

Handel in Rome

NARDUS WILLIAMS
DUNEDIN CONSORT
JOHN BUTT



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TRACKLIST

ENGLISH

SUNG TEXTS

BIOGRAPHIES



Handel in Rome

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

NARDUS WILLIAMS soprano

DUNEDIN CONSORT

JOHN BUTT director

Ero e Leandro 'Qual ti riveggio, oh Dio', HWV 150

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2. Aria: Empio mare, onde crudeli 6:45
3. Recitativo: Amor, che ascoso ne' suoi vaghi lumi 0:40
4. Aria: Se la morte non vorrà 6:13
5. Recitativo: Questi dalla mia fronte 0:48
6. Aria: Si muora, si muora 6:48
7. Recitativo: Ecco, gelide labbra 1:00

Tra le fiamme, HWV 170

8. Aria: Tra le fiamme tu scherzi per gioco 5:12
9. Recitativo: Dedalo già le fortunate penne tessea 0:46
10. Aria: Pien di nuovo e bel diletto 4:34
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Armida abbandonata, HWV 105

15. Accompagnato: Dietro l'orme fugaci del guerrier 0:59
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19. Aria: Venti, fermate 2:36
20. Recitativo: Ma che parlo, che dico? 1:06
21. Aria: In tanti affanni miei 4:03

22. **'Tu del ciel ministro eletto'** 5:28
(from *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*, HWV 46a)

Total Running Time 60:20

Handel in Rome

Handel's arrival in Rome, just short of his 22nd birthday, seems to have had a miraculous influence on his development as a composer. Although he was already familiar with Lutheran musical rigour and expression, and had already performed two operas in Hamburg, there was something about the environment of Rome that ignited the most productive period of his development. He worked with some of the greatest musicians of the age, such as the violinist-composer Arcangelo Corelli and the soprano Margherita Durastanti, and he enjoyed the favours of major patrons of the arts, such as Cardinals Pietro Ottoboni and Benedetto Pamphili and the Marquis Francesco Ruspoli. But there also seems to have been an intangible factor, one that might lie somewhere between the excessive luxury and sensuality of the clerical aristocracy and the moralizing denial of the trappings of beauty that the very same figures preached. If Handel's first oratorio *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*, HWV 46a, of May 1707 (Pamphili) seems to be celebrating – quite extravagantly – beauty and worldly pleasure in the very act of denying it, this is perhaps a pattern that tantalizingly remained with Handel throughout the rest of his career. In the closing aria, 'Tu del ciel', the most sincere sense of unadorned virtue is somehow brought to reality through the supreme, sensual, beauty of the musical means.

Another sense of contrasting pairing that is often noted in Handel's Roman music is that between his construction of male and female personages. Ellen Harris has noted how Handel's Roman females are characterized by 'passionate expression and formal irregularity', while the males show more consistency of style and formal patterning (*Handel as Orpheus: Voice and Desire in the Chamber Cantatas*, Cambridge Mass., 2001, p. 8). Numerous women in the early cantata repertory are in a continual state of agitation and lament, and the music often seems almost to go beyond

rational control. *Armida abbandonata* ('Dietro l'orme fugaci', HWV 105), for Ruspoli in June 1707, opens with an extraordinary recitative, accompanied by arpeggiated violin, before presenting Armida's lament, its coloratura flourishes bursting beyond the solemn lyrical line, as if even a conventional lament is hard won for the desperate Armida. Almost as soon as she has called for the sea to destroy her departing lover, she changes her mind and demands the storm to stop, a storm which the music suggests is as much in her mind as out there in nature. Only the closing Siciliana shows that Armida returns to some form of equilibrium, imploring the god of love to take away her desire for her treacherous lover.

Hero, in *Ero e Leandro* ('Qual ti riveggio', HWV 150, most likely for Ottoboni, around April 1707), is less fortunate, since the cantata narrates her decline in the wake of Leander's drowning, leading towards her own suicide in the final recitative. The first aria shows her extremes of emotion – rage at the cruel waves contrasted with an almost unbearably dissonant lyricism as she witnesses Leander's fidelity still somehow alive within his corpse. The obsessive central aria marks her decision to come to him, given that death still does not come for her as it did for him. Then, in ripping out her tresses that so tempted Leander – coming close to the underlying Christian turn against superficial beauty also expressed in *Il trionfo del Tempo* – she prepares to die, affirming that there is no more noble reason for dying (as if somehow mimicking Christ's own sacrifice).

