

CHACONNE

HANDEL SERSE



Anna Stéphany · Rosemary Joshua · David Daniels
Hilary Summers · Joëlle Harvey · Brindley Sherratt · Andreas Wolf

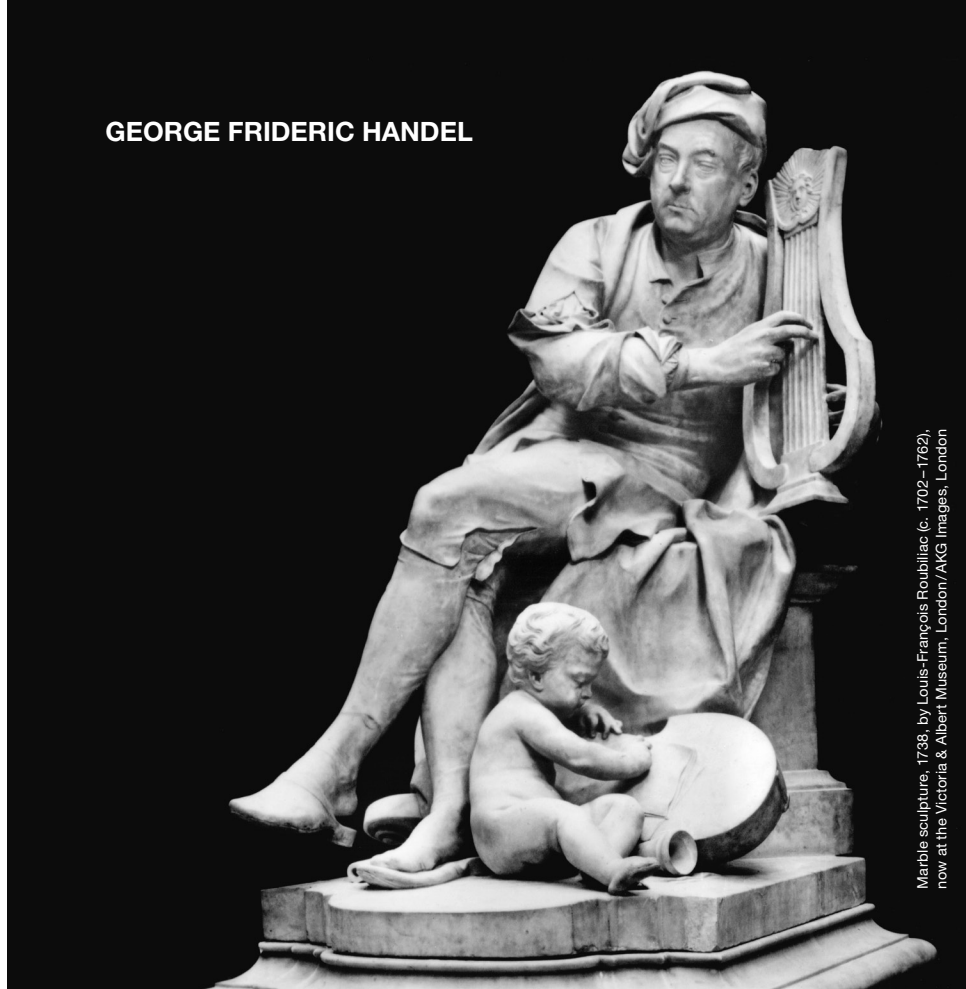
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HANDEL
SERSE

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL



Marble sculpture, 1738, by Louis-François Roubiliac (c. 1702–1762),
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GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685–1759)

Serse, HWV 40
(1737–38)

Opera in Three Acts

On an anonymous revision of the libretto *Il Xerse* (Rome, 1694)
by Silvio Stampiglia (1664–1725),
in turn based on the libretto *Il Xerse* (Venice, 1655)
by Count Nicolò Minato (c. 1630–1698)

Performing edition prepared by Peter Jones

Serse, King of Persia **Anna Stéphany** mezzo-soprano
Arsamene, his brother, in love with Romilda.....**David Daniels** counter-tenor
Amastre, heiress to the kingdom of Tagor,
betrothed to Serse..... **Hilary Summers** contralto
Ariodate, a prince, vassal to Serse **Brindley Sherratt** bass
Romilda, his daughter, in love with Arsamene **Rosemary Joshua** soprano
Atalanta, her sister, secretly in love with Arsamene **Joëlle Harvey** soprano
Elviro, servant of Arsamene **Andreas Wolf** bass-baritone

Setting: Abydos, Persia in ancient times

Early Opera Company
Christian Curnyn

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TT 39:27



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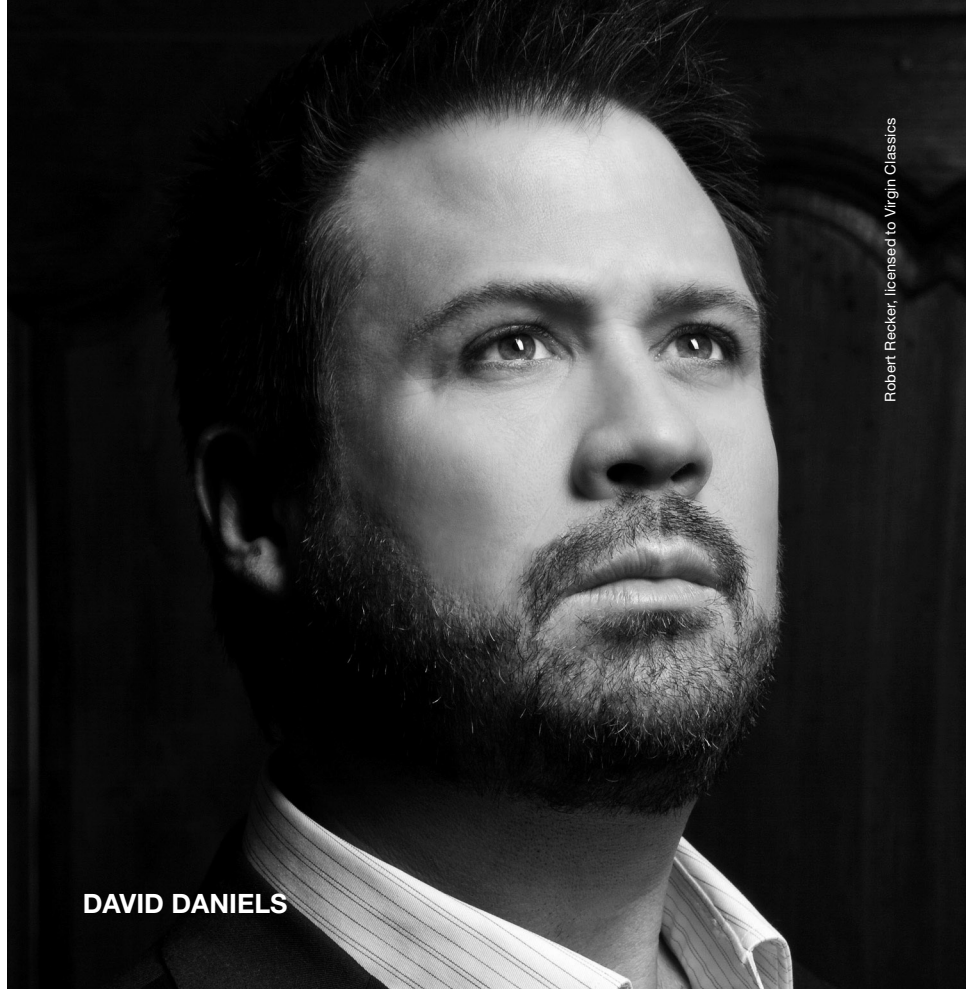
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HANDEL: SERSE, HWV 40

Serse (Xerxes) was first performed at the King's Theatre on the Haymarket on 15 April 1738, only a few years before Handel quit his long labour of trying to convert London audiences to the foreign import of Italian *dramma per musica*. The late position that *Serse* occupies in his operatic career has led some musicologists to regard its unusually ironic libretto, humorous situations, flexible dramatic construction, and high number of short arias as a progressive, forward-looking forebear of Mozart's sophisticated comedies, created half a century later. In fact, *Serse* has its roots in seventeenth-century Venice: the poet Nicolò Minato (c. 1630 – 1698) wrote the original libretto for the Teatro SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice, where it was first performed in 1655 with music by Pier Francesco Cavalli (1602 – 1676).

Minato's published libretto contained an *Argomento* which explained that the plot was a mixture of feigned verisimilitudes and the depiction of historical events as related in an account of the Graeco-Persian wars by Herodotus (c. 485 – c. 425 BC). The son

of Darius the Great, King Xerxes I ruled the Achaemenid Empire from 486 until his assassination by a courtier in 465; he may have been the Persian monarch called 'Ahasuerus' in the Old Testament story of Esther, although the Biblical story contains no references to known historical events during the reign of Xerxes (so there remains some doubt whether or not the two names belong to the same historical person). In 480 Xerxes mounted an ambitious military and naval expedition to conquer Greece. The most novel aspect of his campaign was the construction of a bridge over the Hellespont (now the Dardanelles), a distance of sea more than one kilometre long, stretching from Abydos (on the Asian shore) to Sestos (on the European side). Herodotus reports that on his way to Abydos, Xerxes

came across a plane tree of such beauty that
he was moved to decorate it with golden
ornaments and to appoint a guardian for it
in perpetuity.

Upon arriving at the Hellespont, Xerxes discovered that his engineers had built twin

bridges according to his instructions, but the flax and papyrus constructions were destroyed in a violent storm. The angry Xerxes beheaded his engineers, and ordered that the waters of the Hellespont receive three hundred lashes. A second bridge was built by tying together boats to support decking made of wooden planks covered with brushwood and soil; the crossing of the Persian troops to Sestos is alluded to in Act II, Scene 8 of Handel's opera (although the eventual failure of the invasion and Xerxes' crushing defeat at Salamis are not depicted). Minato added the customary author's declaration that 'the rest is fictitious': he invented the plot concerning the rivalry between Xerxes and his brother, Arsamenes (also a historical character), for Romilda, and the betrayal by the king of his fiancée, Amastris, who arrives at Abydos disguised as a man and soon realises the king's deception. Minato fleshed out his drama with a host of minor characters, but the main focus of it was the unpredictably obsessive and volatile title character.

It is unlikely that Handel knew much about Minato or Cavalli. His adaptation was based instead on a later version of the libretto, radically rewritten by Silvio Stampiglia (1664 – 1725), a poet and member of the Arcadian Academy, which had been set to

music by Giovanni Bononcini (1670 – 1747) for Rome's Teatro di Torre di Nona in 1694. Stampiglia, using his Arcadian pseudonym, Palemone Licurio, professed that he had remodelled the old Venetian text to make it 'conform to the geniality of modern times'; he removed some of Minato's scenes, added a few new ones, altered many recitatives, and created new aria texts. He retained only eight of Minato's original aria texts, with minimal changes, although he derived several new arias from Minato's recitatives. Handel had probably met Stampiglia in Rome during his extended trip to Italy (1706 – 10), possibly through Cardinal Colonna, the poet's patron, or members of the extended circle of the Arcadian Academy. Perhaps Handel recalled his acquaintance with Stampiglia when searching for a suitable model for one of his new operas for the 1737 – 38 season at the King's Theatre, but the catalyst for his decision to set *Serse* to music was certainly his close familiarity with Bononcini's score.

A manuscript score of Bononcini's *Xerse*, now in the British Library, was probably copied in 1707 in Rome for the seventeen-year-old English visitor John Blathwayt, who later joined the board of directors of the Royal Academy of Music (a company organised to produce Italian operas in London, active

from 1719 until 1728, for which both Handel and Bononcini worked). It is presumed that Handel borrowed Blathwayt's manuscript, for he methodically extracted thematic ideas from thirty-one of Bononcini's numbers in at least ten different works composed between 1734 and 1738 – including the masterpieces *Ariodante* (1735), *Alcina* (1735), and the ode *Alexander's Feast* (1736), the operas *Atalanta* (1736), *Arminio* (1736), *Giustino* (1737), *Berenice* (1737), and *Faramondo* (1738), and then eventually his own setting of *Serse*. The close correlation between Bononcini's and Handel's settings makes it seem likely that Handel (with or without help from a literary Italian assistant) prepared his own version of the libretto directly from Bononcini's score; nobody involved probably saw a copy of the 1694 printed wordbook. That Handel took the libretto directly from Bononcini's score might also explain his retention of archaic features, such as the comic servant Elviro, which were usually omitted from London adaptations of old Italian texts.

Handel's famous opening scene, 'Ombra mai fu' (marked *Larghetto* by the composer, never *Largo*), is remarkably similar in construction, style, and melody to Bononcini's old Roman setting of the same words. Likewise, the music for Serse's

climactic outburst, 'Crude furie degl'orridi abissi', was modelled on Bononcini's version, but Handel infinitely transcended his model in terms of harmonic invention, orchestral verve, and dramatic fieriness. In several arias he used only snippets from a few bars of Bononcini's settings within otherwise original music that went its own way (such as Arsamene's 'Meglio in voi' and Amastre's 'Or che siete, speranze, tradite'), whereas some of the briefest numbers remained closer to Bononcini, such as the melodramatic 'Ah, tigre infedele!' of Elviro (his gullible outrage in response to Atalanta's lie that Romilda no longer loves Arsamene but wishes to marry Serse) and the duet with continuo only, 'Lamerete?' / 'Lamerò' (in which Romilda sadly expresses her fidelity to Arsamene, thinking that he has betrayed her, and rejects Serse's renewed attempts at seduction). In some instances Handel avoided direct thematic quotation and instead composed original music in his own inimitable style while emulating Bononcini's tonality, structural concision, or orchestral scoring: the gorgeous Sinfonia introducing Romilda's 'O voi, che penate!' (sung off-stage from inside a summer house) follows Bononcini's use of two recorders, but the actual music of Handel is entirely different – not least because he had

already borrowed Bononcini's recorder parts in *Alexander's Feast* ('Thus long ago'). He had also borrowed from Bononcini's 'Già la tromba', a bass aria for Ariodate (surprisingly without trumpet), in *Alexander's Feast* to furnish a motif for strings in 'Revenge, Timotheus cries' (a bass aria which does have a trumpet), so when composing *Serse* he ignored Bononcini's music and its assignation to Ariodate, and instead transformed the text into an effective chorus (with trumpet).

Handel began composing *Serse* on 26 December 1737, only two days after he had completed another new opera, *Faramondo*. Although presumably busy with rehearsing *Faramondo* and giving its first performance on 3 January 1738, he completed Act I of *Serse* on 9 January, Act II on 25 January, and Act III on 6 February. Another eight days were spent filling in the orchestral details and refining the composition before the score was completed, on 14 February. His typically swift pace and resourceful treatment of musical themes and formal models borrowed from Bononcini (and to a much lesser degree from Alessandro Scarlatti, Telemann, and Keiser) should not be misconstrued as complacency, carelessness, or low imaginative powers. The autograph manuscript suggests that Handel invested

considerable creative skill in arias, which are tailored perfectly to the dramatic action: many of them were meticulously crafted, substantially redrafted, and often shortened; unusually, half of them are through-composed single-section arias without *da capo* repeats. Conventional longer *da capo* structures are consistently applied to emphasize moments of particular intensity or importance to characterisation. For example, three longer *da capo* arias illustrate Serse's extreme swings of mood. 'Più che penso alle fiamme' (Act I, Scene 11) portrays the naïve would-be lover fantasising with exaggerated sentimentality (as in 'Ombra mai fu'). In contrast, the animated response of Serse to rejection by Romilda in 'Se bramate d'amar chi vi sdegnate' (Act II, Scene 4) is an arrogant self-deception, and hints at the ill-tempered, venomous bully exposed later in the petulant climax, 'Crude furie degl'orridi abissi' (Act III, Scene 11). These bigger arias show us that the fickle Serse is untrustworthy, and that his rage is never far from boiling point, where it will have violent consequences. His position of absolute power over those around him makes this erratic behaviour physically dangerous: the sappy fool who heaps adoration upon an attractive tree, and who fancifully imagines that his brother's lover, Romilda, will welcome his

advances, is equally hasty when banishing his brother, Arsamene, in an attempt to steal his girlfriend. He callously betrays his fiancée, Amastre, and threatens the woman he supposedly loves with death when his lust is irrevocably thwarted. This behaviour all seems plausibly connected to the maniac who, according to Herodotus, whipped the Hellespont and murdered a group of innocent skilled workers for having followed his own instructions.

Arsamene is characterised by ardent love music or lilting sicilianos to which he mourns his ill fortune ('Quella che tutta fé per me languia d'amore', Act II, Scene 7), but his occasional displays of assertiveness (e.g. 'Si, la voglio e l'otterrò!', Act II, Scene 9) do not possess the childish or psychopathic tendencies of his volatile brother. Handel also composed potent outbursts for Amastre, whose anger at rejection leads her to a courageous pursuit of vengeance. The initial mocking by Romilda of Serse's attitude towards the plane-tree soon turns to discomfort when she instead becomes the object of Serse's attention; her sentimental and dignified manner portrays her as the perfect match for Arsamene, whereas her sister, Atalanta, is one of Handel's most entertaining flirtatious schemers (her flighty

'Un cenno leggiadretto' ends Act I with an irresistible coquettishness, and is another movement which Handel modelled directly on Bononcini's more straight-forward setting of the same words). Their father, Ariodate, is portrayed as a dim-witted but well-meaning soldier, but the only outright comic character is Arsamene's servant, Elviro. Legend has it that Handel based the music which Elviro sings whilst disguised as a flower seller on cries from the streets of London; this possibility is supported by a fragment of music in the composer's own handwriting, now at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, which contains a transcription of a cry from a match-seller heard 'near a brandy shop St Giles's in Tyburn Road'.

Serse abounds in dramatic subtleties and genius typical of Handel, but the excellence of his opera was lost in transmission. *Serse* was only performed five times and never revived, which ranks it as one of his worst commercial failures. It did not help that the 1737–38 season at the King's Theatre was organised peculiarly: after an intense few years of rivalry, the Opera of the Nobility (1733–37) and Handel's Covent Garden company (1734–37) had wiped each other out by the catastrophic end of the 1736–37 season, when Handel suffered a serious stroke

that temporarily left him partly paralysed. Even before the season's end, the manager of the King's Theatre, John Jacob Heidegger, had entered into negotiations with Handel to cut their losses and consolidate resources for their next season. After such an intense rivalry, it seems that the aristocratic sponsors of the King's Theatre (the inheritors of the directorship of the old Royal Academy of Music) eventually acknowledged that they needed Handel back, whilst their former Director of Music accepted that the precarious state of opera in London and his own fragile health would make it impossible for him to continue on his own with the sort of independence he had cultivated during the earlier 1730s: he had grown accustomed to carrying sole responsibility for an entire season's repertoire and musical direction, but now he was content to return to being a hired gun, albeit only for the short term. The musical direction of the 1737–38 season was shared by Giovanni Battista Pescetti (c. 1704–1766) and Francesco Maria Veracini (1690–1768); Handel probably agreed to compose only two new operas (*Faramondo* and *Serse*) for the makeshift King's Theatre company, but also provided the pasticcio *Alessandro Severo*. He was reportedly paid the respectable fee of £1,000 and

promised a lucrative benefit oratorio concert (which would earn him another £1,000).

It seems that matters were harmonious neither behind the scenes nor onstage. Two days after the final performance of *Serse*, the fourth Earl of Shaftesbury reported to Handel's friend James Harris that the opera is 'beyond all doubt a fine composition', but that 'The singers perform it very indifferently which is a great disadvantage to it'. Moreover, recent research has revealed that the star castrato Gaetano Majorano (1710–1783; known as 'Caffarelli') and Handel did not get on, particularly after the petulant singer discouraged friends from attending Handel's performances of *Faramondo*. His contentious relationship with Handel may have been further aggravated by the unheroic role assigned to him in *Serse*; it is certainly possible that the singer for whom Handel composed 'Ombra mai fu' was not in the least bit grateful. The contralto Antonia Margherita Merighi (fl. 1711–40) (Amastre) had sung for Handel at the beginning of the decade, in repertoire including the similar role of Rosmira in *Partenope* (also based on an old Stampiglia libretto). The bass Antonio Montagnana (fl. 1730–50) (Ariodate) had also been a member of Handel's company (in 1732–33). The cast included as well the

mezzo-soprano Maria Antonia Marchesini (*fl.* 1736–39), called ‘La Lucchesina’, whose skill at performing male characters was required for the role of Arsamene. Atalanta was sung by the soprano Margherita Chimenti (*fl.* 1733–46) (‘La Droghierina’), and Elviro by the little-known bass Antonio Lottini (*fl.* 1717–65). Romilda was sung by the trilingual French soprano Elisabeth du Parc (d. 1778?), called ‘La Francesina’, who became the regular leading soprano of Handel for the next eight years – during which he wrote superb soprano parts for her in some of his greatest English-language masterpieces: *Saul* (1739), *Song for St Cecilia’s Day* (1739), *L’Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* (1740), *Semele* (1744), *Belshazzar* (1745), and *Hercules* (1745).

There was some good news for Handel at around this time. On 15 April 1738, the same date as the opera’s premiere, the *London Daily Post* reported the unveiling of the famous statue of the composer by Louis-François Roubiliac at Vauxhall Gardens (now in the Victoria & Albert Museum). It was extraordinary to erect a monument to a living artist. But although the composer’s reputation appeared securely immortalised in marble, the short-term fate of *Serse* was less fortunate. The opera was not performed

again until Oskar Hagen’s arrangement was staged at Göttingen on 5 July 1924. Several productions in the USA soon followed, and the first British revival took place at Loughton, Essex on 15 June 1935. In recent decades it has become one of Handel’s most popular and admired operas, largely thanks to the witty and uncut production by Nicholas Hytner for English National Opera, mounted to celebrate the composer’s 300th birthday on 23 February 1985 (and often revived since), and a few recordings. This improvement in the opera’s fortunes is echoed by the contradictory attitudes found in critical commentaries on the opera: in 1789 the music historian Charles Burney claimed that *Serse* was full of ‘feeble writing’ and expressed intense dislike for its ‘mixture of tragic-comedy and buffoonery’, whereas more recently the great Handel scholar Winton Dean judged astutely that the composer’s ‘treatment of character and incident carries conviction on all levels’, and that *Serse* ‘springs to palpitating life in the theatre’. Anthony Hicks praised it as ‘one of the composer’s most consistently satisfying scores, moving surefootedly between farce and tragedy’. Nowadays, it seems indisputable that this anti-heroic opera is one of Handel’s most affectionately ironic, warm-hearted,

unusually sentimental, and insightfully characterised operas.

