plac'd to keep all the Passages clear from the Mob." Despite the weather the premiere was a triumph, according to a letter written that same night.

*This evening Sir Wyndham is gone to Handel's musick. I will not seal my letter till his return, in hopes to tell you of the applause; Sir W heard the rehearsal, it is very warlike & gay ... This moment Sir W's arrived from the musick at Lincoln's Inn which was a most crowded audience of all the fine world ... like the operas formerly, brim full; there was the Princesses & the Duke ... It went off with much applause: a martial song encored.*

Handel included the *Ode for St Cecilia's Day* in his subscription seasons for the following four

ideas for the *Ode* from a work by the German composer Gottlieb Muffat, and he also re-used most of the overture in the first two movements of his Grand Concerto Opus 6 No 5, which he wrote the following month. The laws of copyright were not developed until the very end of the eighteenth century, and with the constant demand for "new" music it was common practice for composers to recycle their own as well as other composers' work.

### WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The text for the *Ode* is John Dryden's 1687 poem *From harmony, from Heav'nly harmony*. Its subject is music, its role in the creation of the universe and its ability to mould human emotions, according to eighteenth century beliefs based on Classical Greek philosophy. The emotions are represented as being embodied by particular instruments – lyre, trumpet, flute, violin, organ – but Dryden ultimately places the human voice above all.

The *Ode for St Cecilia's Day* begins with a typical French overture, a form which Handel used for most of his operas and oratorios. It has a stately first section with ceremonial dotted rhythms followed by a lively fugal second section, and this is followed by a minuet whose gentle rising and falling phrases foreshadow the soprano aria "The soft complaining flute".

A feature of the *Ode* is the way Handel uses the music to depict the text and we hear his musical imagination at work in the opening recitative. Shifting harmonies and a chromatic vocal part give the effect of the instability and formlessness of chaos, and the violins' extravagant leaps evoke an image of the elements which go to make up the universe as it emerges from the primeval slime. Finally order is created through the power of music, as "the tuneful voice was heard from high" (the voice of God), and the harmony resolves on "and Music's power obey".

The following chorus draws an analogy between the harmony of nature and musical harmony, and Handel has each vocal part depict the phrase "through all the compass of the notes it ran" by singing rising and falling scales.

The slow, serene air "What passion cannot music raise and quell!" for soprano and solo cello contrasts with the excitingly martial "The trumpet's loud clangour" for tenor and chorus. Arpeggiated figures, dotted rhythms and the use of trumpets and timpani, traditional instruments of battle, evoke the sounds of an eighteenth-century battlefield.

# HANDEL: HEAVEN AND HARMONY

Part II of the *Ode* begins with a march in two sections for trumpet and strings, followed by the beautiful languid soprano solo 'The soft complaining flute' accompanied by solo flute and lute, the instruments mentioned in the verse, and muted strings. The soprano's long melismatic passages on the word "warbling" again illustrate Handel's skill in evocative word painting. The tenor aria "Sharp violins proclaim" contains energetic writing for the violins playing in unison, the words "depth" and "height" placed on appropriately low and high notes.

The soprano air "But oh! what art can teach" extols the power of the organ, a much more popular instrument in the eighteenth century than it is today. The organ part would have been played by Handel himself. The following short air "Orpheus could lead the savage race", also for soprano, is accompanied by violins and continuo, with the violins doubling the vocal line. According to Greek mythology, Orpheus's playing on the lyre was so beautiful that animals, rocks and trees were drawn to follow him, and his voice calmed the Furies in the Underworld.

Eighteenth century audiences understood the musical subtext, and may have been amused (or not!) that Handel used the hornpipe, a popular English dance, to set a text about "the savage race".

As well as ordering the Cosmos at its creation, music will also destroy it when the last trumpet sounds on Judgement Day, and so a grand final chorus concludes the *Ode*, with an extended fugue on the words "the dead shall live, the living die, and Music shall untune the sky".

## PART 1 Overture

### *Recitative*

From harmony, from heavenly harmony,  
This universal frame began.  
When nature underneath a heap  
Of jarring atoms lay,  
And could not heave her head:  
The tuneful voice was heard from high.  
"Arise, ye more than dead!"  
Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry,\*  
In order to their stations leap,  
And Music's power obey.

### *Chorus*

From harmony, from heavenly harmony,  
This universal frame began:  
From harmony to harmony  
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,  
The diapason\* closing full in Man.

\* the word has a number of possible meanings but here refers to the interval between a note and another with half or double its frequency, known as a perfect octave.

\* the four elements (water, fire, air and earth) of which all things are formed, according to classical Greek philosophy

### *Air*

What passion cannot Music raise and quell!  
When Jubal struck the chorded shell\*,  
His listening brethren stood around,  
And, wondering, on their faces fell,  
To worship that celestial sound.  
Less than a God they thought there could not dwell  
Within the hollow of that shell,  
That spoke so sweetly, and so well.  
What passion cannot Music raise and quell!

\* according to the Book of Genesis, Jubal was the ancestor of musicians and the inventor of the lyre ("the chorded shell" because it was made from turtle shell across which strings were attached).

## INTERVAL

## PART 2 March

### *Air*

The soft complaining Flute,  
In dying notes, discovers  
The woes of hopeless lovers,  
Whose dirge is whisper'd by the warbling  
Lute.

### *Air*

Sharp Violins proclaim  
Their jealous pangs and desperation,  
Fury, frantic indignation,  
Depth of pains, and height of passion,  
For the fair, disdainful dame.