If female personages helped Handel develop something of the spontaneity and abandon that to some extent remained with him in his later composition, what of the male stereotype? *Tra le fiamme (Il consiglio)*, HWV 170) conforms to Harris's generalization that cantatas relating to male personages show a more obvious distinction between recitative and aria (indeed, the opening aria also functions as a 'da capo' to close the entire cantata). But this does not necessarily mean that this

cantata lacks anything of the ‘madcap’ quality of the seemingly ‘female’ cantatas. Not only is there a remarkable variety of note-lengths (dotted rhythms, triplets, even semiquavers, in the central aria ‘Pien di nuovo e bel diletto’) and the astonishing viola da gamba obbligato in the third aria, ‘Voli per l’aria’, but the entire cantata seems to be based on the concept of masculine folly, namely Icarus’s assumption that he could mimic the flight of his wise father, Dedalus. From this point of view, there is not really much musical difference between feminine irrationality and thoughtless, masculine complacency.

A final, and rather subtle, distinction within these cantatas is that between narration (diegesis) and impersonation (mimesis). *Tra le fiamme* is largely in the voice of a wise, if moralizing, narrator: youthful arrogance leads to tragedy if the limits of the human are not heeded. It is really only our imagination that has wings, and these can ultimately take us to heaven. Here it is the brilliant flow of music that shows us what the transgression might involve, supremely tempting though it might seem. The first-person female voice of *Ero e Leandro* suddenly turns to narrator in the closing moments of the recitative, as it describes Hero’s final plunge into the sea. The predominantly female voice of *Armida abbandonata* is introduced by the most radical recitative of all, accompanied by violin arpeggios without bass line, which sets the scene for the abandoned Armida witnessing the departure of her lover. In short, the voice who brings these stories to life is capable of both embodying the characters involved, but also of describing and commenting upon them. The real, live, voice, singing in our own present, can encompass both male and female constructions of person, and both narration and actualization of character. This brilliant interplay of roles and voices is perhaps what makes Handel’s musical contribution so special: music allows us to move between different modes of humanity and presence, as if to efface the limitations of time, gender and role.

Ero e Leandro, HWV 1501. *Recitativo*

Qual ti riveggio, oh Dio,
 ahi, vista che m'uccide!
 Così vieni a bearmi, idolo mio?
 È pur questo, occhi miei,
 Leandro? Ahi lasso!
 Leandro il mio conforto,
 ecco su queste arene e sangue e morto.

*O God, what a state I see you in again,
 Ah, the sight kills me!
 Is this how you come to make me happy, my idol?
 And is this really Leander,
 my eyes? Alas!
 This is Leander, my comfort,
 drained and dead on the sand.*

2. *Aria*

Empio mare, onde crudeli,
 giusto è ben ch'io mi quereli,
 della vostra crudeltà.

*Pitiless sea, cruel waves,
 it's right that I complain
 of your cruelty.*

Sei pur morto, o caro, ed io
 veggio ancor, Leandro mio,
 viva in te la fedeltà.

*You really are dead, my dearest,
 and yet still I see, my Leander,
 loyalty alive in you.*

3. *Recitativo*

Amor, che ascoso ne' suoi vaghi lumi,
 da così dolce loco
 porgevi esca al mio fuoco,
 ove fuggisti allor che tempo e morte
 tesero insidie al caro idolo mio?
 Ahi tempo! Ahi morte!
 Ahi crudo amore, oh Dio.

*Love, who living in his beautiful eyes,
 stoked the fires of my passion
 from such a sweet abode,
 where did you flee when time and death
 laid a trap for my dear idol?
 Ah, time! Ah, death!
 Ah, cruel love, O God!*

4. *Aria*

Se la morte non vorrà
 meco usar la crudeltà
 che già teco praticò,

*If death won't treat me
 with the same cruelty
 it has already dealt you,*

pria del tempo idolo amato
pria del tempo a te verrò.

*before time, my beloved idol,
before time I will come to you.*

Che se morte a me s'asconde,
di trovarsi in mezzo all'onde,
la tua fè già m'insegnò.