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To the Reader.

The contexture of this Drama is so very easy, that it wou'd be troubling the reader to give him a long argument to explain it. Some imbecillities, and the temerity of Xerxes (such as his being deeply enamour'd with a plane tree, and the building a bridge over the Hellespont to unit Asia to Europe) are the basis of the story; the rest is fiction.

Synopsis

Act I

In a garden in Abydos, with a summer house on one side, the Persian King Serse (Xerxes) rapturously praises a plane tree that offers him shade. His brother, Arsamene, accompanied by his drowsy servant, Elviro, enters in search of Romilda. They hear sweet music from the summer house; Romilda sings in gentle mockery of the love of the king for a tree that can only return his ardour with the rustle of its leaves. Serse becomes infatuated with the captivating voice of the singer and declares he wants to marry her. The anxious Arsamene initially denies knowing her identity, then he

admits that he knows her name, but suggests it is unlawful for the king to marry anyone who is less than a queen. He refuses an order to woo Romilda on behalf of Serse, claiming shyness, so the king departs, intending to speak to her himself. Arsamene vows that he alone shall have Romilda. He goes to warn Romilda of the king's obsessive amorous intent towards her, but their conversation inadvertently gives hope to Romilda's infatuated sister, Atalanta, who desires Arsamene for herself and hopes Romilda will accept the king's proposition. Arsamene hides when Serse arrives. The king invites Romilda to share his throne; she declines diplomatically but the king will not take no for an answer. Arsamene emerges from hiding to protest vociferously, but is banished – although Serse suggests he might show compassion if Romilda is yielded to him. The king declares his love to Romilda, but she remains steadfast to Arsamene.

In a courtyard, the princess Amastre, who is betrothed to him, is not yet aware that she has been abandoned by Serse; disguised as a man, she withdraws to one side when the general Ariodate, the father of Romilda and Atalanta, and his soldiers enter with prisoners and insignia captured after battle with the enemy. Serse rewards his general

with an ambiguous promise that his daughter Romilda shall marry a royal husband 'equal to Xerxes'; Ariodate joyfully departs with his troops, and Serse interprets the victory as a good omen for his love. Amastre overhears, and is enraged when she realises that he desires another woman; she nearly gives away her identity by shouting an accusation of falsehood. When challenged by Serse, Amastre pretends to have had an argument with 'his' page about the feasibility of a bridge over the Hellespont; Serse dismisses Amastre, assuming 'him' to be a soldier of unsound mind, and contemplates how his love for Romilda increases in its intensity every hour. Arsamene gives Elviro a letter to Romilda, asking for a clandestine meeting; Elviro wavers, complaining that his master's misfortune has landed him in trouble, but rushes off promising to accomplish his mission in an expedient way. Amastre plots revenge upon Serse. Atalanta lies to Romilda that Arsamene has found a new lover, and advises her sister to accept the king's offer, but Romilda sees through her sister's schemes. Atalanta resolves to use her charms to seduce Arsamene.

Act II

In a public square, Amastre laments her

fading hopes. She meets Elviro (disguised as a flower seller and speaking in a broken dialect in order to avoid detection), and learns from him about the love triangle involving Romilda, Arsamene, and Serse. Elviro, terrified that he may have revealed too much, leaves Amastre disconsolate. Elviro bumps into Atalanta, and when she buys some flowers he reveals his identity and secret purpose to her. She eagerly takes Arsamene's letter to Romilda, promising to deliver it to her sister, but deceives Elviro into believing that Romilda has abandoned Arsamene and now loves Serse. At the approach of the king, the mortified Elviro exits hastily to search for his master. Serse finds Atalanta reading the letter; he recognises his brother's handwriting, but Atalanta claims the letter is addressed to her, and that Arsamene truly loves her. The delighted Serse takes the letter, and agrees she can marry his brother, but Atalanta warns him that Arsamene will deny everything because he wishes to keep their love secret. The king confronts Romilda with the letter. She believes it to be a love letter to her sister, but sorrowfully insists she must always love Arsamene even if he has betrayed her. Serse departs furiously, exclaiming that he would treat her disdainfully, just as his brother does, if it would cause her to requite

his passion. Alone, Romilda admits her jealousy. Amastre attempts to kill herself, but is prevented by Elviro and runs away. Arsamene is devastated when Elviro informs him that Romilda now loves Serse.

On the shores of the Hellespont, a chorus of mariners congratulates Serse on the building of his bridge connecting Asia to Europe. The king orders Ariodate to muster the army and declares his plan to advance into Europe before the dawn of the third day. He meets the dejected Arsamene, tells him that he is no longer angry, and promises that he can have the woman he really loves. Arsamene suspects that it is a cruel jest; when his brother offers him Atalanta he defiantly demands Romilda. Serse advises Atalanta to abandon her love for Arsamene, but she cannot forget him; the king reflects on the unstable, conflicting emotions of love. Elviro, looking for his master, notices a rising storm that threatens to wreck the bridge, and seeks solace in wine (observing that he prefers it to water).

In 'a place of retirement contiguous to the town', Serse meets the disguised Amastre, who claims to be a soldier wounded whilst fighting in the king's army. The king asks 'him' to re-enter his service, but their conversation is interrupted by Romilda; she rejects the bullying demands of the king that

she marry him, insisting that she puts love above wealth and fortune. Amastre rushes forward, warns Romilda not to trust Serse, calls him a traitor, and draws her sword. Serse departs angrily, Amastre fights but is arrested by the royal guards. She is released by Romilda who sends the guards away. Alone, Romilda pays tribute to lovers whose fidelity is unswerving.

Act III

In a gallery, Arsamene and Romilda are quarrelling; they (and Elviro) demand an explanation from Atalanta, who admits her deception (albeit with some contrived excuses). Arsamene and Romilda fall into each other's arms, and Atalanta decides to ensnare a new lover. At the king's approach, Elviro runs away and Arsamene hides. Serse asks Romilda why she released the soldier who had been arrested (i.e. the disguised Amastre), and reiterates his proposal of marriage – though with increasingly threatening implications should she refuse. Romilda desperately consents that she will marry Serse if he obtains the permission of her father; the king departs blissfully. Arsamene bitterly reproaches Romilda for her action, but she bids him farewell, saying that it is not marriage that awaits her, but death.

In a grove of trees, Serse asks Ariodate if he is happy for Romilda to have 'a consort of our royal blood'. The overjoyed father is told that 'a person whom thou'lt own Equal to us, and of our royal stem' will visit his family's apartment, and that Romilda is to accept this man as her husband. Ariodate assumes that the king refers to Arsamene and gladly agrees. Meanwhile, Romilda disdains the king's offered diadem and returns it, insinuating to Serse that Arsamene has made love to her more intimately than is appropriate for the chastity of the king's spouse. The enraged Serse accuses Romilda of inventing a ruse to thwart their wedding, and orders his guards to find and kill Arsamene at once, so that 'the widow of that kiss' will be free to marry him. Romilda asks the 'brave warrior' Amastre to help; Amastre asks her to give a letter to Serse and goes to warn Arsamene, but she grieves with the continuing torment of her betrayed love. Arsamene cynically accuses Romilda of lying about the death sentence passed on him, and believes that she is trying to trick him in order to make him flee; they quarrel and exit at different parts of the stage.

In a large Temple of the Sun, its altar lit, a chorus of priests gather round the statue of Jupiter. Romilda and Arsamene enter, still

quarrelling, but they are joyfully reconciled when Ariodate joins their hands and tells them that they are married at the king's command. Serse appears, hoping to surprise Ariodate with the revelation that he himself is the bridegroom promised at Romilda's wedding; he is infuriated when Ariodate explains that Romilda is already married to Arsamene. His fury boils over when a page brings a letter, which he assumes is from Romilda and which he passes to Ariodate to read aloud: the letter is the declaration by Amastre of her love for the king, but she accuses him of despising and betraying her, and tells him that heaven will punish his crimes. Serse loses his temper completely, and invokes the furies to shake their venom over him. Confronted by all the others, who try to appease him, Serse draws his sword and implacably orders Arsamene to murder Romilda with it. The disguised Amastre interrupts, offering to 'pierce th'ungrateful heart which has with treachery repaid true love'. When Serse eagerly assents, she snatches the sword out of his hand, tilts it at his own breast, and reveals her true identity. The shamed Serse repents, receives the forgiveness of Amastre, and blesses the marriage of Arsamene and Romilda. They all look forward to the restoration of calm,

happiness, and peace, and celebrate the union of love and honour.

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Quotations from the 1738 wordbook

The mezzo-soprano **Anna Stéphany** studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the National Opera Studio. In a repertoire ranging from Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, Bach's St Matthew Passion, Handel's *Theodora*, and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony to Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass*, Ravel's *L'Heure espagnole*, Martinů's *Julietta*, and Birtwistle's *The Mask of Orpheus*, she has appeared on concert platforms throughout the world, notably with the NDR Sinfonieorchester Hamburg, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Musikkollegium Winterthur, and Manchester Camerata; with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Jiří Bělohlávek, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra under Andris Nelsons, and Balthasar-Neumann-Chor under Thomas Hengelbrock; with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, London Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican Centre, and Gabrieli Consort & Players in Wrocław, Paris, and Madrid; and with Donald Runnicles at the BBC Proms

and Pierre Boulez in Paris. In the operatic world she has sung Laurette (Offenbach's *La Chanson de Fortunio*) at the Opéra Comique, Paris, Orlofsky (*Die Fledermaus*) and Octavian (*Der Rosenkavalier*) at the Bolshoi Theatre, Hermia (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) at Garsington Opera, Rosina (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) at Châtelet Théâtre musical de Paris, the title role in Charpentier's *Médée* at Chicago Opera Theater, Annio (*La clemenza di Tito*) at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, and Cherubino (*Le nozze di Figaro*) and Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*) at the Opernhaus Zürich. Anna Stéphany has recorded Mozart's Requiem with the London Symphony Orchestra under Sir Colin Davis and a disc of songs by Rodrigo with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under David Zinman.

The American counter-tenor **David Daniels** is known for his superlative artistry, magnetic stage presence, and a voice of singular warmth and surpassing beauty, which have helped him redefine the counter-tenor voice for the modern public. Highly sought after in works by Handel, Monteverdi, Gluck, Mozart, and Britten, he has appeared on the great operatic stages of the world, among others singing the title role in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* at The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, The

Metropolitan Opera, New York, and Lyric Opera of Chicago, the title roles in *Orlando*, *Tamerlano*, and *Rinaldo* at Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich, Didymus (*Theodora*) and the title role in *Giulio Cesare* at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Oberon (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) at The Metropolitan Opera, Teatro alla Scala, Milan, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona, Bertarido (*Rodelinda*) and the title role in *Giulio Cesare* at The Metropolitan Opera, Arsamene (*Serse*) at Houston Grand Opera, and the title role in *Radamisto* and Arsace (*Partenope*) at Theater an der Wien, Vienna. At Santa Fe Opera he created the role of Oscar Wilde in Theodore Morrison's *Oscar*. As much at home in recital as on the opera stage, he is much admired for his performances of lieder and art song and has given recitals in New York, London, Paris, Munich, Berlin, Hamburg, Vienna, Barcelona, and Moscow, as well as at the Edinburgh International, Tanglewood, and Ravinia festivals. David Daniels is much in demand on the concert platform and has recorded prolifically.

A true contralto with a wide vocal range, **Hilary Summers** has excited the attention of many contemporary composers. Since 2002 she has performed *Le Marteau sans*

maître by Pierre Boulez throughout Europe with the Ensemble Intercontemporain under the direction of the composer, and her recording of it with the same forces won a 2006 Grammy award. She has also worked extensively in the baroque repertoire and sings regularly with many of Europe's leading early instrument orchestras. A warm and long-standing association with William Christie and Les Arts Florissants has most recently led to her role as the Sorceress in Deborah Warner's production of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* in Vienna. She took part in the first performance in Russia of Handel's *Messiah* on period instruments. Among the many contemporary roles she has premiered are Stella (Elliott Carter's *What Next*) at the Staatsoper Berlin, conducted by Daniel Barenboim, and Irma (Peter Eötvös's *Le Balcon*) at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. She created the role of Miss Prism (*The Importance of Being Earnest*) in concert performances of Gerald Barry's new work and reprised the role at the Linbury Studio in London in June 2013 before embarking with the production on a tour of Ireland. With Christian Curnyn and the Early Opera Company, Hilary Summers has recorded Handel's *Semele*, *Partenope*, *Flavio*, and *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*.

The bass **Brindley Sherratt** has sung a vast operatic repertoire, including Sarastro (*Die Zauberflöte*), Claggart (*Billy Budd*), Prince Gremin (*Eugene Onegin*), Pimen (*Boris Godunov*), Rocco (*Fidelio*), Sparafucile (*Rigoletto*), Pogner (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*), Fasolt (*Das Rheingold*), Filippo (*Don Carlo*), Banco (*Macbeth*), Claudio (*Agrippina*), Bottom (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), and Fiesco (*Simon Boccanegra*), in such prestigious houses as the Wiener Staatsoper, Bayerische Staatsoper, The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, English National Opera, Welsh National Opera, Opera North, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Staatsoper Hamburg, De Nederlandse Opera, Opéra de Nice, Teatro de la Maestranza, Seville, Opéra national de Bordeaux, and Santa Fe Opera. In concert Brindley Sherratt has sung at the BBC Proms and Three Choirs Festival, as well as at the festivals of Bregenz, Edinburgh, Lucerne, and Salzburg, highlights including appearances with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra under Daniel Harding, Rotterdams Philharmonisch under Harry Bicket, Chamber Orchestra of Europe under John Nelson, Orchestra of the Royal Opera House under Sir Antonio Pappano, Scottish Chamber Orchestra under Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie

Bremen under Louis Langrée, Hallé under Sir Mark Elder, and BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sir Andrew Davis.

In the opera house the soprano **Rosemary Joshua** has appeared as the Vixen (*The Cunning Little Vixen*) and Tytania (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) at Teatro alla Scala, Milan, Anne Trulove (*The Rake's Progress*) and Despina (*Così fan tutte*) at The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, Adele (*Die Fledermaus*) at The Metropolitan Opera, New York, Oscar (*Un ballo in maschera*) and the Vixen at De Nederlandse Opera, and Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*) at Glyndebourne Festival Opera and Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich. Particularly regarded internationally for her Handel roles, she has sung Angelica (*Orlando*) in Munich, at Covent Garden, and in Aix-en-Provence, Poppaea (*Agrippina*) in Cologne, Brussels, and Paris, Cleopatra (*Giulio Cesare*) in Amsterdam, Paris, and Florida, Ginevra (*Ariadante*) in Moscow and San Diego, and the title role in *Semele* in Aix-en-Provence, Innsbruck, Flanders, Cologne, at the BBC Proms, and at English National Opera, where she has also sung the title role in *Partenope*. She has sung Nitocris (*Belshazzar*) in Berlin, Toulouse, Aix-en-Provence, Innsbruck, and on tour with Les Arts Florissants under William Christie,

and the title role in *Theodora* on tour with The English Concert under Harry Bicket. The large discography of Rosemary Joshua includes recordings of the title roles in *Partenope* and *Semele* as well as Emilia (*Flavio*) with the Early Opera Company under Christian Curnyn, and a disc of Handel's Duets with Sarah Connolly and The English Concert under Harry Bicket, all for Chandos, the title role in *Esther* with the London Handel Festival Orchestra under Laurence Cummings, Angelica with Les Arts Florissants under William Christie, and Michal (*Saul*) with Concerto Köln under René Jacobs.

A native of Bolivar, New York, the soprano **Joëlle Harvey** is quickly becoming recognised as one of the most promising young talents of her generation. During the 2011 / 12 season she sang Galatea (Handel's *Acis and Galatea*) at the Teatro La Fenice, Venice and made her Glyndebourne Festival Opera debut in Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*. She also sang Handel's *Messiah* with the San Francisco Symphony, Bach's Mass in B minor at the BBC Proms and in Leipzig with The English Concert, and Michal (Handel's *Saul*) with The Sixteen in London. During the 2012 / 13 season she notably sang Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*) with Glyndebourne on Tour and Arizona Opera, *Messiah* and music from *Peer Gynt* with the

San Francisco Symphony under Michael Tilson Thomas, Tigrane (*Radamisto*) in a tour of the United States with Harry Bicket and The English Concert, Magnificats by Mendelssohn and Bach with the New York Philharmonic, Iphis (Handel's *Jephtha*) in a tour with the Handel and Haydn Society, Boston, and Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*) conducted by Marc Minkowski at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. In the near future Joëlle Harvey will sing Adina (*L'elisir d'amore*) and Serpette (*La finta giardiniera*) at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Erisbe (Cavalli's *Ormindo*) at Shakespeare's Globe, London in a collaboration with The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, Schubert's Mass No. 6 with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, and Dalila (*Samson et Dalila*) with the Handel and Haydn Society. She will also return to the New York Philharmonic and, in 2015, make her debut at Santa Fe Opera.

The German bass-baritone **Andreas Wolf** received his first musical education at the Kreismusikschule Harz in Wernigerode, Germany and was also a member of the renowned Rundfunk-Jugendchor Wernigerode. In 2002 he received a scholarship for the Hochschule für Musik Detmold where he studied with Professor Heiner Eckels.

Most recently he has appeared as Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) at the Teatro Real, Madrid, Falke (*Die Fledermaus*) and Jupiter (Rameau's *Platée*) at the Staatstheater Stuttgart, Elviro (Handel's *Serse*) at the Theater an der Wien, Vienna, Zoroastre (Handel's *Orlando*) at Scottish Opera, Guglielmo at the Macerata Opera Festival in the Sferisterio Arena, and Curio (Handel's *Giulio Cesare*) at the Salle Pleyel, Paris. He has sung Aeneas (*Dido and Aeneas*) with Les Arts Florissants in New York and Moscow, Clito (Handel's *Alessandro*) at the Festival international d'opéra baroque in Beaune, and Nanni (Haydn's *L'infedeltà delusa*) at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. Andreas Wolf has had the great pleasure of working with conductors such as William Christie, Jordi Savall, Andreas Sperring, Jérémie Rhorer, Alessandro De Marchi, René Jacobs, Jean-Christophe Spinosi, Paul Goodwin, and Marcus Creed.

Founded in 1994 by its music director, Christian Curnyn, the **Early Opera Company** is now firmly established as one of Britain's leading early music ensembles. Its debut production of Handel's *Serse* led to an invitation to perform at the BOC Covent Garden Festival, and to three performances of Handel's *Ariodante*. The Company made its

debut at St John's, Smith Square with concert performances of Charpentier's *Actéon* and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, and also staged Handel's *Orlando* at the Queen Elizabeth Hall as part of the Southbank Centre Early Music Festival, followed by national tours of Handel's *Susanna*, *Flavio*, and *Orlando*. Over the years the Company has also performed *Dido and Aeneas* at the Wigmore Hall, London, Vic Early Music Festival in Spain, and BBC Proms, Handel's *Partenope* at the Buxton Festival and Snape Proms, and Thomas Arne's *Alfred* at the Linbury Studio of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, given a live BBC Radio 3 broadcast from the Bristol Baroque Festival, and served as Associate Artists at the Spitalfields Music Summer Festival 2013. The Company appears regularly at the Wigmore Hall, has performed eleven seasons at the Iford Festival, and in 2014 will supply the orchestra for performances of Cavalli's *Ormindo* at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse in a collaboration between Shakespeare's Globe and The Royal Opera. The award-winning Chandos discography of the Early Opera Company includes recordings of Eccles's *The Judgment of Paris* and Handel's *Partenope*, *Semele*, *Flavio*, and *Alceste*, the last of which received superlative reviews in *Gramophone*, *BBC Music*, and *The Sunday*

Times, as well as winning the *BBC Music Magazine* Opera Award in 2013.
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Christian Curnyn has emerged as one of the most sought-after conductors specialising in baroque and classical repertoire. After reading Music at the University of York, he took postgraduate studies on harpsichord at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Founder and director of the Early Opera Company, he has conducted the ensemble in all its staged productions, concert performances, and recordings.