### *Air and Chorus*

The Trumpet's loud clangour  
Excites us to arms,  
With shrill notes of anger,  
And mortal alarms.  
The double, double, double beat  
Of the thundering Drum  
Cries, Hark! the foes come;  
Charge, charge, 'tis too late to retreat.

### *Air*

But oh! what art can teach,  
What human voice can reach  
The sacred Organ's praise?  
Notes inspiring holy love,  
Notes that wing their heavenly ways  
To join the choirs above.

### *Air*

Orpheus\* could lead the savage race;  
And trees unrooted left their place,  
Sequacious\* of the Lyre.

\*according to Greek mythology, Orpheus's playing on the lyre was so beautiful that animals, rocks and trees were drawn to follow him.

\*\*sequacious\*: inclined to follow, lacking independence

# HANDEL: HEAVEN AND HARMONY

## Recitative

But bright Cecilia rais'd the wonder higher:  
When to her Organ vocal breath was given,  
An angel heard, and straight appear'd  
Mistaking Earth for Heaven.

## Solo and Chorus

As from the power of sacred lays  
The spheres began to move,  
And sung the great Creator's praise  
To all the Blest above;  
So when the last and dreadful hour  
This crumbling pageant shall devour,  
The Trumpet shall be heard on high,  
The dead shall live, the living die,  
And Music shall untune the sky!

## Duet "Tra amplessi innocenti" from the cantata *Cecilia, volgi un sguardo* HWV 89

Handel wrote over one hundred cantatas set to Italian texts, the vast majority while he was living in Rome as young man. *Cecilia, volgi un sguardo* (Cecilia, turn your eyes) was one of very few he composed in London. It was for the Italian singers Anna Maria Strada del Pò and Carlo Arrigoni to sing in between the two parts of *Alexander's Feast* when it premiered in 1736. Strada sang more major roles in Handel operas than any other singer, appearing in at least twenty four operas over nine years. Her voice was not matched by her appearance, and she was known to English audiences by the unfortunate nickname of "The Pig". Arrigoni was better known as a lutenist and in fact played in the orchestra for *Alexander's Feast*, but also had a fine light tenor voice. He was reputed to be unable to sing in English, which may account for the choice of Italian for this cantata. Italian singers were satirised mercilessly for their English pronunciation: "so away goes I to the Oratorio, where ... Senesino and Bertolli made rare work with the English Tongue you would have sworn it had been Welch".

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

In composing *Cecilia, volgi un sguardo* Handel re-used a cantata from his Italian period (*Splenda l'alba in oriente* HWV 166) as well as his other St Cecilia cantata *Look Down, Harmonious Saint*. This light-hearted, engaging duet is the last movement in the work.

*Tra amplessi innocenti,  
tra armonici accenti,  
il core sol gode.*

In innocent embraces,  
in harmonious words,  
the heart alone finds pleasure.

*Un fervido affetto, sincero diletto,  
sol mertano lode.*

Fervent emotion, sincere delight,  
only these are worth praise.

*Tra amplessi innocenti...*

In innocent embraces...

YEAR	HANDEL'S LIFE	CONTEMPORARY EVENTS
1685	Born in Halle, Germany	JS Bach and Domenico Scarlatti born
1703	Works as violinist & harpsichordist for Hamburg opera house	Veracini born in Florence
1705	First opera <i>Almira</i> performed in Hamburg	Halley predicts return of comet
1706	Travels to Rome and Florence	Twinings opens first tea room in London
1710	Appointed music director to the Elector of Hanover; makes first visit to London	Beijing becomes biggest city in the world
1711	First London opera <i>Rinaldo</i> performed	Vivaldi famous throughout Europe as virtuoso violinist and composer
1712	Moves to England permanently	Dutch East India company ship wrecked off the coast of Western Australia
1713	Dismissed from the court of Hanover; granted annual pension by Queen Anne of Great Britain	Fahrenheit begins to use mercury in thermometers
1714	Composes <i>Te Deum</i> to welcome new royal family	Queen Anne dies; Elector of Hanover proclaimed George I King of Great Britain
1717	Composes <i>Water Musick</i> to accompany King George I on the River Thames	Thousands die in North Sea floods
1721	Composes opera <i>Floridante</i>	JS Bach composes Brandenburg concertos
1724	Premiere of opera <i>Giulio Cesare</i>	First performance of JS Bach's <i>St John Passion</i> in Leipzig
1725	Premiere of <i>Rodelinda</i>	Vivaldi's <i>Four Seasons</i> published
1727	Composes <i>Zadok the Priest</i> and other anthems for the coronation of George II and Queen Caroline; becomes a British subject	First performance of JS Bach's <i>St Matthew Passion</i> in Leipzig
1736	Composes <i>Alexander's Feast</i> and cantatas	A bathing machine used on the beach at Scarborough in England
1738	His statue is erected in Vauxhall Gardens, London (now in Victoria & Albert Museum)	The first automaton, "The Flute Player", invented
1739	First performance of <i>Ode to St Cecilia</i>	John Wesley founds first Methodist meeting house
1741	Gives last performance of Italian opera in London; composes <i>Messiah</i> and <i>Samson</i>	Vivaldi dies poor and alone in Vienna, aged 63, and is given a pauper's burial
1742	First performance of <i>Messiah</i>	Celsius devises centigrade thermometer
1749	Composes <i>Solomon and Musick for the Royal Fireworks</i>	A rhinoceros exhibited in Paris creates sensation & inspires wigs à la rhinocéros
1751	Begins to go blind; almost totally blind by 1753	New Year's Day occurs on 25 March for the last time in England and Wales
1759	Dies aged 74; 3000 people attend his funeral	Mozart is 3 years old, Haydn is 27