*If death hides itself from me,
your loyalty has already shown
me how to find it in the midst of the waves.*

5. *Recitativo*

Questi dalla mia fronte
a forza svelti biondi crini,
che lacci furo al cuor di Leandro,
e gl'ornamenti, rinforzo un tempo,
ora gravosi impacci di mia beltà:
prendili, o mar:
tu chiudi nel profondo
dell'acque questi tesori miei;
indi la salma attendi di colei
che più di questi a bel Leandro piacque.

*These golden locks torn from my scalp,
which were snares
for Leander's heart,
and these ornaments, once confirmations,
now heavy reminders of my beauty:
take them, O sea:
hide in the deeps
these treasures of mine;
then wait for my corpse,
which Leander loved more than these things.*

6. *Aria*

Si muora, si muora:
come son viva ancora,
in tanto e rio martir?

*Let me die, let me die:
how am I still alive,
in such bitter grief?*

Alma, non troverai
cagion più bella mai,
più propria per morir.

*Soul, you'll not find
a reason nobler
nor more fitting to die.*

7. *Recitativo*

Ecco, gelide labbra,
pegni della mia fè, gl'ultimi baci,
dolce nido d'amor, pupille amate,

*Look, icy lips, here are my last kisses,
pledges of my loyalty;
sweet nest of love, beloved eyes,*

quanto mi duol, che chiusi
rimirar non possiate
l'ultimo sforzo d'un fedele amore.
Sì disse e fiera
in mar precipitossi,
ove trovò la giovinetta ardita
morte ad altri noiosa, a lei gradita.

*how much it hurts that, closed,
you cannot see
the last efforts of a faithful love,
So she spoke and boldly
flung herself into the sea,
where the courageous woman found death,
hateful to others, but welcome to her.*

Tra le fiamme, HWV 170

8. *Aria*

Tra le fiamme tu scherzi per gioco,
O mio core, per farti felice,
e t'inganna una vaga beltà.

*You play amidst the flames for fun,
O my heart, in search of happiness,
but a fair beauty is tricking you.*

Cadon mille farfalle nel foco,
e si trova una sola fenice,
che risorge se a morte sen va.

*A thousand moths die in the fire,
and there is only one phoenix,
which rises from the ashes after death.*

9. *Recitativo*

Dedalo già le fortunate penne tessea
con mano ardita
e con tenera cera piuma a piuma aggiungea.
Icaro, il fanciulletto
sovente confondea l'ingegnoso lavoro;
ah, così mai trattato
non avesse e cera e piume:
per chi non nacque augello
il volare è portento, il cader è costume.

*Daedalus once stitched fateful plumage
with daring hand,
binding feather to feather with melted wax.
Icarus, his young son,
often interrupted his ingenious work;
ah, if only he had never worked
wax and feather like this:
for anyone not born a bird,
flying is a wonder, falling unavoidable.*

10. *Aria*
Pien di nuovo e bel diletto,
sciolse l'ali il giovinetto,
e con l'aure già scherzando.
- Ma del volo s'è gradito
troppo ardito
l'onda ancor va mormorando.
11. *Recitativo*
Sì, sì purtroppo è vero:
nel temerario volo
molti gl'Icari son,
Dedalo un solo.
12. *Aria*
Voli per l'aria chi può volare
scorra veloce la terra il mare
parta, ritorni né fermi il piè.
- Voli ancor l'uomo ma coi pensieri
che delle piume ben più leggeri
e più sublimi il ciel gli diè.
13. *Recitativo*
L'uomo che nacque per salire al cielo,
ferma il pensier nel suolo,
e poi dispone il volo con ali che si finge,
e in sé non ha.
14. *Aria*
Tra le fiamme ...
- Filled with a new and charming delight,
the youth spread his wings,
and began playing on the winds.*
- But the waves are still murmuring
about a wonderful flight
that went too far.*
- Yes, yes, sadly it's true:
when it comes to daredevil flight
there are many Icaruses,
but only one Daedalus.*
- Leave flying through the air to those who can;
let them race above the earth and pull up
from the sea, let them never land.*
- Still, let a person fly but with their thoughts,
which, heavensent, are lighter
and more sublime than feathers.*
- The person born to leap to heaven,
anchors their thought to the ground
and then prepares to fly with wings imagined,
not with those born to them.*
- You play amidst the flames ...*