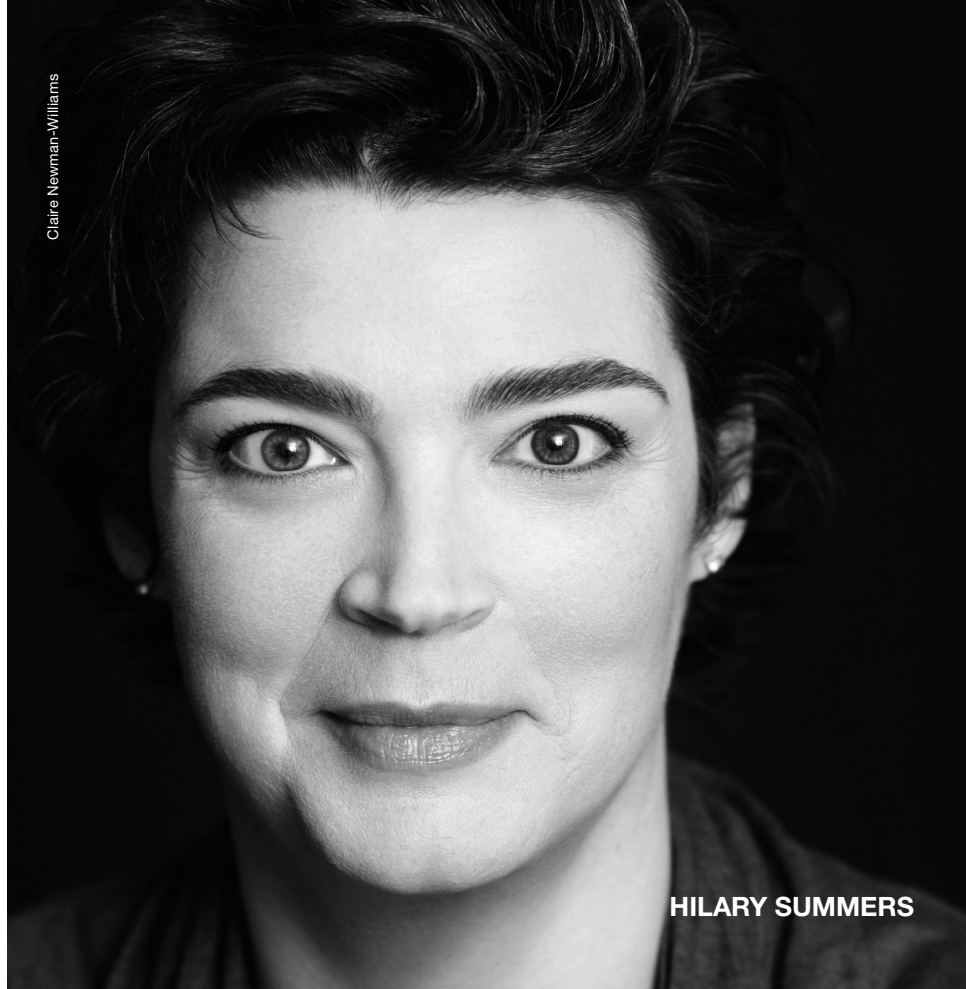
In recent years he has also conducted regularly at English National Opera, among others Handel's *Partenope*, *After Dido* (Katie Mitchell's realisation of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*), Rameau's *Castor and Pollux* (in Barrie Kosky's new Olivier Award-winning production), Handel's *Giulio Cesare*, and Charpentier's *Médée*. He has conducted *Dido and Aeneas* in Aldeburgh as part of the Britten centenary celebrations, Handel's *Ariodante* in Salzburg, a revival of Rameau's *Platée* in Stuttgart, Handel's *Semele* and a new production of Handel's *Tamerlano* at Scottish Opera, Handel's *Saul* at Opera North, Britten's realisation of *The Beggar's Opera* at The Royal

Opera, Covent Garden, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Semele*, and Cavalli's *Eliogabalo* at Grange Park Opera, Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* and Handel's *Orlando* and *Alcina* at Opera Theatre Company, Dublin, Handel's *Jephtha* at the Händel-Festspiele Halle, *Partenope* and *Così fan tutte* at New York City Opera, as well as performances at Chicago Opera Theater, Opera Australia, Salzburger Landestheater, Oper Frankfurt, and Oper Stuttgart.

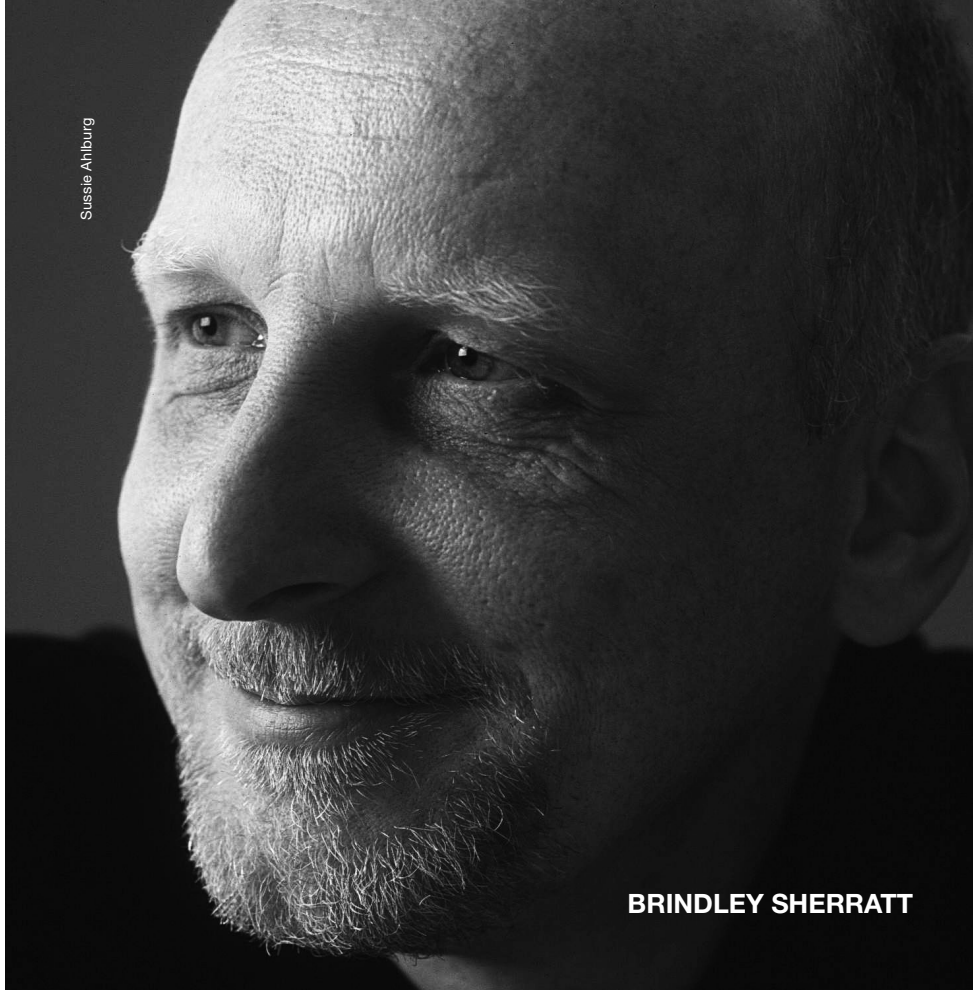
In concert he has conducted the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, The English Concert, Stavanger Symphony Orchestra, Ulster Orchestra, Wrocław Baroque Orchestra, Hallé, and Irish Baroque Orchestra, and appeared at the Händel-Festspiele in Karlsruhe and Halle. For Chandos, he has recorded several operas by Handel with the Early Opera Company as well as Britten's *The Beggar's Opera* with the City of London Sinfonia.

In addition to giving further performances with the Early Opera Company, Christian Curnyn is scheduled to return to English National Opera with Handel's *Rodelinda*, make his debut at Komische Oper Berlin, and perform Cavalli's *Ormindo* with the orchestra of the Early Opera Company in a collaboration between The Royal Opera and Shakespeare's Globe. www.christiancurnyn.com /
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Claire Newman-Williams



HILARY SUMMERS



Sussie Ahlburg

BRINDLEY SHERRATT



ROSEMARY JOSHUA

Peter Warren

HÄNDEL: SERSE, HWV 40

Serse (Xerxes) wurde am 15. April 1738 im King's Theatre am Haymarket uraufgeführt, nur wenige Jahre bevor Händel seine langen Bemühungen aufgab, das Londoner Publikum von dem aus Italien eingeführten *dramma per musica* zu überzeugen. Die späte Position, die *Serse* in seinem Operschaffen einnimmt, hat einige Musikwissenschaftler dazu bewegt, das ungewöhnlich ironische Libretto, die komischen Situationen, die flexible dramatische Konstruktion und die große Zahl kurzer Arien als einen progressiven, vorwärtsgerichteten Vorläufer von Mozarts ein halbes Jahrhundert später entstandenen überaus komplexen Komödien anzusehen. Tatsächlich aber hat *Serse* seine Wurzeln im Venedig des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts: Der Dichter Nicolò Minato (um 1630 – 1698) schrieb das originale Libretto für das Teatro SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Venedig, wo es 1655 zu Musik von Pier Francesco Cavalli (1602 – 1676) uraufgeführt wurde.

Minatos gedrucktes Libretto enthielt ein *Argomento*, das erklärte, dass es sich

bei der Handlung um eine Mischung aus vorgeblichen Wahrscheinlichkeiten und der Darstellung historischer Ereignisse handelte, wie sie in einem Bericht über die Griechisch-Persischen Kriege von Herodot (um 485 – um 425 v. Chr.) enthalten sind. Der Sohn von Darius dem Großen, König Xerxes I., herrschte von 486 bis zu seiner Ermordung durch einen Höfling im Jahr 465 über das Achämeniden-Reich; er könnte mit dem persischen Monarchen identisch sein, der im alttestamentlichen Buch Esther den Namen "Ahasverus" trägt, obwohl die biblische Geschichte keine Hinweise auf bekannte historische Ereignisse in der Regierungszeit von Xerxes enthält (somit bestehen weiterhin gewisse Zweifel, ob die beiden Namen sich auf dieselbe historische Person beziehen). Im Jahr 480 bereitete Xerxes eine ambitionierte militärische Expedition an Land und zur See vor, um Griechenland zu erobern. Der neuartigste Aspekt dieser Kampagne war die Konstruktion einer Brücke über den Hellespont (die heutigen Dardanellen), eine Meerenge von mehr als einem Kilometer

Breite, die sich von Abydos an der asiatischen Küste nach Sestos auf der europäischen Seite erstreckt. Herodot berichtet, dass Xerxes auf seinem Weg nach Abydos

auf eine Platane von solcher Schönheit traf, dass er sich dazu hinreißen ließ, sie mit goldenen Ornamenten zu schmücken und einen Wächter zu bestimmen, der sie dauerhaft bewachen sollte.

Nachdem er den Hellespont erreichte, entdeckte Xerxes, dass seine Ingenieure nach seinen Anweisungen eine zweistrangige Brücke errichtet hatten, dass die Konstruktion aus Flachs und Papyrus aber in einem heftigen Sturm zerstört worden war. Der verärgerte Herrscher köpfte seine Ingenieure und befahl, die Wasser des Hellespont sollten dreihundert Peitschenhiebe erhalten. Eine zweite Brücke wurde gebaut, indem man Boote miteinander verträute, über die man Holzplanken legte, die wiederum mit Reisig und Erde bedeckt wurden (das Übersetzen der persischen Truppen nach Sestos wird in Akt II, Szene 8 von Händels Oper erwähnt, das letztendliche Scheitern der Invasion und Xerxes' vernichtende Niederlage bei Salamis werden allerdings nicht dargestellt). Minato ergänzte die übliche Erklärung des Autors, "der Rest" sei "erfunden": Er erfand

die Geschichte von der Rivalität zwischen Xerxes und seinem Bruder Arsamenes (auch dieser eine historische Figur) um Romilda und vom Treuebruch des Königs gegenüber seiner Verlobten Amastris, die als Mann verkleidet in Abydos eintrifft und schon bald den Verrat des Königs entdeckt. Minato ergänzte sein Drama durch eine Vielzahl von Nebenfiguren, das Hauptinteresse der Handlung lag jedoch auf der unberechenbaren, zwanghaften und launischen Titelfigur.

Es ist kaum wahrscheinlich, dass Händel viel über Minato oder Cavalli wusste. Seine Bearbeitung basierte vielmehr auf einer radikal umgeschriebenen späteren Fassung des Librettos aus der Feder des Dichters Silvio Stampiglia (1664 – 1725), einem Mitglied der Arkadischen Akademie; dieses war 1694 von Giovanni Bononcini (1670 – 1747) für das römische Teatro di Torre di Nona vertont worden. Stampiglia behauptete unter Verwendung seines arkadischen Pseudonyms Palemone Licurio, er habe den alten venezianischen Text umgearbeitet, um ihn "der Genialität der modernen Zeiten anzupassen"; er tilgte einige von Minatos Szenen, fügte einige neue hinzu, veränderte zahlreiche Rezitative und schrieb neue Arientexte. Lediglich acht originale Arientexte

von Minato behielt er mit minimalen Änderungen bei, gewann aber einige neue Arien aus dessen Rezitativen. Händel war Stampiglia wahrscheinlich während seiner ausgedehnten Italienreise (1706 – 1710) in Rom begegnet, möglicherweise ergab sich der Kontakt über Kardinal Colonna, den Gönner des Dichters, oder über Mitglieder der ausgedehnten Kreise der Arkadischen Akademie. Vielleicht erinnerte sich Händel an seine Bekanntschaft mit Stampiglia, als er nach einer passenden Vorlage für eine seiner Opern für die Spielzeit 1737 / 38 am King's Theatre suchte; der eigentliche Katalysator für seine Entscheidung, *Serse* zu vertonen, war aber sicherlich seine große Vertrautheit mit Bononcini's Vertonung.

Eine handschriftliche Partitur von Bononcini's *Xerse*, die sich heute in der British Library befindet, wurde vermutlich 1707 in Rom für den siebzehnjährigen englischen Besucher John Blathwayt angefertigt, der später dem Direktorium der Royal Academy of Music angehörte (einer zur Aufführung von italienischen Opern in London gegründeten Gesellschaft, die von 1719 bis 1728 aktiv war und für die sowohl Händel als auch Bononcini arbeiteten). Es wird angenommen, dass Händel sich Blathwayts Handschrift auslieh, denn er ging ausgesprochen methodisch vor

und entnahm thematische Gedanken aus einunddreißig Nummern von Bononcini's Werk, die er in mindestens zehn verschiedenen zwischen 1734 und 1738 entstandenen Kompositionen verarbeitete – darunter die Meisterwerke *Ariodante* (1735), *Alcina* (1735), die Ode *Alexander's Feast* (1736), die Opern *Atalanta* (1736), *Arminio* (1736), *Giustino* (1737), *Berenice* (1737) und *Faramondo* (1738) sowie schließlich seine eigene Vertonung von *Serse*. Die enge Korrelation zwischen den Vertonungen von Bononcini und Händel lässt es plausibel erscheinen, dass Händel (mit oder ohne Unterstützung eines literarisch gebildeten italienischen Assistenten) seine eigene Fassung des Librettos unmittelbar auf der Basis von Bononcini's Partitur erstellte; keiner der Beteiligten hatte wahrscheinlich Zugang zu einem Exemplar des gedruckten Librettos von 1694. Der Umstand, dass Händel das Libretto direkt aus Bononcini's Partitur exzerpierte, könnte auch erklären, warum er solch archaische Versatzstücke wie den komischen Diener Elviro übernahm, während sonst in Londoner Bearbeitungen älterer italienischer Texte derartige Elemente gewöhnlich ausgelassen wurden.

Händels berühmte Eröffnungsszene, "Ombra mai fu" (die der Komponist mit

der Anweisung *Larghetto* versah, keinesfalls *Largo*) ist Bononcini's älterer römischer Vertonung derselben Worte in Aufbau, Stil und Melodie erstaunlich ähnlich. Auch die Musik für Serses kulminierenden Zornausbruch "Crude furie degl'orridi abissi" entstand in enger Anlehnung an Bononcini's Fassung, doch Händel geht in Bezug auf harmonische Erfindungsgabe, Elan des Orchesters und dramatisches Temperament weit über seine Vorlage hinaus. In einigen Arien verwendete er nur kurze, wenige Takte umfassende Bruchstücke von Bononcini's Vorlage innerhalb seiner eigenen, originalen Musik (zum Beispiel Arsamenes "Meglio in voi" und Amastres "Or che siete, speranza, tradite"), während einige der kürzesten Nummern sich enger an Bononcini anlehnten, etwa das melodramatische "Ah, tigre infedele!" von Elviro (seine leichtgläubige Entrüstung in Reaktion auf Atalantas Lüge, dass Romilda nicht mehr Arsamene liebe, sondern nun Serse heiraten wolle) und das nur vom Continuo begleitete Duett "L'amerete?" / "L'amerò" (in dem die traurige Romilda glaubt, von Arsamene betrogen worden zu sein, ihm aber trotzdem Treue schwört und sich zugleich gegen Serses erneute Versuche wehrt, sie zu verführen). In einigen Fällen vermied

Händel ein direktes thematisches Zitat und komponierte stattdessen originale Musik in seinem eigenen unvergleichlichen Stil, imitierte zugleich aber Bononcini's Tonart, bündige Struktur oder Orchestrierung: Die prachtvolle Sinfonia zu Beginn von Romilda's "O voi, che penate!" (hinter der Bühne aus dem Sommerhaus gesungen) folgt Bononcini in der Verwendung von zwei Blockflöten, doch die eigentliche Musik Händels ist völlig anders – nicht zuletzt weil er Bononcini's Flötenstimmen bereits für *Alexander's Feast* ("Thus long ago") entlehnt hatte. Auch Bononcini's "Già la tromba", eine Bassarie für Ariodate (überraschenderweise ohne Trompete) hatte er in *Alexander's Feast* für ein Streichermotiv in "Revenge, Timotheus cries" herangezogen (hier eine Bassarie mit Trompete); als er *Serse* komponierte, ignorierte er daher Bononcini's Musik und ihre Zuweisung an Ariodate und verwandelte den Text stattdessen in einen wirkungsvollen Chor (mit Trompete).

Händel nahm die Komposition von *Serse* am 26. Dezember 1737 auf, nur zwei Tage nachdem er eine weitere Oper vollendet hatte – *Faramondo*. Obwohl anzunehmen ist, dass er mit den Proben zu *Faramondo* beschäftigt war – die Uraufführung gab er am 3. Januar 1738 –, vollendete er Akt I

von *Serse* am 9. Januar, Akt II am 25. Januar und Akt III am 6. Februar. Weitere acht Tage verbrachte er damit, Einzelheiten der Orchestrierung einzutragen und die Komposition zu überarbeiten, bevor die Partitur am 14. Februar vollständig vorlag. Die für ihn typische rasche Arbeitsweise und einfallsreiche Behandlung der von Bononcini (und in geringerem Maße von Alessandro Scarlatti, Telemann und Keiser) entlehnten musikalischen Themen und Formschemata sollte man aber nicht als Überheblichkeit, Nachlässigkeit oder mangelnde Erfindungsgabe deuten. Das Autograph legt nahe, dass Händel erhebliche schöpferische Sorgfalt auf die Arien verwendete, die perfekt auf die dramatische Handlung zugeschnitten sind: Viele von ihnen wurden liebevoll ausgearbeitet, umfangreich revidiert und häufig gekürzt; ungewöhnlicher Weise handelt es sich bei der Mehrzahl um durchkomponierte einteilige Arien ohne Da capo. Konventionelle längere Da-capo-Strukturen werden durchwegs eingesetzt, um Momente von besonderer Intensität oder besonderer Bedeutung für die Charakterisierung einer Figur zu betonen. Drei ausgedehnte Da-capo-Arien zum Beispiel illustrieren Sertes extreme Stimmungswechsel. "Più che penso alle

fiamme" (Akt I, Szene 11) beschreibt den naiven Möchtegern-Liebhaber, der mit übertriebener Sentimentalität fantasiert (wie in "Ombra mai fu"). Sertes lebhaftes Reaktion auf Romildas Zurückweisung in "Se bramate d'amar chi vi sdegnate" (Akt II, Szene 4) hingegen zeigt ihn voller arroganter Selbsttäuschung und verweist bereits auf den übellunigen, giftigen Tyrannen, der später in dem gereizten Höhepunkt "Crude furie degl'orridi abissi" (Akt III, Szene 11) zutage tritt. Diese größeren Arien zeigen uns, dass dem wankelmütigen *Serse* nicht zu trauen ist und dass seine Wut immer kurz davor steht, überzuschäumen, mit fatalen Konsequenzen. Seine Position absoluter Macht über seine Umgebung macht dieses unberechenbare Verhalten zu einer konkreten physischen Gefahr: Der rührselige Narr, der einen reizvollen Baum mit grenzenloser Bewunderung überhäuft und sich einbildet, die Geliebte seines Bruders, Romilda, werde seine Annäherungsversuche begrüßen, handelt ebenso übertrieben, wenn er seinen Bruder Arsamene verbannt und ihm seine Freundin auszuspannen versucht. Er betrügt kaltschnäuzig seine Verlobte Amastre und bedroht die Frau, die er zu lieben vorgibt, mit dem Tod, als seine Begierde auf unumstößlichen Widerstand trifft. Sämtliche

Facetten dieses Verhaltens passen durchaus zu einem Besessenen, der, wie bei Herodot zu lesen ist, den Hellespont auspeitschen ließ und eine Gruppe unschuldiger Konstrukteure umbrachte, die letztlich nur seine Anweisungen befolgt hatten.

Arsamene wird durch sehnsüchtige Liebesweisen oder gefällige Sicilianos charakterisiert, zu denen er sein Unglück beklagt ("Quella che tutta fé per me languia d'amore", Akt II, Szene 7), doch seine gelegentlich zur Schau gestellte Durchsetzungskraft (z.B. "Si, la voglio e l'otterrò!", Akt II, Szene 9) besitzt nicht die bei seinem sprunghaften Bruder zu beobachtenden kindischen oder psychopathischen Tendenzen. Händel komponierte auch kraftvolle Gefühlsausbrüche für Amastre, deren Wut über ihre Zurückweisung sie zu einem couragierten Racheplan treibt. Romildas anfänglicher Spott über Serses außergewöhnliche Verehrung der Platane weicht schon bald tiefem Unbehagen, als sie selbst zum Objekt seiner Aufmerksamkeit wird; ihr empfindsames und würdevolles Auftreten lässt sie als die perfekte Partnerin für Arsamene erscheinen, während ihre Schwester Atalanta eine von Händels unterhaltsamsten verführerischen

Intrigantinnen ist (ihr flatterhaftes "Un cenno leggiadretto" beendet Akt I mit unwiderstehlicher Koketterie und ist ein weiterer Satz, den Händel direkt in Anlehnung an Bononcini's geradlinigere Vertonung derselben Worte schuf). Ihr Vater Ariodate wird als dümmlicher aber wohlmeinender Soldat dargestellt, die einzige unverblümt komische Figur ist hingegen Arsamenes Diener Elviro. Der Legende nach verarbeitete Händel in der Musik, die Elviro als Blumenverkäufer verkleidet singt, die Rufe, die auf den Straßen von London zu hören waren; diese Annahme wird gestützt von einem heute im Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge befindlichen Musikfragment von der Hand des Komponisten, auf dem dieser den Ruf einer Zündhölzerverkäuferin übertragen hat, den er "in der Nähe eines Branntweinladens in St. Giles in der Tyburn Road" gehört hatte.