Armida abbandonata, HWV 105

15. *Accompagnato*

Dietro l'orme fugaci del guerrier,
che gran tempo,
in lascivo soggiorno ascoso avea,
Armida abbandonata il piè movea;
e poi che vidde al fine
che l'oro del suo crine, i vezzi,
i sguardi, i preghi
non han forza che legghi il fuggitivo amante,
fermò le stanche piante,
e afissa sopra un scoglio,
calma di rio cordoglio,
a quel leggiero abete,
che il suo ben le rapia, le luci affisse,
piangendo e sospirando così disse:

*Following wearily in the footsteps
of the fugitive warrior, with whom for so long
she had enjoyed hidden love,
the abandoned Armida walked.
But at last, when she realized
that her golden hair, her charms,
her beseeching, her prayers,
had no force to hold back her fleeing lover,
she stopped her tired feet,
and sat on a rock,
calm in her despair;
and she looked out to the slender mast
which carried away her love.
Weeping and sighing, she said:*

16. *Aria*

Ah, crudele! E pur ten vai,
e mi lasci in preda al duolo,
e pur sai che sei tu solo
il diletto del mio cor.

*Ah, cruel man! You are leaving me
in the grip of grief, and yet you know
that you are the sole
delight of my heart.*

Come, ingrato, e come puoi
involare a questo sen,
il seren de' lumi tuoi,
se per te son tutta ardor?

*How, thankless man, can you steal
from my breast
the light of your starry eyes,
when you know that I burn for you alone?*

17. *Recitativo*

Per te mi struggo, infido,
per te languisco, ingrato;
ah, pur lo sai che sol

*For you I yearn, you faithless man!
For you I suffer, you ungrateful man!
Ah, you even know*

da' tuoi bei rai per te piagato ho il seno,
e pur tu m'abbandoni, infido amante!

*that my heart breaks for your eyes alone,
and still you abandon me – unfaithful lover!*

18. *Accompagnato*

O voi, dell' incostante
e procelloso amare orridi mostri,
dai più profondi chiostrì,
a vendicarmi uscite,
e contro quel crudel in crudelite!
Sì, sì sì, sia vostro il vanto
e del vostro rigore
un mostro lacerar di voi maggiore!
Onde, venti, che fate,
che voi nol sommergete? Ah, no! Fermate!

*O, you fearful monsters
of the changeful and stormy sea!
From the deepest cloisters of the ocean,
hurry to avenge me,
and turn your cruelty against this cruel lover!
Yes, yes, yes! In your boasting
and zeal bring forth
a monster even greater than yourselves!
Waves! Winds! What are you doing?!
Do not drown him! Ah, no! Stop!*

19. *Aria*

Venti, fermate, sì,
nol sommergete!
È ver che mi tradì,
ma pur l'adoro!

*Winds, stop! No,
do not drown him!
It is true that he has betrayed me,
but still I adore him!*

Onde crudeli no,
non l'uccidete!
È ver che mi sprezzò,
ma è il mio tesoro.

*Cruel waves, no,
do not kill him!
It is true that he has broken me,
but he is still my beloved!*

20. *Recitativo*

Ma che parlo, che dico?
Ah, ch'io vaneggio; e come amar
potrei un traditore, infelice mio core?
Rispondi, o Dio, rispondi!
Ah, che tu ti confondi,
dubbioso e palpitante vorresti
non amare e vivi amante.

*But what am I saying, what am I talking about?
Ah, I am raving! And how could you,
treacherous heart, still love a traitor?
Answer me, O God, answer me!
Ah, my heart, you are confounded,
doubtful and trembling, you wish
only not to love, and yet still you love.*

Spezza quel laccio indegno,
che tiene avvinto ancor gli affetti tuoi.
Che fai misero cor, che fai misero cor?
Ah, tu non puoi!

*Shatter these unworthy chains,
which still capture your affections.
What are you doing, poor sad heart?
Ah, you cannot!*

21. *Aria*

In tanti affanni miei
assisti mi almen tu,
nume d'amore!

*In this overwhelming distress,
help me,
O God of love!*

E se pietoso sei,
fa ch'io non ami più
quel traditore.

*And, if you pity me,
make me no longer love
this traitor.*

**Il trionfo del Tempo e
del Disinganno, HWV 46a**

22. *Aria*

Tu del ciel ministro eletto,
non vedrai più nel mio petto
voglia infida, o vano ardor.