Serse steckt voller dramatischer Subtilitäten und der für Händel typischen Genialität, doch die herausragende Qualität dieser Oper geriet im Laufe der Zeit in Vergessenheit. *Serse* wurde nur fünf Mal aufgeführt und nie wieder aufgegriffen; damit war die Oper einer der schlimmsten wirtschaftlichen Misserfolge des Komponisten. Hierzu trug auch der Umstand bei, dass die Spielzeit 1737 / 38 am King's

Theatre eigenwillig verlief: Nach einer Reihe von Jahren intensiver Rivalität zwischen der Opera of the Nobility (1733 – 1737) und Händels Covent Garden Company (1734 – 1737) hatten die beiden Häuser sich mit dem katastrophalen Ende der Spielzeit 1736 / 37 gegenseitig ausgelöscht, als Händel einen schweren Schlaganfall erlitt, woraufhin er eine Zeitlang teilweise gelähmt war. Noch vor Ende der Spielzeit war der Manager des King's Theatre John Jacob Heidegger mit Händel in Verhandlung getreten, um den Schaden zu begrenzen und ihre Ressourcen für die kommende Spielzeit zu konsolidieren. Es scheint als haben die aristokratischen Sponsoren des King's Theatre (die die Leitung der vormaligen Royal Academy of Music übernommen hatten) sich nach diesem intensiven Konkurrenzkampf schließlich eingestanden, dass sie nicht auf Händel verzichten konnten, während der vormalige Musikdirektor akzeptierte, dass die prekäre Lage der Londoner Oper und seine eigene geschwächte Gesundheit es ihm unmöglich machen würden, eigenständig und mit derselben Unabhängigkeit fortzufahren, die er in den frühen 1730er Jahren kultiviert hatte: Er war gewohnt gewesen, die alleinige Verantwortung für das Repertoire und die musikalische Leitung einer ganzen Spielzeit

zu übernehmen, doch nun begnügte er sich damit, zumindest für eine kurze Zeit lediglich angestellt zu sein. In der Spielzeit 1737 / 38 teilten sich Giovanni Battista Pescetti (um 1704 – 1766) und Francesco Maria Veracini (1690 – 1768) die musikalische Leitung; Händel erklärte sich wahrscheinlich bereit, für die zusammengestoppelte Truppe des King's Theatre lediglich zwei neue Opern zu komponieren (*Faramondo* und *Serse*), und steuerte außerdem noch das Pasticchio *Alessandro Severo* bei. Berichten zufolge erhielt er hierfür ein respektables Honorar von £ 1.000 und man versprach ihm ein lukratives Benefiz-Oratorienkonzert (das ihm weitere £ 1.000 einbringen würde).

Anscheinend war die Stimmung weder auf noch hinter der Bühne harmonisch. Zwei Tage nach der letzten Aufführung von *Serse* berichtete der vierte Earl of Shaftesbury Händels Freund James Harris, die Oper sei "ohne jeglichen Zweifel eine ausgezeichnete Komposition", doch "die Sänger führen sie recht gleichgültig auf und das gereicht ihr sehr zum Nachteil". Neuere Forschungsergebnisse belegen zudem, dass der berühmte Kastrat Gaetano Majorano (1710 – 1783, genannt "Caffarelli") und Händel nicht miteinander auskamen, besonders nachdem der launenhafte Sänger

Freunden davon abgeraten hatte, Händels Aufführungen von *Faramondo* zu besuchen. Seine kontroverse Beziehung zu Händel mag zusätzlich noch durch die unheroische Rolle belastet gewesen sein, die man ihm in *Serse* zuteilte; es ist jedenfalls durchaus möglich, dass der Sänger, für den Händel "Ombra mai fu" schrieb, dem Komponisten gegenüber alles andere als dankbare Gefühle hegte. Die Altistin Antonia Margherita Merighi (aktiv 1711 – 1740), die die Amastre gab, hatte schon zu Beginn des Jahrzehnts für Händel gesungen, wobei zu ihrem Repertoire auch die ähnliche Rolle der Rosmira in *Partenope* gehörte (auch diese Oper basierte auf einem alten Libretto von Stampiglia). Der Bassist Antonio Montagnana (aktiv 1730 – 1750) sang den Ariodate und hatte bereits 1732 / 33 zu Händels Operntruppe gehört. Ferner gehörte zur Besetzung die Mezzosopranistin Maria Antonia Marchesini (aktiv 1736 – 1739), genannt "La Lucchesina", deren Begabung als Darstellerin männlicher Charaktere für die Rolle des Arsamene benötigt wurde. Atalanta wurde von der Sopranistin Margherita Chimenti (aktiv 1733 – 1746, "La Droghierina") und Elviro von dem wenig bekannten Bassisten Antonio Lortini (aktiv 1717 – 1765) gesungen. Die Rolle der Romilda übernahm die dreisprachige

französische Sopranistin Elisabeth du Parc (gest. 1778?), genannt "La Francesina", die in den nächsten acht Jahren Händels führende Sopranistin sein würde; in dieser Zeit schrieb er für sie überragende Sopranpartien in einigen seiner großartigsten englischsprachigen Meisterwerke: *Saul* (1739), *Song for St Cecilia's Day* (1739), *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* (1740), *Semele* (1744), *Belsazzar* (1745) und *Hercules* (1745).

Um diese Zeit erhielt Händel eine erfreuliche Nachricht. Am 15. April 1738, dem Tag, an dem die Premiere der Oper stattfand, berichtete die *London Daily Post* von der Enthüllung der von Louis-François Roubiliac angefertigten berühmten Statue des Komponisten in Vauxhall Gardens (heute befindet sie sich im Victoria & Albert Museum). Es war außergewöhnlich, ein Denkmal für einen noch lebenden Künstler zu errichten. Doch obwohl nun die Reputation des Künstlers sicher in Marmor verewigt erschien, war *Serse* kurzfristig ein weniger glückliches Schicksal beschieden. Die Oper wurde nicht wieder aufgeführt, bis Oskar Hagens Bearbeitung am 5. Juli 1924 in Göttingen auf die Bühne kam. Bald folgte eine Reihe von Inszenierungen in den USA, und die erste britische moderne Aufführung fand am 15. Juni 1935 in Loughton (Essex)

statt. In den letzten Jahrzehnten avancierte das Werk zu einer der populärsten und meistbewunderten Opern Händels, nicht zuletzt dank der geistreichen ungekürzten Produktion von Nicholas Hytner für English National Opera, die anlässlich des 300sten Geburtstags des Komponisten am 23. Februar 1985 inszeniert (und seither häufig wiederbelebt) wurde, sowie einiger Einspielungen auf Tonträger. Diese glückliche Wendung im Schicksal der Oper spiegelt sich auch in den widersprüchlichen kritischen Kommentaren zu dem Werk: Der Musikhistoriker Charles Burney behauptete 1789, *Serse* sei voller "schwacher Passagen" und äußerte große Abscheu vor der dem Werk eigenen "Mischung aus Tragikomödie und Possenreißerei", während in jüngerer Zeit der große Händel-Forscher Winton Dean treffend urteilte, die "Behandlung von Charakteren und Ereignissen" durch den Komponisten sei "auf allen Ebenen überzeugend" und *Serse* erwache "auf der Bühne zu pulsierendem Leben". Anthony Hicks lobte die Oper als "eines der durchweg befriedigendsten Werke des Komponisten, das sich sicheren Fußes zwischen Farce und Tragödie bewegt". Heute erscheint es unumstritten, dass es sich bei dieser antiheroischen Oper um eines von Händels

ganz besonders liebevoll-ironischen, warmherzigen, ungewöhnlich sentimental und einfühlsam charakterisierten Bühnenwerken handelt.

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Übersetzung: Stephanie Wollny

An den Leser.

Der Gegenstand dieses Dramas ist so unkompliziert, dass es den Leser belästigen hieße, wollte man weit ausholen, um ihn zu erklären. Einige Einfältigkeiten sowie die Verwegenheit des Xerxes (etwa, dass er sich heftig in eine Platane verliebt hat und dass er eine Brücke über den Hellespont bauen lässt, um Asien und Europa zu vereinen) bilden die Grundlage der Geschichte; der Rest ist freie Erfindung.

Synopse

Erster Akt

In einem Garten in Abydos, auf dessen einer Seite ein Sommerhaus steht, singt der persische König Serse (Xerxes) verzückt ein Loblied auf eine Platane, die ihm Schatten spendet. Sein Bruder Arsamene erscheint in Begleitung seines schläfrigen Dieners Elviro auf der Suche nach Romilda. Aus dem Sommerhaus erklingt bezaubernde Musik;

Romilda singt mit mildem Spott von der Liebe des Königs zu einem Baum, der seine Inbrunst nur mit dem Rascheln seiner Blätter erwidern kann. Serse zeigt sich betört von der einnehmenden Stimme der Sängerin und erklärt, er wolle sie heiraten. Der beunruhigte Arsamene bestreitet zunächst, sie zu kennen, dann gesteht er ein, ihren Namen zu wissen, weist aber darauf hin, dass es für den König unrechtmäßig wäre, jemanden zu heiraten, der von niedrigerem Rang ist als eine Königin. Er weigert sich, Romilda an Serses Stelle den Hof zu machen, und täuscht Schüchternheit vor. Der König entfernt sich in der Absicht, sie selbst anzusprechen. Arsamene schwört, dass nur er allein Romilda besitzen werde. Er begibt sich zu ihr, um sie vor den stürmisch verliebten Absichten des Königs zu warnen, doch ihr Gespräch wird zufällig von Romildas Schwester Atalanta belauscht, die Arsamene für sich selbst gewinnen will und nun hofft, dass Romilda den Antrag des Königs annimmt. Als Serse auftaucht, versteckt sich Arsamene. Der König fordert Romilda auf, mit ihm den Thron zu teilen; sie lehnt mit diplomatischen Worten ab, doch der König akzeptiert keine Zurückweisung. Arsamene tritt aus seinem Versteck hervor und äußert lautstark seinen Protest, doch er wird verbannt – allerdings

deutet Serse an, dass er Gnade walten lassen wird, wenn Arsamene Romilda an ihn abtritt. Der König erklärt Romilda seine Liebe, doch sie bleibt Arsamene treu ergeben.

In einem Innenhof. Die Prinzessin Amastre, die mit Serse verlobt ist, weiß noch nicht, dass er sie verlassen hat. Als Mann verkleidet zieht sie sich auf eine Seite des Hofes zurück, als General Ariodate, der Vater von Romilda und Atalanta, mit seinen Soldaten erscheint; sie führen Gefangene und Insignien mit sich, die sie im Kampf mit dem Feind erbeutet haben. Serse belohnt seinen General mit dem zweideutigen Versprechen, seine Tochter Romilda werde einen königlichen Ehemann bekommen, "dem Xerxes ebenbürtig". Erfreut entfernt sich Ariodate mit seinen Truppen und Serse interpretiert den Sieg als gutes Omen für seine Liebe. Amastre überhört dies und ist wutentbrannt, als sie begreift, dass er eine andere Frau begehrt; sie bezichtigt ihn lautstark der Falschheit und läuft damit Gefahr, ihre wahre Identität zu verraten. Als Serse sie zur Rede stellt, gibt Amastre vor, mit "seinem" Pagen darüber gestritten zu haben, ob man eine Brücke über den Hellespont bauen könne. Serse entlässt Amastre in dem Glauben, einen geistig verwirrten Soldaten vor sich zu haben, und reflektiert darüber,

wie seine Liebe zu Romilda stündlich an Intensität zunimmt. Arsamene gibt Elviro einen Brief für Romilda, in dem er sie um ein heimliches Treffen bittet; Elviro zögert und klagt darüber, dass das Unglück seines Herrn ihn in Schwierigkeiten gebracht habe, doch er macht sich auf den Weg und verspricht, seinen Auftrag schnell auszuführen. Amastre plant, sich an Serse zu rächen. Atalanta belügt Romilda und erzählt ihr, Arsamene habe eine neue Geliebte; sie rate ihr daher, das Angebot des Königs anzunehmen. Doch Romilda durchschaut die Intrige ihrer Schwester. Atalanta beschließt, ihren Charme einzusetzen und Arsamene zu verführen.

Zweiter Akt

Auf einem öffentlichen Platz. Amastre beklagt ihre schwindenden Hoffnungen. Sie trifft Elviro (der als Blumenverkäufer verkleidet ist und in gebrochenem Dialekt spricht, um nicht erkannt zu werden) und erfährt durch ihn von der Dreiecksgeschichte zwischen Romilda, Arsamene und Serse. Elviro, der schreckliche Angst davor hat, zu viel verraten zu haben, verlässt die untröstliche Amastre. Er stößt zufällig auf Atalanta, und als sie ihm einen Blumenstrauß abkauft, gibt er sich zu erkennen und verrät ihr seinen geheimen Auftrag. Sie nimmt ihm bereitwillig Arsamenes

Brief an Romilda ab und verspricht, ihn ihrer Schwester auszuhändigen; allerdings behauptet sie Elviro gegenüber, dass Romilda Arsamene verlassen habe und nun Serse liebe. Als der König sich nähert, entfernt sich der beschämte Elviro hastig, um nach seinem Herrn zu suchen. Serse taucht auf, während Atalanta noch den Brief liest; er erkennt die Schriftzüge seines Bruders, doch Atalanta behauptet, der Brief sei an sie gerichtet und Arsamene liebe sie zutiefst. Der hocheufreute Serse nimmt den Brief an sich und erklärt, sie könne seinen Bruder heiraten, doch Atalanta warnt ihn, Arsamene werde alles abstreiten, da er ihre Liebe geheim halten wolle. Der König konfrontiert Romilda mit dem Brief. Sie glaubt ihm, dass es sich um einen Brief an ihre Schwester handelt, besteht aber voller Trauer darauf, dass sie Arsamene ewig lieben müsse, selbst wenn er sie betrogen habe. Serse geht wutentbrannt ab und ruft, auch er werde sie genau wie sein Bruder verächtlich behandeln, wenn das die Voraussetzung sei, dass sie seine Leidenschaft erwidere. Allein zurückgeblieben, gesteht Romilda sich ihre Eifersucht ein. Amastre versucht sich umzubringen, wird jedoch von Elviro daran gehindert und läuft davon. Arsamene ist untröstlich, als Elviro ihm mitteilt, dass Romilda nun Serse liebt.

An den Ufern des Hellespont gratuliert ein Chor von Matrosen Serse zum Bau seiner Brücke, die Asien und Europa verbindet. Der König weist Ariodate an, die Armee zu mustern, und erklärt seine Absicht, von Anbruch des dritten Tages in Europa einzumarschieren. Er trifft auf den niedergeschlagenen Arsamene, teilt ihm mit, dass er nicht mehr verärgert ist, und verspricht, dass Arsamene die Frau haben könne, die er wirklich liebt. Arsamene hält dies für einen grausamen Scherz; als sein Bruder ihm Atalanta anbietet, verlangt er trotzig nach Romilda. Serse rät Atalanta, ihre Liebe zu Arsamene aufzugeben, doch sie kann ihn nicht vergessen; der König sinniert über die instabilen und widersprüchlichen Gefühle der Liebe. Auf der Suche nach seinem Herrn bemerkt Elviro, dass ein Sturm aufkommt, der die Brücke zu zerstören droht; er sucht Trost im Wein (den er, wie er bemerkt, dem Wasser vorzieht).

Ein „abgelegener Ort in der Nähe der Stadt“. Serse trifft auf die verkleidete Amastre, die behauptet, ein im Armeedienst des Königs verwundeter Soldat zu sein. Der König weist „ihn“ an, in seine Dienste zurückzukehren, doch ihre Unterredung wird von Romilda unterbrochen; diese verweigert sich den drängenden Forderungen des Königs, ihn zu

heiraten, und insistiert weiterhin, dass ihr die Liebe wichtiger sei als Glück und Reichtum. Amastre drängt sich dazwischen, warnt Romilda, dass Serse nicht zu trauen sei, nennt ihn einen Verräter und zieht ihren Degen. Serse zieht sich wütend zurück, Amastre wirft sich in den Kampf, wird jedoch von den königlichen Wachen verhaftet. Sie wird von Romilda befreit, die die Wachen fortschickt. Allein zurückgeblieben, singt Romilda das Lob unerschütterlicher Liebe.

Dritter Akt

Auf einer Galerie. Arsamene und Romilda streiten sich; sie (und Elviro) verlangen eine Erklärung von Atalanta, die ihren Verrat eingesteht (wenn auch mit einigen erfundenen Ausreden). Arsamene und Romilda fallen sich in die Arme und Atalanta beschließt, einen neuen Liebhaber zu umgarnen. Als der König sich nähert, läuft Elviro davon und Arsamene versteckt sich. Serse fragt Romilda, warum sie den Soldaten befreit hat, der verhaftet worden war (d.h. die verkleidete Amastre) und wiederholt sein Heiratsangebot – allerdings droht er ihr mit zunehmend drastischen Konsequenzen für den Fall, dass sie sich weigern sollte. Verzweifelt willigt Romilda ein, Serse zu heiraten, sofern er die Erlaubnis ihres Vaters

gewinnt. Der König geht glücklich ab. Arsamene macht Romilda bittere Vorwürfe für ihr Vorgehen, doch sie sagt ihm Lebewohl und erklärt, nicht eine Heirat stehe ihr bevor, sondern der Tod.

Unter einer Baumgruppe. Serse fragt Ariodate, ob er sich für Romilda freue, einen "Gemahl von unserem königlichen Blut" zu gewinnen. Der übergläckliche Vater erfährt, "eine Person, die Sie als uns ebenbürtig ansehen werden und die unserer königlichen Linie entstammt", werde die Gemächer seiner Familie besuchen und Romilda werde diesen Mann als ihren Gemahl akzeptieren. Ariodate nimmt an, dass der König sich auf Arsamene bezieht und gibt freudig seine Einwilligung. Inzwischen lehnt Romilda das ihr vom König dargebotene Diadem ab und sendet es zurück; dabei deutet sie Serse gegenüber an, dass Arsamene sich ihr als Geliebter vertraulicher genähert habe, als es sich für die Keuschheit einer königlichen Braut ziemen würde. Wutentbrannt wirft Serse Romilda vor, eine List anzuwenden, um ihr Hochzeit zu verhindern; er befiehlt den Wachen, Arsamene sofort aufzuspüren und umzubringen, so dass "die Witwe dieses Kusses" frei sei, ihn zu ehelichen. Romilda ersucht den "tapferen Krieger" Amastre um Hilfe; Amastre bittet sie, Serse einen

Brief zu übermitteln und macht sich auf, Arsamene zu warnen, doch sie leidet unter den fortdauernden Qualen ihrer betrogenen Liebe. Der misstrauische Arsamene wirft Romilda vor, die Nachricht von seiner Verurteilung zum Tod entspreche nicht der Wahrheit; er glaubt, sie wende eine List an, um ihn zur Flucht zu bewegen. Sie streiten sich und gehen auf verschiedenen Seiten der Bühne ab.

In einem großen Sonnentempel. Der Altar ist erleuchtet und ein Chor von Priestern schart sich um die Statue des Jupiter. Romilda und Arsamene treten ein, noch immer zerstritten, doch sie versöhnen sich voller Freude, als Ariodate ihre Hände ineinander legt und ihnen mitteilt, dass sie auf Befehl des Königs verheiratet werden. Serse erscheint; er hofft, Ariodate mit der Offenbarung zu überraschen, dass er selbst der Romilda versprochene Bräutigam sei. Zornentbrannt erfährt er von Ariodate, dass Romilda bereits mit Arsamene vermählt ist. Seine Wut schäumt über, als ein Page einen Brief bringt, den er für ein Schreiben Romildas hält und den er an Ariodate weiterreicht, damit dieser ihn laut vorlese. Doch es handelt sich um Amastres Liebeserklärung an den König, in der sie ihm vorwirft, sie zu verachten und zu betrügen; sie erklärt, der Himmel werde seine

Verbrechen bestrafen. Serse verliert nun völlig die Beherrschung und ruft die Furien an, sie mögen ihr Gift über ihn ausschütten. Als alle anderen ihm entgegentreten und versuchen, ihn zu beruhigen, zieht Serse seinen Degen und befiehlt Arsamene unerbittlich, Romilda damit zu ermorden. Die verkleidete Amastre fährt dazwischen und schlägt vor, "das undankbare Herz zu durchbohren, das wahre Liebe mit Verrat vergolten hat". Als Serse eifrig zustimmt, entwendet sie ihm den Degen, richtet ihn auf seine eigene Brust und enthüllt ihre wahre Identität. Der beschämte Serse zeigt Reue, erlangt Amastres Vergebung und segnet die Heirat von Arsamene und Romilda. Alle freuen sich auf die Rückkehr von Ruhe, Glückseligkeit und Frieden und feiern die Vereinigung von Liebe und Ehre.

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Übersetzung: Stephanie Wollny

Zitate aus dem gedruckten Libretto von 1738

Die Mezzosopranistin **Anna Stéphany** studierte an der Guildhall School of Music and Drama und am National Opera Studio. Mit einem Repertoire, das von Monteverdis *Orfeo*, Bachs Matthäus-Passion, Händels *Theodora* und Beethovens Neunter Sinfonie bis zu Janáčeks *Glagolitischer Messe*, Ravels

L'Heure espagnole, Martinüs *Julietta* und Birtwistles *The Mask of Orpheus* reicht, ist sie auf den Konzertpodien der ganzen Welt aufgetreten, darunter besonders mit dem NDR Sinfonieorchester Hamburg, dem BBC National Orchestra of Wales, dem Musikkollegium Winterthur und der Manchester Camerata, mit dem BBC Symphony Orchestra unter Jiří Bělohávek, dem City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra unter Andris Nelsons und dem Balthasar-Neumann-Chor unter Thomas Hengelbrock, mit dem Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment im Concertgebouw Amsterdam, dem London Symphony Orchestra im Barbican Centre und dem Gabrieli Consort & Players in Wrocław, Paris und Madrid sowie schließlich mit Donald Runnicles auf den BBC Proms und mit Pierre Boulez in Paris. Auf der Opernbühne hat sie die Laurette (Offenbachs *La Chanson de Fortunio*) an der Opéra Comique in Paris, Orlofsky (*Die Fledermaus*) und Octavian (*Der Rosenkavalier*) am Bolschoi-Theater, Hermia (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) an der Garsington Opera, Rosina (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) am Châtelet Théâtre musical de Paris, die Titelrolle in Charpentier's *Médée* am Chicago Opera Theater, Annio (*La clemenza di Tito*) auf dem Festival d'Aix-

en-Provence sowie Cherubino (*Le nozze di Figaro*) und Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*) am Opernhaus Zürich gesungen. Anna Stéphany hat Mozarts Requiem mit dem London Symphony Orchestra unter Sir Colin Davis und eine CD mit Liedern von Rodrigo mit dem BBC Symphony Orchestra unter David Zinman aufgenommen.

Der amerikanische Countertenor **David Daniels** ist bekannt für sein überragendes Künstlertum, seine magnetisierende Bühnenpräsenz und eine Stimme von einzigartiger Wärme und unvergleichlicher Schönheit, mit der er die Stimmlage des Countertenors für das moderne Publikum neu definiert hat. Besonders gefragt ist er für Rollen in Werken von Händel, Monteverdi, Gluck, Mozart und Britten; auf den großen Opernbühnen der Welt sang er unter anderem die Titelrolle in Glucks *Orfeo ed Euridice* an der Royal Opera, Covent Garden, der Metropolitan Opera in New York und der Lyric Opera of Chicago, die Titelrollen in *Orlando*, *Tamerlano* und *Rinaldo* an der Bayerischen Staatsoper in München, Didymus (*Theodora*) und die Titelrolle in *Giulio Cesare* an der Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Oberon (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) an der Metropolitan Opera, der

Mailänder Teatro alla Scala, der Lyric Opera of Chicago und dem Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona, Bertarido (*Rodelinda*) und die Titelrolle in *Giulio Cesare* an der Metropolitan Opera, Arsamene (*Serse*) an der Houston Grand Opera sowie die Titelrolle in *Radamisto* und Arsace (*Partenope*) am Theater an der Wien. An der Santa Fe Opera schuf er die Rolle des Oscar Wilde in Theodore Morrisons *Oscar*. Im Recital fühlt er sich ebenso zu Hause wie auf der Opernbühne und erntet große Bewunderung für seine Liedinterpretationen; er hat Recitals in New York, London, Paris, München, Berlin, Hamburg, Wien, Barcelona und Moskau gegeben sowie auf dem Edinburgh International Festival, dem Tanglewood und dem Ravinia Festival. Neben seiner regen Konzerttätigkeit ist David Daniels auch in zahlreichen CD-Einspielungen zu hören.

Hilary Summers hat mit dem ausgesprochen großen Umfang ihrer genuinen Altstimme die Aufmerksamkeit zahlreicher zeitgenössischer Komponisten erregt. Seit 2002 hat sie in ganz Europa *Le Marteau sans maître* von Pierre Boulez mit dem Ensemble Intercontemporain unter der Leitung des Komponisten aufgeführt, und ihre Einspielung dieses Werks mit derselben Besetzung wurde 2006

mit einem Grammy Award ausgezeichnet. Auch im barocken Repertoire hat sie große Erfahrung und singt regelmäßig mit den führenden Alte-Musik-Ensembles Europas. Ihre langjährige enge Verbindung zu William Christie und Les Arts Florissants brachte ihr in jüngster Vergangenheit die Rolle der Hexe in Deborah Warners Produktion von Purcells *Dido and Aeneas* in Wien ein. Sie wirkte an der ersten Aufführung von Händels *Messiah* auf historischen Instrumenten in Russland mit. Zu ihren zahlreichen Rollen bei zeitgenössischen Premieren gehören Stella (in Elliott Carters *What Next*) an der Staatsoper Berlin unter der Leitung von Daniel Barenboim sowie Irma (in Peter Eötvös' *Le Balcon*) auf dem Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. Sie schuf die Rolle der Miss Prism (*The Importance of Being Earnest*) in konzertanten Aufführungen von Gerald Barrys neuem Werk und nahm diese Rolle im Juni 2013 am Linbury Studio in London wieder auf, bevor sie mit der Produktion in Irland auf Tournee ging. Mit Christian Curnyn und der Early Opera Company hat Hilary Summers Händels *Semele*, *Partenope*, *Flavio* und *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* eingespielt.

Der Bassist **Brindley Sherratt** beherrscht ein großes Opernrepertoire, darunter Sarastro

(*Die Zauberflöte*), Claggart (*Billy Budd*), Fürst Gremin (*Eugen Onegin*), Pimen (*Boris Godunow*), Rocco (*Fidelio*), Sparafucile (*Rigoletto*), Pogner (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*), Fasolt (*Das Rheingold*), Filippo (*Don Carlo*), Banco (*Macbeth*), Claudio (*Agrippina*), Bottom (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) und Fiesco (*Simon Boccanegra*); seine Engagements führten ihn an solch renommierte Häuser wie die Wiener Staatsoper, die Bayerische Staatsoper, die Royal Opera, Covent Garden, die English National Opera, die Welsh National Opera, die Opera North, die Glyndebourne Festival Opera, die Staatsoper Hamburg, die Nederlandse Opera, die Opéra de Nice, das Teatro de la Maestranza in Sevilla, die Opéra national de Bordeaux und die Santa Fe Opera. Im Konzert hat Brindley Sherratt auf den BBC Proms und dem Three Choirs Festival sowie auf den Festivals von Bregenz, Edinburgh, Luzern und Salzburg gesungen, wobei zu den besonderen Highlights Auftritte mit dem Schwedischen Radio-Sinfonicorchester unter Daniel Harding, mit Rotterdams Philharmonisch unter Harry Bicket, mit dem Chamber Orchestra of Europe unter John Nelson, dem Orchester des Royal Opera House unter Sir Antonio Pappano, dem Scottish Chamber Orchestra

unter Yannick Nézet-Séguin, der Deutschen Kammerphilharmonie Bremen unter Louis Langrée, dem Hallé unter Sir Mark Elder und dem BBC Symphony Orchestra unter Sir Andrew Davis gehören.

Auf der Opernbühne ist die Sopranistin **Rosemary Joshua** als das Füchslin (*Das schlaue Füchslin*) und Tytania (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) an der Mailänder Teatro alla Scala aufgetreten, als Anne Trulove (*The Rake's Progress*) und Despina (*Così fan tutte*) an der Royal Opera, Covent Garden, als Adele (*Die Fledermaus*) an der Metropolitan Opera in New York, als Oscar (*Un ballo in maschera*) und das Füchslin an der Nederlandse Opera sowie als Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*) an der Glyndebourne Festival Opera und der Bayerischen Staatsoper in München. Besonders für ihre Rollen in Werken von Händel hat sie internationale Anerkennung gefunden, darunter die Angelica (*Orlando*) in München, an der Royal Opera, Covent Garden und in Aix-en-Provence, Poppaea (*Agrippina*) in Köln, Brüssel und Paris, Cleopatra (*Giulio Cesare*) in Amsterdam, Paris und Florida, Ginevra (*Ariodante*) in Moskau und San Diego sowie die Titelrolle in *Semele* in Aix-en-Provence, Innsbruck,

Flandern, Köln, auf den BBC Proms und an der English National Opera, wo sie auch die Titelrolle in *Partenope* gesungen hat. Außerdem hat sie die Nitocris (*Belsazzar*) in Berlin, Toulouse, Aix-en-Provence, Innsbruck und auf Tournee mit Les Arts Florissants unter William Christie sowie die Titelrolle in *Theodora* auf Tournee mit dem English Concert unter Harry Bicket gesungen. In der umfangreichen Diskographie von Rosemary Joshua finden sich bei Chandos die Titelrollen in *Partenope* und *Semele* sowie die Emilia (*Flavio*) mit der Early Opera Company unter Christian Curnyn, außerdem gemeinsam mit Sarah Connolly und dem English Concert unter Harry Bicket eine CD mit Händel-Duetten; ferner hat sie die Titelrolle in *Esther* mit dem London Handel Festival Orchestra unter Laurence Cummings, Angelica mit Les Arts Florissants unter William Christie und Michal (*Saul*) mit Concerto Köln unter René Jacobs aufgenommen.

Die aus Bolivar im amerikanischen Bundesstaat New York gebürtige Sopranistin **Joëlle Harvey** gewinnt zunehmend Anerkennung als eine der vielversprechendsten jungen Musikerinnen ihrer Generation. In der Spielzeit 2011 / 12 sang sie die Galatea (in Händels *Acis and Galatea*) am Teatro La Fenice in Venedig

und feierte ihr Debüt an der Glyndebourne Festival Opera in Purcells *Fairy Queen*. Außerdem sang sie Händels *Messiah* mit der San Francisco Symphony, Bachs H-Moll-Messe mit dem English Concert auf den BBC Proms und in Leipzig sowie Michal (in Händels *Saul*) mit The Sixteen in London. Beachtenswerte Auftritte in der Spielzeit 2012 / 13 umfassten die Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*) mit Glyndebourne on Tour und der Arizona Opera, den *Messiah* und Musik aus *Peer Gynt* mit der San Francisco Symphony unter Michael Tilson Thomas, Tigrane (*Radamisto*) auf einer USA-Tournee mit Harry Bicket und dem English Concert, Magnificats von Mendelssohn und Bach mit dem New York Philharmonic, Iphis (in Händels *Jephtha*) auf einer Tournee mit der Bostoner Handel and Haydn Society sowie Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*) unter der Leitung von Marc Minkowski auf dem Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. In nächster Zeit wird Joëlle Harvey an der Glyndebourne Festival Opera die Adina (*L'elisir d'amore*) und Serpetta (*La finta giardiniera*) geben, Erisbe (Cavallis *Ormindo*) am Londoner Shakespeare's Globe in einer Koproduktion mit der Royal Opera, Covent Garden, Schuberts Messe Nr. 6 mit dem Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra und Dalila (*Samson et Dalila*) mit der

Handel and Haydn Society. Sie wird zudem erneut mit dem New York Philharmonic zusammenarbeiten und 2015 ihr Debüt an der Santa Fe Opera geben.

Der deutsche Bass-Bariton **Andreas Wolf** erhielt seine erste musikalische Ausbildung an der Kreismusikschule Harz in Wernigerode, wo er auch Mitglied des bekannten Rundfunk-Jugendchors Wernigerode war. 2002 erhielt er ein Stipendium zum Studium an der Hochschule für Musik Detmold, wo er Schüler von Professor Heiner Eckels war. Zu seinen Engagements in jüngerer Zeit zählen Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) am Teatro Real in Madrid, Falke (*Die Fledermaus*) und Jupiter (Rameaus *Platée*) am Staatstheater Stuttgart, Elviro (Händels *Serse*) am Theater an der Wien, Zoroastre (Händels *Orlando*) an der Scottish Opera, Guglielmo auf dem Macerata-Opernfestival in der Sferisterio Arena und Curio (Händels *Giulio Cesare*) in der Salle Pleyel in Paris. Er hat Aeneas (*Dido and Aeneas*) mit Les Arts Florissants in New York und Moskau gesungen, Clito (Händels *Alessandro*) auf dem Festival international d'opéra baroque in Beaune sowie Nanni (Haydns *L'infedeltà delusa*) auf dem Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. Andreas Wolf hatte das große Vergnügen, mit solch namhaften

Dirigenten wie William Christie, Jordi Savall, Andreas Spering, Jérémie Rhorer, Alessandro De Marchi, René Jacobs, Jean-Christophe Spinosi, Paul Goodwin und Marcus Creed zusammenzuarbeiten.

Die **Early Opera Company** wurde 1994 von ihrem Musikdirektor Christian Curnyn gegründet und hat sich seither einen festen Platz als eines der führenden britischen Ensembles für Alte Musik erobert. Ihre Debüt-Produktion von Händels *Serse* führte zu einer Einladung des BOC Covent Garden Festivals sowie zu drei Aufführungen von Händels *Ariodante*. Das Ensemble feierte sein Debüt an St John's, Smith Square mit konzertanten Aufführungen von Charpentiers *Actéon* und Purcells *Dido and Aeneas*; außerdem brachte es im Rahmen des Southbank Centre Early Music Festivals in der Queen Elizabeth Hall eine Inszenierung von Händels *Orlando* auf die Bühne, gefolgt von landesweiten Tourneen mit Händels *Susanna*, *Flavio* und *Orlando*. Im Laufe der Jahre gab das Ensemble zudem *Dido and Aeneas* an der Wigmore Hall in London, auf dem Vic Early Music Festival in Spanien und auf den BBC Proms, Händels *Partenope* auf dem Buxton Festival und den Snape Proms sowie Thomas Arnes *Alfred* am Linbury

Studio des Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, spielte in einer Live-Übertragung des Bristol Baroque Festivals von BBC Radio 3 und wirkte als Associate Artists auf dem Spitalfields Music Summer Festival 2013. Die Gruppe tritt regelmäßig in der Wigmore Hall auf, war in elf Spielzeiten auf dem Iford-Festival zu hören und wird 2014 bei Aufführungen von Cavallis *Ormindó* am Sam Wanamaker Playhouse in einer Koproduktion mit dem Shakespeare's Globe und der Royal Opera mitwirken. Die mit Preisen ausgezeichnete Diskographie der Early Opera Company bei Chandos umfasst Aufnahmen von Eccles' *The Judgment of Paris* sowie Händels *Partenope*, *Semele*, *Flavio* und *Alceste*; die letztgenannte Einspielung wurde in *Gramophone*, *BBC Music* und der *Sunday Times* mit hervorragenden Kritiken bedacht und gewann 2013 den Opera Award des *BBC Music Magazine*. www.earlyopera.com / Facebook / Twitter @earlyopera

Christian Curnyn hat sich als einer der gefragtesten Dirigenten für das barocke und klassische Repertoire etabliert. Er studierte Musik an der Universität von York und vertiefte anschließend seine Cembalo-Studien an der Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Als Gründer und Direktor der Early Opera Company hat er das Ensemble

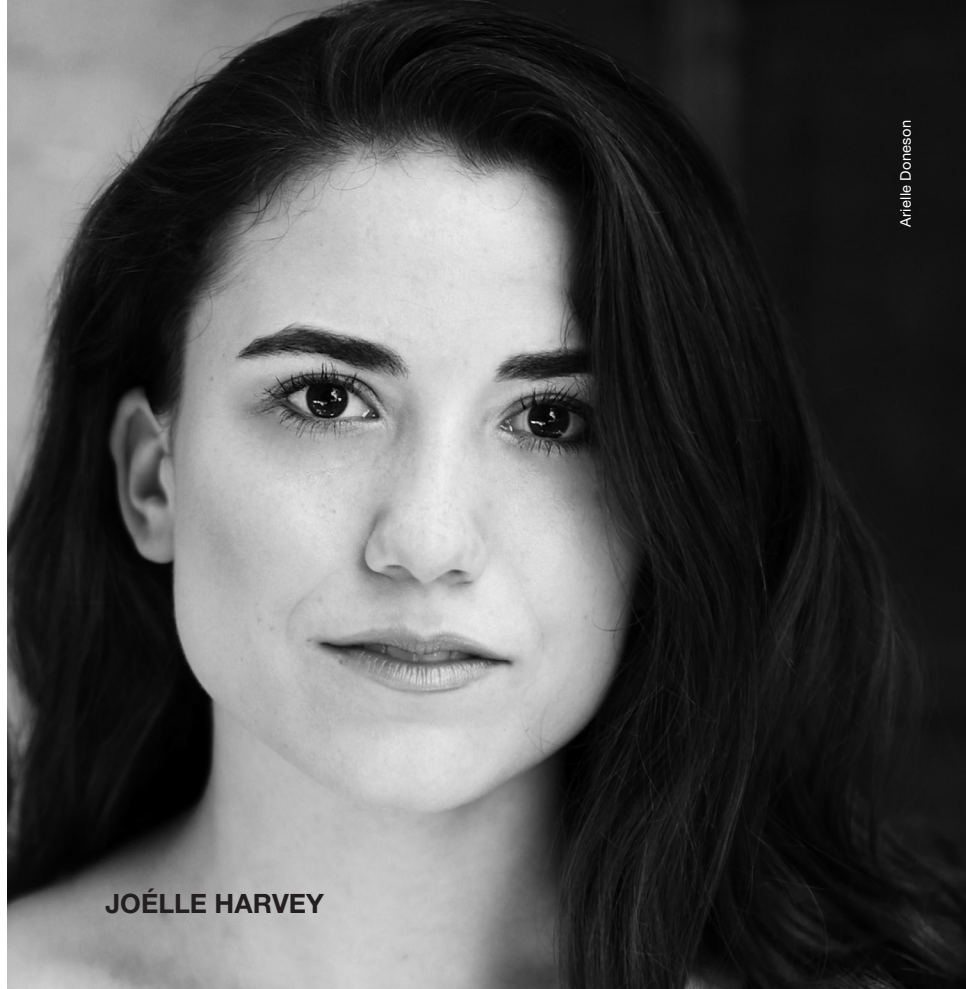
bei sämtlichen Bühnenproduktionen, Konzertaufführungen und CD-Aufnahmen geleitet.

In den letzten Jahren dirigierte er auch regelmäßig an der English National Opera, unter anderem Händels *Partenope*, *After Dido* (Katie Mitchells Umsetzung von Purcells *Dido and Aeneas*), Rameaus *Castor et Pollux* (in Barrie Koskys neuer Inszenierung, die mit einem Olivier-Award ausgezeichnet wurde), Händels *Giulio Cesare* und Charpentiers *Médée*. Er hat *Dido and Aeneas* im Rahmen der Britten-Hundertjahrfeier in Aldeburgh dirigiert, Händels *Ariodante* in Salzburg, eine Wiederaufnahme von Rameaus *Platée* in Stuttgart, Händels *Semele* und eine Neuinszenierung von Händels *Tamerlano* an der Scottish Opera, Händels *Saul* an der Opera North, Brittens Bearbeitung der *Beggar's Opera* an der Royal Opera, Covent Garden, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Semele* und Cavallis *Eliogabalo* an der Grange Park Opera, Monteverdis *L'incoronazione di Poppea* sowie Händels *Orlando* und *Alcina* an der Opera Theatre Company in Dublin, Händels *Jephtha* bei den Händel-Festspielen in Halle, *Partenope* und *Così fan tutte* an der

New York City Opera sowie Aufführungen am Chicago Opera Theater, an der Opera Australia, am Salzburger Landestheater und an den Opernhäusern von Frankfurt und Stuttgart.

Im Konzert hat er das Scottish Chamber Orchestra, The English Concert, das Stavanger Sinfonieorchester, das Ulster Orchestra, das Wrocław Barockorchester, das Hallé und das Irish Baroque Orchestra dirigiert und ist im Rahmen der Händel-Festspiele in Karlsruhe und Halle aufgetreten. Für Chandos hat er mit der Early Opera Company mehrere Opern von Händel und mit der City of London Sinfonia *The Beggar's Opera* von Britten eingespielt.

Neben weiteren Engagements mit der Early Opera Company plant Christian Curnyn, mit Händels *Rodelinda* an die English National Opera zurückzukehren, außerdem wird er sein Debüt an der Komischen Oper Berlin feiern und mit dem Orchester der Early Opera Company Cavallis *Ormindo* in einer Koproduktion der Royal Opera mit Shakespeare's Globe aufführen. www.christiancurnyn.com/ / Twitter @christiancurnyn



JOËLLE HARVEY

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HAENDEL: SERSE, HWV 40

Serse (Xerxès) fut créé au King's Theatre à Haymarket, le 15 avril 1738, quelques années seulement avant que Haendel cesse, après de longs efforts, de chercher à convertir le public londonien à l'importation étrangère du *dramma per musica* italien. La position tardive de *Serse* dans sa carrière lyrique a conduit certains musicologues à le considérer, au travers de son livret extrêmement ironique, de ses situations humoristiques, de sa construction dramatique souple et de son grand nombre d'arias courtes, comme un ancêtre progressiste et futuriste des comédies sophistiquées de Mozart, qui ont vu le jour un demi siècle plus tard. En fait, *Serse* trouve ses racines dans la Venise du dix-septième siècle: le poète Nicolò Minato (vers 1630 – 1698) écrivit le livret original pour le Teatro SS. Giovanni e Paolo de Venise, où il fut créé en 1655 sur une musique de Pier Francesco Cavalli (1602 – 1676).

Le livret publié de Minato contenait un *Argomento* expliquant que l'intrigue était un mélange de vraisemblances feintes et de description d'événements historiques tels

qu'ils sont racontés dans un récit des guerres médiques par Hérodote (vers 485 – vers 425 avant J.-C.). Le fils de Darius le Grand, le roi Xerxès I, régna sur l'Empire achéménide à partir de 486 jusqu'à son assassinat par un courtisan en 465; c'est peut-être le monarque perse qui porte le nom d'"Assuérus" dans l'histoire d'Esther de l'Ancien Testament, bien que la Bible ne fasse pas référence à des événements historiques connus sous le règne de Xerxès (il reste donc encore des doutes sur le fait que les deux noms correspondent au même personnage historique). En 480, Xerxès monta une ambitieuse expédition militaire et navale pour conquérir la Grèce. L'aspect le plus original de sa campagne fut la construction d'un pont sur l'Hellespont (aujourd'hui les Dardanelles), un bras de mer de plus d'un kilomètre de large, s'étendant d'Abydos (sur la rive asiatique) à Sestos (du côté européen). Hérodote rapporte que sur le chemin d'Abydos, Xerxès

tomba sur un platane d'une telle beauté qu'il le fit décorer d'ornements d'or et qu'il en confia la garde à un immortel.