*You, chosen minister of heaven,
will no longer see in my breast
faithless desire or empty passion.*

E se vissi ingrata a Dio,
tu custode del cor mio
a lui porta il nuovo cor.

*And although I've lived heedless of God,
you, keeper of my heart,
carry to him a new heart.*



NARDUS WILLIAMS soprano

Winner of the Rising Talent award at the 2022 International Opera Awards, Nardus Williams has established herself as one of the most exciting and versatile young British singers of her generation. Highlights of the 2023/24 season include a return to Opéra de Rouen for concert performances of *Don Giovanni* (Donna Anna), a return to the role of Belinda in Errollyn Wallen *Dido's Ghost* with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra & Chorale, her Berlin Philharmonie debut with Academy of Ancient Music, a world premiere of George Lewis' *The Comet / Poppea* playing the role of Poppea, a return to the London Handel Festival singing the title role in Handel's *Esther*, Bach's St Matthew Passion with The Bach Choir and Handel's Brockes Passion with The English Concert, and a return to the Wigmore Hall.

Recent highlights include the roles of Anne Trulove in *The Rake's Progress* for the Glyndebourne Tour, Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* for English National Opera, Countess in *Le nozze di Figaro* for Opera Holland Park, Ciboulette in *In the Market for Love* for the Glyndebourne Tour, Micaëla in *Carmen* at English National Opera, Mimi in *La bohème* and Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* for Houston Grand Opera.

On the concert and recital platform, recent recital highlights include Oxford Lieder, Leeds Lieder, Wigmore Hall, St. John's Smith Square, her BBC Proms debut with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, returning with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and La Nuova Musica, and Handel's *Messiah* at King's Place and English National Opera.

Williams was a member of the Houston Opera Studio for the 2018/19 season and is a former Jerwood Young Artist at Glyndebourne and a former Harewood Artist with the English National Opera. Williams trained at the International Opera School at the Royal College of Music where she was the sole recipient of the prestigious Kiri Te Kanawa Scholarship.

JOHN BUTT director

John Butt is Gardiner Professor of Music at the University of Glasgow, Music Director of Edinburgh's Dunedin Consort and a Principal Artist with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Author of five monographs, Butt has written extensively on Bach, the Baroque, the historical performance revival and issues of modernity and music.

His discography includes some twenty-five recordings as keyboard soloist or director. Highlights, as Director of Dunedin, include the Gramophone award-winning recordings of Handel's *Messiah* and Mozart's Requiem. His performing career takes him across the world, including the US, Mexico, Hong Kong, Germany, France, Holland, Belgium, Malta, Spain and Norway.

DUNEDIN CONSORT

Dunedin Consort is one of the world's leading Baroque ensembles, recognized for its vivid and insightful performances and recordings. Formed in 1995 and named after Din Eidyn, the ancient Celtic name for Edinburgh Castle, Dunedin Consort's ambition is to allow listeners to hear early music afresh, and to couple an inquisitive approach to historical performance with a commitment to commissioning and performing new music. Under the direction of John Butt, the ensemble has earned two coveted Gramophone Awards, a BBC Music Magazine Award, and a Grammy nomination. In 2021 it was the recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society Ensemble Award.

Dunedin Consort performs regularly at major festivals and venues across the UK and abroad, and enjoys close associations with the BBC Proms, Wigmore Hall, Edinburgh International Festival and Lammermuir Festival. Alongside its

performance and recording work, Dunedin Consort is committed to a wide-ranging education programme both in schools and in the wider community. In inspiring and encouraging musical participation, developing vocal skills and fostering a love of classical music, historical performance and new music, Dunedin Consort aims to develop and nurture its potential audience and to encourage the performers of the future.

Dunedin Consort is an enthusiastic champion and commissioner of contemporary music, and in recent years has premiered a new set of orchestral dances at the BBC Proms, a new opera by Errollyn Wallen at the Barbican Centre, and new choral music for its a cappella consort. In 2024, premieres include a work for voices and strings from Caroline Shaw and a new guitar concerto by Cassandra Miller for Sean Shibe, the first instalment of a 3-year co-commissioning series which will see further new music by David Fennessy and Tansy Davies.



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CELLO

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László Rózsa
Olwen Foulkes

* solo violin in *Ero e Leandro & Tu del ciel*

° solo cello in *Ero e Leandro*; solo viola da gamba in *Tra le fiamme*

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