En arrivant à l'Hellespont, Xerxès découvrit que ses ingénieurs avaient construit des ponts jumeaux selon ses instructions, mais les constructions en lin et en papyrus furent détruites dans une violente tempête. Furieux, Xerxès décapita ses ingénieurs et ordonna que les eaux de l'Hellespont reçoivent trois cents coups de verges. Un second pont fut construit en attachant ensemble des vaisseaux pour soutenir la pose du tablier du pont constitué de planches en bois couvertes de menu bois et de terre; il est fait allusion au passage des troupes perses vers Sestos à l'acte II, scène 8 de l'opéra de Haendel (mais l'échec final de l'invasion et la défaite écrasante de Xerxès à Salamine ne sont pas dépeints). Minato ajouta la déclaration habituelle de l'auteur: "le reste est imaginaire"; il inventa l'intrigue concernant la rivalité entre Xerxès et son frère Arsamène (également un personnage historique) pour Romilda, ainsi que la trahison du roi vis-à-vis de sa fiancée, Amastre, qui arrive à Abydos déguisée en homme et comprend vite la trahison du roi. Minato étaya ce drame d'une foule de personnages mineurs, mais mit nettement l'accent sur le personnage titre, imprévisible névrotique et versatile.

Il est peu probable que Haendel ait su grand-chose de Minato ou de Cavalli. Son adaptation repose plutôt sur une version

ultérieure du livret, complètement réécrit par Silvio Stampiglia (1664 – 1725), poète et membre de l'Académie arcadienne, qu'avait mis en musique Giovanni Bononcini (1670 – 1747) pour le Teatro di Torre di Nona de Rome en 1694. Stampiglia, sous son pseudonyme arcadien, Palemone Licurio, professa qu'il avait remodelé l'ancien texte vénitien pour le rendre "conforme à la cordialité des temps modernes"; il retira certaines scènes de Minato, en ajouta quelques nouvelles, modifia de nombreux récitatifs et créa d'autres textes d'arias. Il conserva seulement huit textes d'arias originaux de Minato, avec des changements minimes, mais tira plusieurs nouvelles arias des récitatifs de Minato. Haendel avait probablement rencontré Stampiglia à Rome au cours de son long voyage en Italie (1706 – 1710), peut-être par l'intermédiaire du Cardinal Colonna, protecteur du poète, ou de membres du cercle étendu de l'Académie arcadienne. Haendel se souvint peut-être de sa rencontre avec Stampiglia lorsqu'il chercha un modèle adéquat pour l'un de ses nouveaux opéras pour la saison 1737 – 1738 au King's Theatre, mais le catalyseur de sa décision de mettre *Serse* en musique fut certainement sa bonne connaissance de la partition de Bononcini.

Une partition manuscrite du *Xerse* de Bononcini, conservée aujourd'hui à la

British Library, fut sans doute copiée en 1707 à Rome pour un visiteur anglais âgé de dix-sept ans, John Blathwayt, qui entra par la suite au conseil d'administration de la Royal Academy of Music (une institution destinée à la production d'opéras italiens à Londres, active de 1719 à 1728, pour laquelle travaillèrent Haendel comme Bononcini). On suppose que Haendel emprunta le manuscrit de Blathwayt, car il tira méthodiquement des idées thématiques de trente-et-un numéros de Bononcini dans au moins dix œuvres différentes composées entre 1734 et 1738 – notamment les chefs-d'œuvre *Ariodante* (1735), *Alcina* (1735) et l'ode *Alexander's Feast* (1736), les opéras *Atalanta* (1736), *Arminio* (1736), *Giustino* (1737), *Berenice* (1737) et *Faramondo* (1738) et finalement sa propre musique de *Serse*. En raison de la corrélation étroite entre les musiques de Bononcini et de Haendel, il est très plausible que Haendel (avec ou sans assistant littéraire italien) ait réalisé sa propre version du livret directement à partir de la partition de Bononcini; personne parmi les protagonistes ne semble avoir eu connaissance de la version du livret imprimé en 1694. Le fait que Haendel ait pris le livret directement dans la partition de Bononcini pourrait aussi expliquer qu'il ait conservé des éléments

archaïques, comme le serviteur comique Elviro, qui disparaissaient généralement dans les adaptations londoniennes de textes italiens anciens.

La fameuse scène initiale de Haendel, "Ombra mai fu" (marquée *Larghetto* et non *Largo*, par le compositeur), présente une construction, un style et une mélodie en tous points conformes à la musique romaine "à l'ancienne" de Bononcini sur les mêmes paroles. De même, la musique de l'emportement crucial de Xerxès, "Crude furie degl'orridi abissi", fut modelée sur la version de Bononcini, mais Haendel transcenda totalement son modèle en termes d'invention harmonique, de verve orchestrale et d'ardeur dramatique. Dans plusieurs arias, il n'utilisa que des bribes de quelques mesures de la musique de Bononcini au sein d'une musique par ailleurs originale qui suivait son chemin (comme "Meglio in voi" d'Arsamène et "Or che siete, speranze, tradite" d'Amastre), alors que certains des numéros les plus courts restaient plus proches de Bononcini, comme le mélodramatique "Ah, tigre infedele!" d'Elviro (son indignation crédule face au mensonge d'Atalante selon laquelle Romilda n'aimait plus Arsamène, mais souhaitait épouser Xerxès) et le duo avec continuo seulement "L'amerete?" / "L'amerò" (dans lequel Romilda

exprime tristement sa fidélité à Arsamène, pensant qu'il l'a trahie, et rejette les tentatives renouvelées de séduction de Xerxès). Dans certains cas, Haendel évita la citation thématique directe et composa à la place une musique originale dans son propre style inimitable tout en s'inspirant de la tonalité, de la concision structurelle ou de l'orchestration de Bononcini: la superbe sinfonia qui introduit "O voi, che penate!" de Romilda (chanté en coulisse de l'intérieur d'un pavillon) reprend l'utilisation de deux flûtes à bec que l'on trouve chez Bononcini, mais la musique réelle de Haendel est totalement différente – d'autant qu'il avait déjà emprunté les parties de flûte à bec de Bononcini dans *Alexander's Feast* ("Thus long ago", "Ainsi, il y a longtemps"). Dans *Alexander's Feast*, il s'était aussi inspiré d'une aria de basse pour Ariodate de Bononcini "Già la tromba" (chose étonnante, sans trompette), dont il tira un motif de cordes pour une aria de basse avec trompette "Revenge, Timotheus cries" (Vengeance, crie Timotheus), si bien que lorsqu'il composa *Serse* il ignore la musique de Bononcini et son attribution à Ariodate, et transforma le texte en véritable chœur (avec trompette).

Haendel commença à composer *Serse* le 26 décembre 1737, deux jours seulement

après avoir achevé un autre nouvel opéra, *Faramondo*. Même s'il était probablement occupé par les répétitions de *Faramondo* et sa création le 3 janvier 1738, il acheva l'acte I de *Serse* le 9 janvier, l'acte II le 25 janvier et l'acte III le 6 février. Il passa encore huit jours à donner les détails orchestraux et à peaufiner la composition avant que la partition ne soit terminée, le 14 février. Il ne faudrait pas mal interpréter sa rapidité caractéristique et son traitement ingénieux des thèmes musicaux et des modèles formels empruntés à Bononcini (et dans une bien moindre mesure à Alessandro Scarlatti, Telemann et Keiser) comme de la suffisance, de l'insouciance ou un manque d'imagination. Le manuscrit autographe semble indiquer que Haendel investit un talent créateur considérable dans les arias, qui sont parfaitement adaptées à l'action dramatique: bon nombre d'entre elles furent construites méticuleusement, en grande partie retravaillées et souvent raccourcies; chose rare, la moitié d'entre elles sont des arias à une seule section de forme ouverte sans reprises *da capo*. Les structures plus longues *da capo* conventionnelles sont toujours utilisées pour mettre l'accent sur des moments d'une intensité ou d'une importance particulière dans la représentation des personnages.

Par exemple, trois longues arias *da capo* illustrent les sautes d'humeur extrêmes de Xerxès. "Più che penso alle fiamme" (acte I, scène 11) dépeint le prétendu amoureux naïf fantasmant avec une sensiblerie exagérée (comme dans "Ombra mai fu"). Par contraste, la réponse animée de Xerxès à son rejet par Romilda dans "Se bramate d'amar chi vi sdeгна" (acte II, scène 4) est une arrogante auto-illusion et fait allusion au tyran désagréable et venimeux exposé plus tard dans "Crude furie degl'orridi abissi" (acte III, scène 11), véritable sommet agressif. Ces arias plus développées nous montrent que l'imprévisible Xerxès est indigne de confiance et que sa colère n'est jamais loin du point d'ébullition, où elle aura des conséquences violentes. Le pouvoir absolu qu'il exerce de par sa position sur ceux qui l'entourent rend ce comportement imprévisible physiquement dangereux: le fou sentimental qui se met à adorer un arbre attrayant ou qui s' imagine que l'amoureuse de son frère, Romilda, fera bon accueil à ses avances va aussi vite en besogne lorsqu'il bannit son frère, Arsamène, en essayant de lui voler sa petite amie. Il trahit cyniquement sa fiancée, Amastre, et menace de mort la femme qu'il est censé aimer lorsque son désir est contrarié de façon irrévocable. Ce comportement semble correspondre

de manière plausible au maniaque qui, selon Hérodote, fit fouetter l'Hellespont et assassiner un groupe d'innocents travailleurs compétents pour avoir suivi ses propres instructions.

Arsamène est portraituré par une musique d'amour ardent ou par des siciliennes mélodieuses dans lesquelles il pleure sa malchance ("Quella che tutta fé per me languia d'amore", acte II, scène 7); mais dans le déploiement d'assurance dont il fait preuve parfois (notamment "Si, la voglio e l'otterrò", acte II, scène 9), on ne trouve pas les tendances puériles ou psychopathiques de son frère instable. Haendel composa aussi de puissants emportements pour Amastre qui, sous le coup de la colère à la suite de son éviction, se lance dans une recherche courageuse de vengeance. L'attitude moqueuse initiale de Romilda face au comportement de Xerxès devant le platane se transforme en sentiment de gêne lorsqu'elle devient l'objet de l'attention de Xerxès; sa manière sentimentale et digne la présente comme le parti idéal pour Arsamène, alors que sa sœur, Atalante, est l'une des intrigantes charmeuses les plus divertissantes de Haendel (son volage "Un cenno leggiadretto" termine l'acte I avec une coquetterie irrésistible et c'est un autre mouvement que Haendel a directement

modélé sur la musique plus simple de Bononcini sur les mêmes paroles). Leur père, Ariodate, est présenté comme un soldat obtus, mais bien intentionné, et le seul personnage vraiment comique est le serviteur d'Arsamène, Elviro. Selon la légende, Haendel aurait basé la musique que chante Elviro lorsqu'il est déguisé en marchand de fleurs sur des cris des rues de Londres; cette hypothèse est étayée par un fragment de musique de la propre main du compositeur, conservé aujourd'hui au Fitzwilliam Museum de Cambridge, qui contient une transcription d'un cri de vendeur d'allumettes entendu "près d'un marchand d'eau-de-vie à St Giles dans Tyburn Road".

Serse regorge de subtilités et de traits de génie dramatiques typiques de Haendel, mais l'excellence de son opéra s'est perdue dans la transmission. *Serse* ne fut représenté que cinq fois et jamais repris, ce qui en fait l'un de ses pires échecs commerciaux. Le fait que la saison 1737 – 1738 du King's Theatre fasse l'objet d'une organisation spéciale ne fut d'aucune aide: après quelques années intenses de rivalité, l'Opera of the Nobility (1733 – 1737) et la troupe de Haendel à Covent Garden (1734 – 1737) s'étaient anéantis l'un l'autre par la fin catastrophique de la saison 1736 – 1737, lorsque Haendel subit une attaque sérieuse qui le laissa

partiellement paralysé pendant quelque temps. Avant la fin de la saison, le directeur du King's Theatre, John Jacob Heidegger, était déjà entré en négociation avec Haendel pour arrêter les dégâts et consolider les ressources pour la saison suivante. Après une rivalité aussi intense, il semble que les mécènes aristocrates du King's Theatre (les héritiers de l'équipe dirigeante de l'ancienne Royal Academy of Music) reconnurent finalement qu'ils avaient besoin de faire revenir Haendel, tandis que leur ancien directeur de la musique acceptait de ne pas continuer seul avec le genre d'indépendance qu'il avait cultivé au tout début des années 1730 à cause de l'état précaire de l'opéra à Londres et de la fragilité de sa propre santé: s'il avait pris l'habitude de porter la seule et unique responsabilité du répertoire et de la direction musicale de toute une saison, il apprécia alors de retrouver l'état de tueur à gages, mais seulement à court terme. La direction musicale de la saison 1737 – 1738 fut partagée par Giovanni Battista Pescetti (vers 1704 – 1766) et Francesco Maria Veracini (1690 – 1768); Haendel accepta probablement de composer seulement deux nouveaux opéras (*Faramondo* et *Serse*) pour la compagnie improvisée du King's Theatre, mais il fournit aussi le pastiche *Alessandro Severo*. Selon certaines

sources, il aurait été payé la somme respectable de mille livres et on lui aurait promis un concert de bienfaisance lucratif en oratorio (qui devait lui valoir encore mille livres).

Il semble que les choses n'étaient harmonieuses ni dans les coulisses, ni sur scène. Deux jours après la dernière représentation de *Serse*, le quatrième comte de Shaftesbury déclara à un ami de Haendel, James Harris, que l'opéra était "sans aucun doute une excellente composition", mais que "les chanteurs le jouent avec beaucoup d'indifférence ce qui le désavantage énormément". En outre, des recherches récentes ont révélé que le castrat vedette Gaetano Majorano (1710 – 1783; connu sous le nom de "Caffarelli") et Haendel ne s'entendaient pas bien, en particulier après que l'irascible chanteur ait découragé ses amis d'assister aux représentations de *Faramondo* de Haendel. Ses relations conflictuelles avec Haendel furent peut-être encore aggravées par le rôle peu héroïque qui lui fut attribué dans *Serse*; il serait fort possible que le chanteur pour qui Haendel composa "Ombra mai fu" lui ait manqué totalement de reconnaissance. La contralto Antonia Margherita Merighi (célèbre en 1711 – 1740) (Amastre) avait chanté pour Haendel au début de la décennie, dans un répertoire comprenant le rôle

similaire de Rosmira dans *Partenope* (qui repose aussi sur un vieux livret de Stampiglia). La basse Antonio Montagnana (célèbre en 1730 – 1750) (Ariodate) avait également fait partie de la compagnie de Haendel (en 1732 – 1733). La distribution comprenait aussi la mezzo-soprano Maria Antonia Marchesini (célèbre en 1736 – 1739), appelée "La Lucchesina", dont la faculté à interpréter les personnages masculins était indispensable pour le rôle d'Arsamène. Atalanta fut confié à la soprano Margherita Chimenti (célèbre en 1733 – 1746) ("La Droghierina") et Elviro à la basse peu connue Antonio Lottini (célèbre en 1717 – 1765). Romilda était interprétée par la soprano française trilingue Elisabeth du Parc (morte en 1778?), appelée "La Francesina", à qui Haendel confia régulièrement les principaux rôles de soprano pendant les huit années suivantes – au cours desquelles il composa pour elle de superbes parties de soprano dans certains de ses plus grands chefs-d'œuvre en anglais: *Saul* (1739), *Song for St Cecilia's Day* (1739), *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* (1740), *Semele* (1744), *Belshazzar* (1745) et *Hercules* (1745).

Haendel connut quelques bonnes nouvelles à cette époque. Le 15 avril 1738, le jour même de la création de l'opéra, le *London Daily Post* annonça le dévoilement de la

célèbre statue du compositeur par Louis-François Roubiliac aux Vauxhall Gardens (aujourd'hui au Victoria & Albert Museum). C'était exceptionnel d'ériger un monument à un artiste vivant. Mais si la réputation du compositeur semblait solidement immortalisée dans le marbre, le destin à court terme de *Serse* fut moins heureux. L'opéra ne fut plus représenté avant l'arrangement d'Oskar Hagen, monté à Göttingen le 5 juillet 1924. Plusieurs productions suivirent bientôt aux États-Unis, et la première reprise britannique eut lieu à Loughton, dans l'Essex, le 15 juin 1935. Depuis quelques décennies, il est devenu l'un des opéras les plus populaires et admirés de Haendel, en grande partie grâce à la production spirituelle et intégrale de Nicholas Hytner à l'English National Opera, montée pour le tricentenaire de la naissance du compositeur, le 23 février 1985 (et souvent reprise depuis lors) ainsi qu'à quelques enregistrements. Le changement d'attitude qu'a connu cet opéra se retrouve dans les positions contradictoires de la critique à son égard: en 1789, l'historien de la musique Charles Burney prétendit que *Serse* regorgeait "d'écriture médiocre" et exprima sa vive aversion pour son "mélange de tragi-comédie et de bouffonnerie", alors qu'à une date plus récente le grand spécialiste de Haendel Winton Dean jugea avec finesse

que le "traitement [par le compositeur] des personnages et des épisodes [était] convaincant à tous les niveaux" et que *Serse* commençait "brusquement à mener une vie palpitante au théâtre". Anthony Hicks en fit l'éloge comme "l'une des partitions les plus convaincantes du compositeur passant avec agilité de la farce à la tragédie". De nos jours, il semble indiscutable que cet opéra antihéroïque est l'un des opéras de Haendel les plus affectueusement ironiques, chaleureux, d'un sentimentalisme exceptionnel et dont les personnages sont campés avec perspicacité.

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Traduction: Marie-Stella Pâris

Au lecteur.

La structure de ce drame est si facile que cela ennuerait le lecteur de lui donner un long argument pour l'expliquer. Certaines stupidités et l'audace de Xerxès (comme le fait qu'il s'éprenne d'un platane et la construction d'un pont sur l'Hellespont pour unir l'Asie et l'Europe) sont la base de l'histoire; le reste est de la fiction.

Synopsis

Acte I

Un pavillon donnant sur un jardin à Abydos.

Le roi perse Xerxès (Serse) chante avec extase les louanges d'un platane qui lui offre de l'ombre. Son frère, Arsamène, accompagné de son serviteur à moitié endormi, Elviro, entre à la recherche de Romilda. Ils entendent une douce musique venant du pavillon; Romilda chante en se moquant gentiment de l'amour du roi pour un arbre qui ne peut lui retourner son ardeur qu'avec le murmure de son feuillage. Xerxès s'éprend de la voix fascinante de la chanteuse et déclare qu'il veut l'épouser. Inquiet, Arsamène commence par affirmer qu'il ignore son identité, avant d'admettre que ce ne serait pas convenable pour un roi d'épouser quiconque ne serait pas une reine. Il refuse l'ordre de courtiser Romilda au nom de Xerxès, en prétendant qu'il est trop timide; le roi sort donc dans l'intention de lui parler lui-même. Arsamène jure que Romilda sera à lui tout seul. Il va avertir Romilda des desseins amoureux obsessionnels du roi à son égard, mais sans le vouloir leur conversation donne de l'espoir à la sœur de Romilda, Atalanta, qui s'est entichée d'Arsamène et le désire pour elle-même, espérant que Romilda acceptera la proposition du roi. Arsamène se cache lorsque Xerxès arrive. Le roi invite Romilda à partager son trône; elle décline son offre avec diplomatie, mais le roi estime qu'il n'est

pas question de refuser. Arsamène sort de sa cachette pour protester avec véhémence, mais il est banni – bien que Xerxès lui laisse entendre qu'il pourrait faire preuve de compassion si Romilda lui cède. Le roi déclare son amour à Romilda, mais elle reste loyale envers Arsamène.

Dans une cour, la princesse Amastre, qui est fiancée à Xerxès, ne sait pas encore qu'il l'a abandonnée; déguisée en homme, elle se dissimule d'un côté de la scène lorsque le général Ariodate, père de Romilda et Atalanta, et ses soldats entrent avec des prisonniers et des enseignes prises à l'ennemi après la bataille. Xerxès récompense son général avec une promesse ambiguë: sa fille Romilda aura un époux royal "un égal de Xerxès"; Ariodate sort joyeusement avec ses troupes et Xerxès interprète la victoire comme un bon présage pour son amour. Amastre entend par hasard et est furieuse quand elle comprend qu'il désire une autre femme: elle laisse presque échapper son identité en criant une accusation de mensonge. Interrogée par Xerxès sur l'identité du "menteur", Amastre fait semblant d'avoir eu une discussion avec "son" écuyer sur la possibilité de construire un pont sur l'Hellespont; Xerxès congédie Amastre, supposant que c'est "un" soldat qui ne jouit pas de toutes ses facultés mentales,

et considère avec attention à quel point son amour pour Romilda augmente d'heure en heure. Arsamène donne à Elviro une lettre pour Romilda, dans laquelle il lui demande une rencontre clandestine; Elviro hésite et se plaint de la malchance de son maître qui lui cause des ennuis, mais il part en courant, promettant d'accomplir sa mission de manière opportune. Amastre prépare sa vengeance contre Xerxès. Atalanta ment à Romilda en lui disant qu'Arсамène a trouvé une nouvelle amoureuse et conseille à sa sœur d'accepter l'offre du roi, mais Romilda voit clair dans les projets de sa sœur. Atalanta décide d'utiliser ses charmes pour séduire Arсамène.

Acte II

Sur une place publique, Amastre se lamente sur ses espérances qui l'abandonnent. Elle rencontre Elviro (déguisé en vendeur de fleurs et parlant en mauvais dialecte afin de ne pas être reconnu), qui lui raconte le triangle amoureux entre Romilda, Arсамène et Xerxès. Elviro, terrifié d'en avoir peut-être trop dit, laisse Amastre inconsolable. Elviro tombe sur Atalanta et, lorsqu'elle lui achète quelques fleurs, il révèle son identité et son objectif secret. Elle prend avec enthousiasme la lettre d'Arсамène à Romilda, promettant

de la donner à sa sœur, mais trompe Elviro en lui faisant croire que Romilda a abandonné Arсамène et aime maintenant Xerxès. À l'approche du roi, Elviro mortifié part à la hâte chercher son maître. Xerxès trouve Atalanta en train de lire la lettre; il reconnaît l'écriture de son frère, mais Atalanta prétend que cette lettre lui est adressée à elle et qu'Arсамène l'aime vraiment. Ravi, Xerxès prend la lettre et accepte qu'Atalanta épouse son frère, mais celle-ci l'avertit qu'Arсамène niera tout car il espère garder secret leur amour. Le roi affronte Romilda avec la lettre. Elle croit que c'est une lettre d'amour adressée à sa sœur, mais soutient avec tristesse qu'elle aimera toujours Arсамène, même s'il l'a trahie. Xerxès part hors de lui, s'exclamant qu'il la traiterait avec dédain, tout comme le fait son frère, si cela l'amenait à partager sa passion. Seule, Romilda admet sa jalousie. Amastre tente de se tuer, mais en est empêchée par Elviro et sort. Arсамène est anéanti quand Elviro lui annonce que Romilda aime maintenant Xerxès.

Sur les rives de l'Hellespont, un chœur de marins félicite Xerxès de la construction de son pont reliant l'Asie à l'Europe. Le roi ordonne à Ariodate de rassembler l'armée et annonce son plan pour avancer en Europe avant l'aube du troisième jour. Il rencontre

Arsamène abattu, lui dit qu'il n'est plus en colère et lui promet qu'il pourra avoir la femme qu'il aime vraiment. Arsamène soupçonne une plaisanterie cruelle; lorsque son frère lui offre Atalanta, il demande avec défi Romilda. Xerxès conseille à Atalanta de renoncer à son amour pour Arsamène, mais elle ne peut l'oublier; le roi médite sur les émotions instables et contradictoires de l'amour. À la recherche de son maître, Elviro remarque qu'une tempête se lève qui menace de détruire le pont et cherche sa consolation dans le vin (observant qu'il le préfère à l'eau).

Dans "un lieu retiré aux abords de la ville", Xerxès rencontre Amastre déguisée, qui prétend être un soldat blessé au combat dans l'armée du roi. Le roi "lui" demande d'entrer à nouveau à son service, mais leur conversation est interrompue par Romilda; elle rejette les demandes en mariage brutales du roi, insistant sur le fait qu'elle place l'amour au-dessus de la richesse et de la chance. Amastre se précipite, avertit Romilda de ne pas faire confiance à Xerxès, le traite de traître et tire son épée. Xerxès sort furieux. Amastre se bat, mais est arrêtée par les gardes royaux. Elle est libérée par Romilda qui renvoie les gardes. Seule, Romilda rend hommage aux amants dont la fidélité est inébranlable.

Acte III

Dans une galerie, Arsamène et Romilda se querellent; ils (et Elviro) demandent une explication à Atalanta, qui admet sa tromperie (mais avec des excuses tirées par les cheveux). Arsamène et Romilda tombent dans les bras l'un de l'autre et Atalanta décide de prendre au piège un nouvel amant. À l'approche du roi, Elviro part en courant et Arsamène se cache. Xerxès demande à Romilda pourquoi elle a relâché le soldat qui avait été arrêté (autrement dit Amastre déguisée) et réitère sa proposition de mariage – mais avec des implications de plus en plus menaçantes au cas où elle refuserait. Désespérée, Romilda consent à épouser Xerxès s'il obtient la permission de son père; le roi part, débordant de joie. Arsamène reproche amèrement à Romilda sa décision, mais elle lui fait ses adieux, disant que ce n'est pas le mariage, mais la mort qui l'attend.

Dans un bosquet, Xerxès demande à Ariodate s'il est heureux que Romilda ait "un époux de mon sang royal". Fou de joie, le père s'entend dire qu'"une personne d'un rang égal au mien, et de ma souche royale" arrivera au domicile de sa famille et que Romilda devra accepter cet homme pour époux. Ariodate suppose que le roi fait référence à Arsamène et accepte volontiers. Pendant

ce temps, Romilda dédaigne la couronne offerte par le roi et la lui retourne, insinuant qu'Arsamène l'a aimée de manière plus intime qu'il convient à la chasteté de l'épouse du roi. Furieux, Xerxès accuse Romilda d'inventer une ruse pour contrecarrer leur mariage et ordonne à ses gardes de trouver et de tuer tout de suite Arsamène, ainsi "la veuve à cause de ce baiser" sera libre de l'épouser. Romilda demande de l'aide au "brave guerrier" Amastre: Amastre lui demande de donner une lettre à Xerxès et va prévenir Arsamène, mais elle pleure dans les affres permanents de son amour trahi. Arsamène accuse cyniquement Romilda de mentir au sujet de la sentence de mort prononcée à son encontre et pense qu'elle essaye de lui jouer un tour pour le faire fuir; ils se querellent et sortent chacun de son côté.

Dans un vaste Temple du Soleil, son autel sur lequel brûle un feu, un chœur de prêtres entoure la statue de Jupiter. Romilda et Arsamène entrent, toujours en train de se quereller, mais ils se réconcilient joyeusement quand Ariodate unit leurs mains et leur dit qu'ils sont mariés sur ordre du roi. Xerxès apparaît, espérant surprendre Ariodate en lui révélant qu'il est lui-même le futur marié promis au mariage de Romilda; il est furieux lorsque Ariodate explique que Romilda est déjà mariée à Arsamène. Sa colère déborde

quand un page apporte une lettre qu'il pense être de Romilda et qu'il confie à Ariodate pour qu'il la lise à voix haute: la lettre est la déclaration d'amour d'Amastre pour le roi, mais elle l'accuse de la mépriser et de la trahir et lui dit que le ciel punira ses crimes. Xerxès se met en colère et invoque les furies pour qu'elles répandent leur venin sur lui. Face à face avec tous les autres, qui tentent de l'apaiser, Xerxès tire son épée et ordonne de manière intraitable à Arsamène de tuer Romilda avec cette épée. Amastre déguisée l'interrompt: "Ne voulez-vous pas qu'un cœur fourbe soit percé par quelqu'un qui l'adore encore?" Lorsque Xerxès accepte avec enthousiasme, elle lui arrache son épée, la lui appuie sur la poitrine et révèle sa véritable identité. Honteux, Xerxès se repend, reçoit le pardon d'Amastre et bénit le mariage d'Arsamène et Romilda. Ils attendent tous avec impatience le rétablissement du calme, du bonheur et de la paix, et célèbrent l'union de l'amour et de l'honneur.

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Traduction: Marie-Stella Pâris

Citations du livret de 1738

La mezzo-soprano Anna Stéphany a étudié à la Guildhall School of Music and

Drama de Londres et au National Opera Studio. Son répertoire s'étend de l'*Orfeo* de Monteverdi, la Passion selon Saint Matthieu de Bach, *Theodora* de Haendel, la Neuvième Symphonie de Beethoven jusqu'à la *Messe glagolitique* de Janáček, *L'Heure espagnole* de Ravel, *Julietta* de Martinů et *The Mask of Orpheus* de Sir Harrison Birtwistle. Elle s'est produite en concert dans le monde entier, notamment avec le NDR Sinfonieorchester de Hambourg, le BBC National Orchestra of Wales, le Musikkollegium Winterthur, la Manchester Camerata; avec le BBC Symphony Orchestra sous la direction de Jiří Bělohlávek, le City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra sous la direction de Andris Nelsons, le Balthasar-Neumann-Chor sous la direction de Thomas Hengelbrock; avec l'Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment au Concertgebouw d'Amsterdam, le London Symphony Orchestra au Barbican Centre de Londres, les Gabrieli Consort & Players à Wrocław, Paris et Madrid; avec Donald Runnicles aux BBC Proms de Londres et Pierre Boulez à Paris. À l'opéra, elle a incarné Laurette (*La Chanson de Fortunio* d'Offenbach) à l'Opéra Comique à Paris, Orlofsky (*Die Fledermaus*) et Octavian (*Der Rosenkavalier*) au Théâtre du Bolchoï à Moscou, Hermia (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) au Garsington Opera, Rosina

(*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) au Théâtre musical du Châtelet à Paris, le rôle titre dans *Médée* de Charpentier au Chicago Opera Theater, Annio (*La clemenza di Tito*) au Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Cherubino (*Le nozze di Figaro*) et Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*) à l'Opernhaus de Zurich. Anna Stéphany a enregistré le Requiem de Mozart avec le London Symphony Orchestra sous la direction de Sir Colin Davis et un disque de mélodies de Rodrigo avec le BBC Symphony Orchestra sous la direction de David Zinman.

Le haute-contre américain **David Daniels** est connu pour son talent artistique exceptionnel, sa présence scénique magnétique, et une voix d'une singulière chaleur et d'une beauté incomparable, qui ont contribué à redéfinir la voix de haute-contre pour le public de notre temps. Très recherché pour ses interprétations des œuvres de Haendel, Monteverdi, Gluck, Mozart et Britten, il s'est produit sur les plus grandes scènes lyriques du monde, notamment dans le rôle titre dans *Orfeo ed Euridice* de Gluck au Royal Opera de Covent Garden de Londres, au Metropolitan Opera de New York, au Lyric Opera de Chicago, dans les rôles titres dans *Orlando*, *Tamerlano* et *Rinaldo* au Bayerische Staatsoper de Munich, Didymus (*Theodora*)

et le rôle titre dans *Giulio Cesare* au Festival de Glyndebourne, Oberon (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) au Metropolitan Opera, au Teatro alla Scala de Milan, au Lyric Opera de Chicago, au Gran Teatre del Liceu de Barcelone, Bertarido (*Rodelinda*) et le rôle titre dans *Giulio Cesare* au Metropolitan Opera, Arsamène (*Serse*) au Houston Grand Opera, et le rôle titre dans *Radamisto* et Arsace (*Partenope*) au Theater an der Wien de Vienne. Par ailleurs, il a créé le rôle d'Oscar Wilde dans *Oscar* de Theodore Morrison au Santa Fe Opera. Tout aussi à l'aise en récital qu'à l'opéra, il est très admiré pour ses interprétations des lieder et des mélodies, et a donné des récitals à New York, Londres, Paris, Munich, Berlin, Hambourg, Vienne, Barcelone, Moscou, ainsi qu'au Festival international d'Édimbourg, au Festival de Tanglewood et au Festival de Ravinia. David Daniels est très demandé en concert, et a enregistré de nombreux disques.

Dotée d'une véritable voix de contralto avec une tessiture très étendue, **Hilary Summers** a attiré l'attention de nombreux compositeurs contemporains. Depuis 2002, elle chante *Le Marteau sans maître* de Pierre Boulez à travers toute l'Europe avec l'Ensemble Intercontemporain sous la direction du

compositeur, et son enregistrement de l'œuvre avec les mêmes interprètes a remporté un Grammy Award en 2006. Elle travaille également beaucoup dans le répertoire baroque, et chante régulièrement avec les plus grands ensembles et orchestres d'instruments anciens européens. Sa chaleureuse et longue association avec William Christie et Les Arts Florissants l'ont récemment conduite à se produire dans le rôle de la Sorcière dans la production de Deborah Warner de *Dido and Aeneas* de Purcell à Vienne. Elle a participé à la première exécution sur instruments anciens en Russie du *Messiah* de Haendel. Elle a créé de nombreux rôles, notamment Stella (*What Next* d'Elliott Carter) au Staatsoper de Berlin sous la direction de Daniel Barenboim, Irma (*Le Balcon* de Peter Eötvös) au Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. Elle a créé en version de concert le rôle de Miss Prism dans le nouvel ouvrage de Gerald Barry, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, puis l'a repris au Linbury Studio de Londres en juin 2013 avant d'entreprendre une tournée de cette production en Irlande. Hilary Summers a enregistré *Semele*, *Partenope*, *Flavio* et *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* de Haendel avec Christian Curnyn et la Early Opera Company.

Le vaste répertoire lyrique de la basse **Brindley Sherratt** inclut Sarastro (*Die Zauberflöte*),

Claggart (*Billy Budd*), le Prince Greminine (*Eugène Onéguine*), Pimen (*Boris Godounov*), Rocco (*Fidelio*), Sparafucile (*Rigoletto*), Pogner (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*), Fasolt (*Das Rheingold*), Filippo (*Don Carlo*), Banco (*Macbeth*), Claudio (*Agrippina*), Bottom (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Fiesco (*Simon Boccanegra*). Il a incarné ces rôles dans des théâtres aussi prestigieux que le Wiener Staatsoper, le Bayerische Staatsoper, le Royal Opera de Covent Garden, l'English National Opera, le Welsh National Opera, l'Opera North, au Festival de Glyndebourne, au Staatsoper de Hambourg, à De Nederlandse Opera, à l'Opéra de Nice, au Teatro de la Maestranza de Séville, à l'Opéra national de Bordeaux, au Santa Fe Opera. En concert, Brindley Sherratt s'est produit en Angleterre aux BBC Proms de Londres et au Three Choirs Festival, ainsi que dans les festivals de Bregenz, Édimbourg, Lucerne et Salzbourg. Parmi les moments forts de sa carrière, on peut citer ses prestations avec l'Orchestre symphonique de la Radio suédoise sous la direction de Daniel Harding, la Rotterdams Philharmonisch sous la direction de Harry Bicket, l'Orchestre de chambre d'Europe sous la direction de John Nelson, l'Orchestre du Royal Opera House sous la direction de Sir Antonio Pappano, le Scottish Chamber Orchestra sous la direction

de Yannick Nézet-Séguin, la Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie de Brême sous la direction de Louis Langrée, le Hallé Orchestra sous la direction de Sir Mark Elder, et le BBC Symphony Orchestra sous la direction de Sir Andrew Davis.

Rosemary Joshua s'est produite sur scène dans les rôles du Petit Renard (*Le Petit Renard rusé*) et Tytania (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) au Teatro alla Scala de Milan, Anne Trulove (*The Rake's Progress*) et Despina (*Così fan tutte*) au Royal Opera de Covent Garden de Londres, Adele (*Die Fledermaus*) au Metropolitan Opera de New York, Oscar (*Un ballo in maschera*) et le Petit Renard à De Nederlandse Opera, Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*) au Festival de Glyndebourne et au Bayerische Staatsoper de Munich. Particulièrement réputée dans le monde entier pour ses interprétations des rôles haendéliens, elle a incarné Angelica (*Orlando*) à Munich, Covent Garden et Aix-en-Provence, Poppaea (*Agrippina*) à Cologne, Bruxelles et Paris, Cleopatra (*Giulio Cesare*) à Amsterdam, Paris et en Floride, Ginevra (*Ariodante*) à Moscou et San Diego, le rôle titre dans *Semele* à Aix-en-Provence, Innsbruck, dans les Flandres, à Cologne, aux BBC Proms de Londres, et à l'English National Opera où elle a également chanté

le rôle titre dans *Partenope*. Elle a interprété le rôle de Nitocris (*Belshazzar*) à Berlin, Toulouse, Aix-en-Provence, Innsbruck, et en tournée avec Les Arts Florissants sous la direction de William Christie, et le rôle titre dans *Theodora* en tournée avec The English Concert sous la direction de Harry Bicket. La riche discographie de Rosemary Joshua inclut les enregistrements des rôles titres dans *Partenope* et *Semele*, ainsi que le rôle d'Emilia (*Flavio*) avec la Early Opera Company sous la direction de Christian Curnyn, et un disque de duos de Haendel avec Sarah Connolly et The English Concert sous la direction de Harry Bicket, tous pour le label Chandos; le rôle titre dans *Esther* avec le London Handel Festival Orchestra sous la direction de Laurence Cummings, Angelica avec Les Arts Florissants sous la direction de William Christie, et Michal (*Saul*) avec le Concerto Köln sous la direction de René Jacobs.

Née à Bolivar, New York, la soprano **Joëlle Harvey** s'impose rapidement comme l'une des jeunes chanteuses les plus prometteuses de sa génération. Au cours de la saison 2011 / 2012, elle a incarné le rôle de Galatea (*Acis and Galatea* de Haendel) au Teatro La Fenice de Venise et fait ses débuts au Festival de Glyndebourne dans *The Fairy Queen*

de Purcell. Elle a également chanté dans le *Messiah* de Haendel avec le San Francisco Symphony, dans la Messe en si mineur de Bach aux BBC Proms de Londres et à Leipzig avec The English Concert, et le rôle de Michal (*Saul* de Haendel) avec l'ensemble The Sixteen à Londres. En 2012 / 2013, elle a notamment chanté Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*) avec Glyndebourne on Tour et à l'Arizona Opera, le *Messiah* et la musique de *Peer Gynt* avec le San Francisco Symphony sous la direction de Michael Tilson Thomas, Tigrane (*Radamisto*) en tournée aux États-Unis avec Harry Bicket et The English Concert, dans le Magnificat de Mendelssohn et dans celui de Bach avec le New York Philharmonic, Iphis (*Jephtha* de Haendel) en tournée avec la Handel and Haydn Society de Boston, et Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*) sous la direction de Marc Minkowski au Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. Parmi ses futurs engagements, Joëlle Harvey chantera les rôles de Adina (*L'elisir d'amore*) et Serpetta (*La finta giardiniera*) au Festival de Glyndebourne, Erisbe (*Ormindo* de Cavalli) au Shakespeare's Globe de Londres en collaboration avec le Royal Opera de Covent Garden, la Messe no 6 de Schubert avec le Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, et Dalila (*Samson et Dalila*) avec la Handel and Haydn Society. Elle sera également réinvitée

par le New York Philharmonic, et fera ses débuts au Santa Fe Opera en 2015.

Le basse-baryton allemand **Andreas Wolf** a commencé sa formation musicale au Kreismusikschule Harz de Wernigerode en Allemagne, et a été également membre du célèbre Rundfunk-Jugendchor Wernigerode. En 2002, il a obtenu une bourse pour étudier avec Heiner Eckels à la Hochschule für Musik de Detmold. Plus récemment, il s'est produit dans les rôles de Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) au Teatro Real de Madrid, Falke (*Die Fledermaus*) et Jupiter (*Platée* de Rameau) au Staatstheater de Stuttgart, Elviro (*Serse* de Haendel) au Theater an der Wien de Vienne, Zoroastre (*Orlando* de Haendel) au Scottish Opera, Guglielmo au Festival de Macerata donné dans les arènes de Sferisterio en Italie, et Curio (*Giulio Cesare* de Haendel) à la Salle Pleyel à Paris. Il a chanté Aeneas (*Dido and Aeneas*) avec Les Arts Florissants à New York et Moscou, Clito (*Alessandro* de Haendel) au Festival international d'opéra baroque de Beaune, et Nanni (*L'infedeltà delusa* de Haydn) au Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. Andreas Wolf s'est produit sous la direction de chefs tels que William Christie, Jordi Savall, Andreas Spering, Jérémie Rhorer, Alessandro De Marchi, René Jacobs,

Jean-Christophe Spinosi, Paul Goodwin et Marcus Creed.

Fondée en 1994 par son directeur musical Christian Curnyn, la **Early Opera Company** est aujourd'hui reconnue comme l'une des meilleures formations baroques du Royaume Uni. Après avoir fait ses débuts avec *Serse* de Haendel, elle a été invitée à se produire au BOC Covent Garden Festival, et à donner trois exécutions de *Ariodante* de Haendel. Elle a fait ses débuts à St John's, Smith Square à Londres avec des versions de concert de *Actéon* de Charpentier et *Dido and Aeneas* de Purcell, et a également donné une version scénique de *Orlando* de Haendel au Queen Elizabeth Hall dans le cadre du Southbank Centre Early Music Festival. La compagnie a ensuite effectué des tournées nationales avec *Susanna*, *Flavio* et *Orlando* de Haendel. Elle a aussi donné *Dido and Aeneas* au Wigmore Hall de Londres, au Vic Early Music Festival en Espagne, aux BBC Proms de Londres, *Partenope* de Haendel au Buxton Festival et aux Snape Proms, *Alfred* de Thomas Arne au Linbury Studio du Royal Opera de Covent Garden. La Early Opera Company s'est produite en direct sur les ondes de la BBC Radio 3 depuis le Bristol Baroque Festival, et a été "Associate Artists" au Spitalfields

Music Summer Festival en 2013. Elle se produit régulièrement au Wigmore Hall, et a participé à onze saisons de l'Iford Festival. En 2014, l'Orchestre de la compagnie accompagnera les représentations de *Ormindo* de Cavalli à la Sam Wanamaker Playhouse en collaboration avec le Shakespeare's Globe de Londres et le Royal Opera de Covent Garden. La discographie couverte de prix de la Early Opera Company pour Chandos inclut *The Judgment of Paris* de John Eccles, *Partenope*, *Semele*, *Flavio* et *Alceste* de Haendel – l'enregistrement d'*Alceste* a reçu des critiques particulièrement enthousiastes des magazines anglais *Gramophone* et *BBC Music*, et du *Sunday Times*, et a obtenu le "Opera Award" du *BBC Music Magazine* en 2013. www.earlyopera.com/ / Facebook / Twitter @earlyopera

Christian Curnyn est aujourd'hui l'un des chefs d'orchestre spécialisés dans le répertoire baroque et classique les plus recherchés. Après avoir étudié la musique à l'Université de York, il a poursuivi des études de troisième cycle en clavecin à la Guildhall School of Music and Drama de Londres. Fondateur et directeur de la Early Opera Company, il a dirigé toutes les productions scéniques, concerts et enregistrements de cet ensemble.

Au cours de ces dernières années, il s'est également régulièrement produit à l'English National Opera où il a dirigé, entre autres, *Partenope* de Haendel, *After Dido* (la réalisation de Katie Mitchell de *Dido and Aeneas* de Purcell), *Castor et Pollux* de Rameau (dans la nouvelle production de Barrie Kosky qui a obtenu un Olivier Award), *Giulio Cesare* de Haendel, et *Médée* de Charpentier. Il a dirigé *Dido and Aeneas* à Aldeburgh lors des manifestations célébrant le centenaire de la naissance de Benjamin Britten, *Ariodante* de Haendel à Salzbourg, une reprise de *Platée* de Rameau à Stuttgart, *Semele* de Haendel et une nouvelle production de *Tamerlano* au Scottish Opera, *Saul* de Haendel à l'Opera North, la réalisation de Britten de *The Beggar's Opera* au Royal Opera de Covent Garden à Londres, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Semele* et *Eliogabalo* de Cavalli avec le Grange Park Opera, *L'incoronazione di Poppea* de Monteverdi, *Orlando et Alcina* de Haendel avec l'Opera Theatre Company de Dublin, *Jephtha* de Haendel aux Händel-Festspiele de Halle, *Partenope* et *Così fan tutte* au New York City Opera, ainsi que des représentations au Chicago Opera Theater, à l'Opera Australia, au Salzburger Landestheater, à l'Opéra de Francfort et à l'Opéra de Stuttgart.

En concert, Christian Curnyn a dirigé le Scottish Chamber Orchestra, The English Concert, l'Orchestre symphonique de Stavanger, l'Ulster Orchestra, l'Orchestre baroque de Wrocław, le Hallé Orchestra, le Irish Baroque Orchestra, et s'est produit aux Händel-Festspiele à Karlsruhe et à Halle. Pour Chandos, il a enregistré plusieurs opéras de Haendel avec la Early Opera Company, ainsi que *The Beggar's Opera* de Britten avec le City of London Sinfonia.

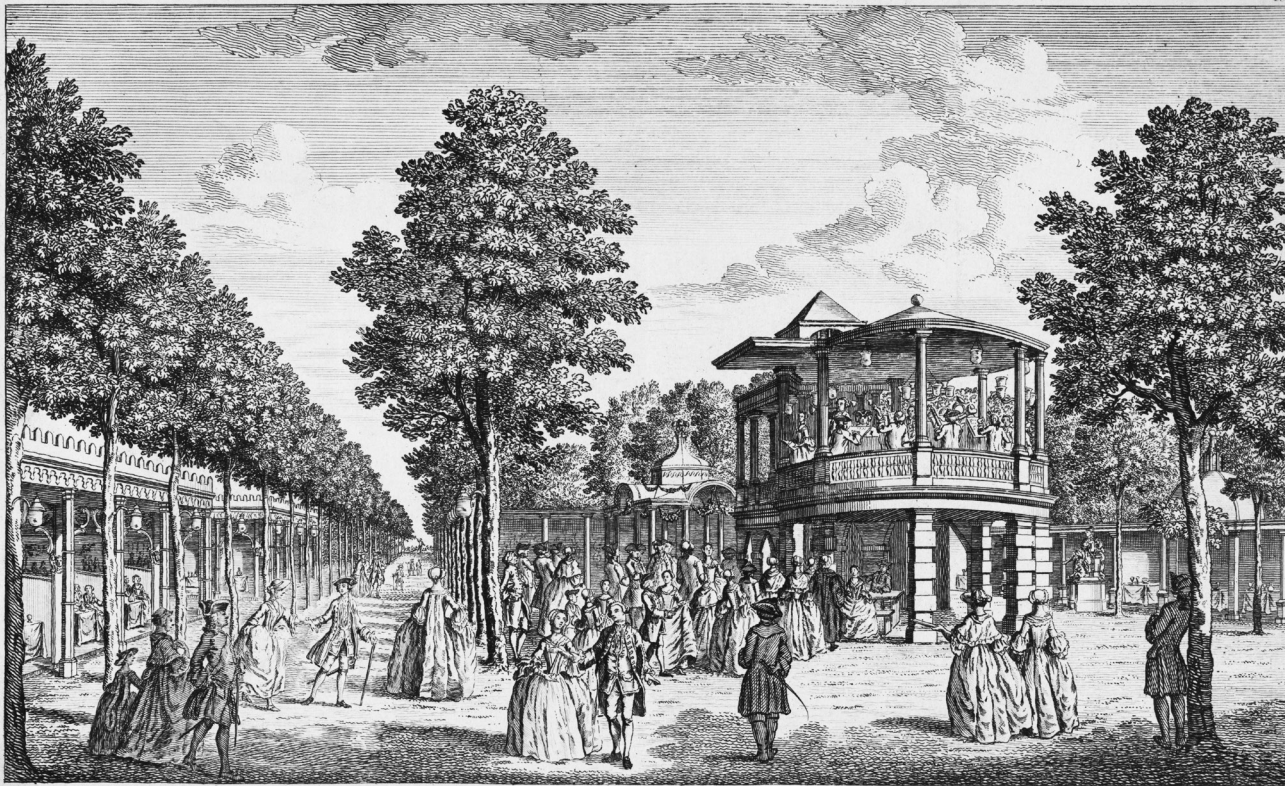
Parmi les futurs engagements de Christian Curnyn, on citera des représentations avec la Early Opera Company, un retour à l'English National Opera avec *Rodelinda* de Haendel, ses débuts au Komische Oper de Berlin, et *Ormindo* de Cavalli avec l'Orchestre de la Early Opera Company en collaboration avec le Royal Opera de Covent Garden et le Shakespeare's Globe Theatre de Londres. www.christiancurnyn.com / Twitter @christiancurnyn



FROM THE RECORDING SESSIONS



FROM THE RECORDING SESSIONS



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*A View of Vaux-Hall Gardens, shewing the Grand Walk at the Vie des Jardins de Vaux-Hall, ou You voit la Grand Allée à l'Entrée
entrance of the Garden, & the Orchestre, with the Music Playing. du Jardin, et l'Orchestre avec les Musiciciens exécutant une Symphonie*

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1770

S.

**ENGRAVING, 1770, DEPICTING
VAUXHALL GARDENS, THE STATUE
OF HANDEL VISIBLE TO THE RIGHT
OF THE MUSIC PAVILION**

SERSE

SERSE

COMPACT DISC ONE

1. Ouverture

Atto primo

Belvedere a canto d'un bellissimo giardino in mezzo di cui v'è un platano.

Scena 1

Serse sotto il platano.

2. Accompagnato

Serse

Frondi tenere, e belle
del mio platano amato,
per voi risplenda il fato.
Tuoni, lampi, e procelle
non v'oltraggino mai la cara pace,
nè giunga a profanarvi austro rapace.

3. Aria

Serse

Ombra mai fu
di vegetabile
cara ed amabile
soave più.

Si tiene ammirando il platano.

Scena 2

Arsamene, Elviro insonnito, e Romilda nel belvedere.

XERXES

COMPACT DISC ONE

1. Overture

Act I

A summerhouse to one side of a magnificent garden, in the middle of which stands a plane tree.

Scene 1

Xerxes under the tree

2. Accompanied recitative

Xerxes

May fate prove kind to you,
tender and beautiful leaves
of my beloved plane;
and may thunder, lightning and tempest
never disturb your precious peace,
nor the preying south wind profane you.

3. Aria

Xerxes

Never was nature's
own shade more beloved
or sweetly treasured
than thine.

He stands and admires the tree.

Scene 2

Arsamenes, Elviro, who looks tired, and Romilda in the summer-house

4. Recitativo

Arsamene

Siam giunti, Elviro...

Elviro

Intendo.

Arsamene

Dove alberga...

Elviro

Seguite.

Arsamene

L'idol mio.

Elviro

Dite pure.

Arsamene

Oh, se fortuna...

Elviro

Sì, così è...

Arsamene

Tu, dove vai?

Elviro

Men vado
ad appoggiarmi, ché di sonno io cado.

Arsamene

Vien qui pronto, ti dico.

4. Recitative

Arsamenes

We have arrived, Elviro...

Elviro

I know.

Arsamenes

...at the abode...

Elviro

Yes...

Arsamenes

...of my beloved.

Elviro

I am all ears.

Arsamenes

Oh, if only Fortune...

Elviro [*leaving*]

Yes, absolutely...

Arsamenes

And where do you think you are going?

Elviro

I'm going to go
and lie down, because I'm half dead with sleep.

Arsamenes

Come back here this instant.

Si ode breve sinfonia.

5. Sinfonia e Recitativo
Arsamene
Sento un soave concerto.

Elviro
Andiam vicini.

Arsamene
Andiam.

Elviro
Son di Romilda
questi villaggi?

Arsamene
Sì, lasciami udire!

Elviro
Così della città poco discosti.

Arsamene
Non parlar più!

Elviro
Me n'anderò a dormire.

Arsamene
Non ti partir...

6. Aria
Romilda (*nel belvedere*)
O voi...

A short symphony is heard.

5. Sinfonia and Recitative
Arsamenes
I hear sweet music...

Elviro
Let's draw a little nearer then.

Arsamenes
Let us do so.

Elviro
So, this is where
Romilda lives?

Arsamenes
Yes. Let me listen.

Elviro
Not too far from the city, either.

Arsamenes
That's enough!

Elviro
I think I'll go and find myself a bed.

Arsamenes
You'll stay right here!

6. Aria
Romilda (*in the summer-house*)
All you...

Arsamene
Questa è Romilda.

Romilda
O voi, che penate!

Elviro
Romilda, è ver?

Arsamene
Sì, taci.

Elviro
E chi favella?

Romilda
O voi, che penate
per cruda beltà,
un Serse...

Scena 3
Serse e detti.

Serse
Qui si canta il mio nome?

Romilda
...un Serse mirate,
che d'un ruvido tronco
acceso stà;
e pur non corrisponde
altro al suo amor,
che mormorio di fronde.

Arsamenes
That's her, Romilda!

Romilda
All you who suffer...

Elviro
Romilda? Really?

Arsamenes
Yes – quiet!

Elviro
I haven't said a word.

Romilda
All you who suffer
at the hands of cruel beauty,
behold Xerxes...

Scene 3
Xerxes and the above

Xerxes
Do I hear my name being sung?

Romilda
Behold Xerxes,
all afire with passion
for a coarse tree trunk,
his love answered only
by the murmur
of the leaves!

7. Recitativo

Serse
Arsamene.

Arsamene
Mio Sire.

Serse
Udite?

Arsamene
Udii.

Serse
Conoscete chi sia?

Arsamene
Io? Nò, Signore.

Serse
Io, sì.

Arsamene
(Ahimè, che gelosia m'accora!)

Serse
Che dite?

Arsamene
Che amerei sentirla ancora.

8. Aria

Romilda
Và godendo vezzoso e bello
quel ruscello la libertà.

7. Recitative

Xerxes
Arsamenes!

Arsamenes
My lord?

Xerxes
Did you hear that?

Arsamenes
Indeed –

Xerxes
And do you know who it is?

Arsamenes
I do not, my lord.

Xerxes
Well, I do.

Arsamenes
(I am consumed with jealousy!)

Xerxes
What are you saying?

Arsamenes
That I would love to hear that voice again.

8. Aria

Romilda
Charming and playful,
the brook revels in its freedom;

E tra l'erbe con onde chiare
lieto al mare correndo v`a.

9. Recitativo

Serse

Quel canto a un bell'amor l'anima sforza.
Per mia dama la scelgo.

Arsamene

(Oh Dei, che sento!)
Signor, ella `e Romilda; `e principessa:
ma parmi non convenga...

Serse

Eh! Mi diceste
non conoscerla. Or come?

Arsamene

Sol la conosco al nome.

Serse

E al canto ancora.
Se dama non convien, sar`a mia sposa.
L'approve?

Arsamene

Signor, a un re non lice
ergere al trono chi non `e regina.

Serse

Per dama non convien, sposa non lice.
Nulla vi piace; `e rigido il consiglio.
Mi sia compagna al soglio.
Le direte che l'amo, io cos`i voglio.

and gliding through meadows with pure ripples
it rushes seaward full of joy.

9. Recitative

Xerxes

This song enchants the soul with love.
I want this woman to join my court.

Arsamenes

(Oh gods! What do I hear!)
My lord, that is Romilda, a princess,
and it seems unfit to me that...

Xerxes

Ah! I thought you said
you didn't know her. Explain yourself.

Arsamenes

I know her only by name.

Xerxes

And by her voice, it would appear.
Well, if not a courtesan, she shall be my bride.
Do you approve of that?

Arsamenes

It is not lawful, sir, that a king should marry
a woman who is not of royal blood.

Xerxes

Unfit to be a courtesan... not lawful as a bride...
You turn down every suggestion!
She shall sit by my side on the throne.
Tell her that I love her. That is my wish.

Arsamene
Io?

Serse
Sì, voi.

Arsamene
Non ho il modo di parlarle.

Serse
Cercatelo...

Arsamene
Ma, Sire, e se non posso...

Serse
Perché?

Arsamene
Ma la modestia... e alfine...

Serse
Intesi.
Io gliel' dirò, ch' a parlar meglio appresi.

10. Aria

Serse
Io le dirò che l'amo,
né mi sgomenterò.

E perché mia la bramo,
so quel che far dovrò.

Arsamenes
I!

Xerxes
Yes, you!

Arsamenes
I wouldn't know how to speak to her.

Xerxes
Then find a way.

Arsamenes
But, my lord, if I should fail...

Xerxes
Why should you?

Arsamenes
Modesty! as well as...

Xerxes
Very well.
I shall tell her myself, since I am clearly better
at it.

10. Aria

Xerxes
I shall tell her of my love,
and feel quite undaunted.

And since I desire her to be mine,
I'll know how to go about it.

Arsamene

Tu le dirai che l'ami
ma non t'ascolterà.

Quella beltà che brami
solo di me sarà.

Serse parte.

Scena 4

Romilda, Atalanta, Arsamene ed Elviro.

11. Recitativo

Romilda
Arsamene.

Arsamene

Romilda, oh Dei! Pavento
che'l tuo più volte a me giurato amore
tu non sparga d'oblio.

Romilda

Perché parli così?

Arsamene

Lo so ben io.
Il re...

Atalanta

Chi? Serse?

Romilda

E che da me richiede?

Arsamenes

You may well tell her of your love,
but she will not listen to you.

The beauty that you desire
shall be mine alone.

Exit Xerxes.

Scene 4

Romilda, Atalanta, Arsamenes and Elviro

11. Recitativo

Romilda
Arsamenes...

Arsamenes

Oh heavens, Romilda, I am afraid
that you will cast aside the love
you have so often sworn to me!

Romilda

Whatever makes you say so?

Arsamenes

I know it all too well:
the king...

Atalanta

Who? Xerxes?

Romilda

And what should Xerxes want of me?

Arsamene

Tenterà la tua fede.

Atalanta

(Se può vincerle il cor, oh me felice!)

(*a Romilda*)

Vien acceso ogni cor dal tuo bel sguardo.

Romilda

Io non temo.

Arsamene

Io pavento.

Atalanta

(Ed io tutt'ardo!)

Dimmi, Arsamene, e credi
che la germana mia tradirti possa?

Arsamene

Crollan le querce annose a una gran scossa.

Romilda

Ma Romilda resiste.

Atalanta

(Ah, fosse infida!)

Romilda

Mai sarà l'alma mia da te disciolta.

Arsamene

Che diletto!

Arsamenes

He is about to tempt your faithfulness.

Atalanta

(Oh what bliss if he could conquer her heart.)

(*to Romilda*)

All hearts are fired by your beauty.

Romilda

I am not afraid.

Arsamenes

I am terrified.

Atalanta

(And I am all aflame!)

Tell me, Arsamenes, do you believe
that my sister could ever betray you?

Arsamenes

The hardiest of oaks will succumb to an
earthquake.

Romilda

Romilda is unshakable.

Atalanta

(Oh, that she were unfaithful!)

Romilda

Never shall my soul be set asunder from yours.

Arsamenes

What a relief!

Atalanta
(Che doglia!) Ascolta, ascolta!

Lo guarda con tenerezza, facendogli molti vezzi.

12. Aria

Atalanta
Sì, sì, mio ben, sì, sì,
io vivo per te sol,
io per te moro.
Amo chi mi ferì,
e pure al mio gran duol
non ho ristoro.
Romilda notte e di
va esclamando così,
"Io per te moro".

Parte.

13. Recitativo

Elviro
Presto, Signor, vien Serse.

Arsamene
Io qui mi celo.

Si nasconde con Elviro.

Scena 5

Serse e Romilda; Arsamene ed Elviro nascosti.

Serse
Come, qui, Principessa, al ciel sereno?
Forse agl'inviti d'Arsamene usciste?

Atalanta
(What a pity!) Listen:

She looks at him tenderly and flirtatiously.

12. Aria

Atalanta
Yes, yes! my love, yes, yes,
for you alone I live,
for you alone I die.
I love the man who wounds me,
though my suffering
is relentless.
These are Romilda's own words,
night and day:
'For you I die.'

Exit.

13. Recitativo

Elviro
Quick, my lord, Xerxes is coming.

Arsamenes
I'll hide here.

He hides with Elviro.

Scene 5

Xerxes and Romilda; Arsamenes and Elviro in hiding

Xerxes
You, my princess, out here in the evening air?
Was it at Arsamenes' invitation?

Romilda
Egli non mi chiamò.

Serse
Parlavvi almeno.

Romilda
Ma, Sire...

Serse
Basta, udite.
Romilda, il fato al trono
oggi vi scorge, amor v'ingemma il serto.

Romilda
Non aspiro tant'alto. Io non ho merito.

Serse
Ne so ben la cagione.
Arsamene m'offende, ma...

Escono Arsamene ed Elviro.

Arsamene
Io, Sire?
Tolga il Ciel, che v'offenda.

Romilda
Ei non sapea...

Romilda
He did not send for me.

Xerxes
But he spoke to you, at least.

Romilda
In truth, my lord...

Xerxes
Stop, enough. Listen.
Romilda, today destiny offers you a throne,
love crowns you with jewels.

Romilda
I do not aspire to such heights: I am quite
unworthy.

Xerxes
I am well aware of the reasons,
and Arsamenes offends me with them.
However...

*Arsamenes emerges from his hiding place with
Elviro.*

Arsamenes
Heaven forbid, my lord,
that I should offend you!

Romilda
He knew nothing..

Serse
Tacete. E voi veloci
lunge da questa corte qual torrente
volgete il piede!

Arsamene
Andrò, benché innocente.

Serse
Pure se promettete
lasciar Romilda...

Elviro (*all'orechio del suo padrone*)
Eh! dite! io lo farò.

Serse
...posso usarvi pietate.

Arsamene
Oh! questo no.

14. Aria
Arsamene
Meglio in voi col mio partire
gelosia s'estinguerà.

Io men vado al mio morire,
voi restate in libertà.

Parte con Elviro.

Xerxes
Silence! And you,
remove yourself from my court,
faster than the rushing river!

Arsamenes
I go, though I am innocent.

Xerxes
Should you, however, swear
to relinquish Romilda...

Elviro (*in his master's ear*)
I say, that's what I would do!

Xerxes
...I am willing to show mercy.

Arsamenes
Ah! No, never!

14. Aria
Arsamenes
May this banishment of mine
extinguish your jealous rage.

I go to meet my death,
and leave you to enjoy your freedom.

Exit with Elviro.

Scena 6

Serse e Romilda immobile senza guardar il re.

15. Recitativo

Serse

Bellissima Romilda, eh, non celate
l'adorato sembiante!
Uditemi, Romilda, io sono amante.
E pur tacete ancora?
Dite un sì, dite un no, dite ch'io mora.

16. Aria

Serse

Di tacere e di schernirmi,
ah! crudel, chi t'insegnò?
Oh, lasciate d'esser belle,
care luci, amate stelle,
oh, cessate di ferirmi
ché mai più vi seguirò,
ah! crudel!

Parte.

Scena 7

Romilda sola.

17. Recitativo

Romilda

Aspide sono a' detti tuoi d'amore,
né vuò macchiar' d'infedeltà il mio core.

Scene 6

*Xerxes and Romilda, who stands motionless,
avoiding the king's gaze*

15. Recitative

Xerxes

Most beautiful Romilda, oh hide not
your beloved features from me.
Pay heed to me, Romilda: I am in love.
Yet still you say nothing?
Say yes, say no, or say you wish me dead!

16. Aria

Xerxes

Whoever taught you, cruel one,
to remain silent and mock me thus?
Oh that you were not so enchanting,
dear eyes, beloved stars.
Oh that you would not wound me thus,
that I need pursue you no more,
cruel one!

Exit.

Scene 7

Romilda alone

17. Recitative

Romilda

I am cold as an asp to your words of love.
I shall never taint my heart with unfaithfulness.

18. Aria
Romilda
Nemmen coll'ombre d'infedeltà
voglio tradire l'anima mia.
E se'l mio bene suo mal si fa
incolpi amore, non gelosia.

Parte.

Scena 8
Cortile. Amastre in abito da uomo, seguita da uno scudiere.

19. Aria
Amastre
Se cangio spoglia
non cangia core,
ma nell'amore
sono l'istessa.

Si ritira in disparte.

Scena 9
Ariodate, seguito da soldati con prigionieri, ed insegne prese a' nemici, ed Amastre.

20. Recitativo
Ariodate
Pugnammo, amici, e stette
per noi bella vittoria.

18. Aria
Romilda
Not even with a shade of unfaithfulness
would I ever betray my soul.
And if my beloved causes his own harm,
let him blame love, not jealousy.

Exit.

Scene 8
A courtyard. Amastres disguised as a man, followed by a page

19. Aria
Amastres
Though I change my appearance,
I shall never change my heart,
for my love will always
remain the same.

She withdraws to one side.

Scene 9
Ariodates, followed by soldiers who guard prisoners, and trophies captured in battle; and Amastres

20. Recitative
Ariodates
How bravely we have fought, my friends,
and how sweet is our victory!

Amastre
(Dunque è vinto il re moro? Oh noi felici!)

Ariodate
Ed accresce di Serse ognor la gloria!

21. Coro di Soldati
Soldati
Già la tromba,
che chiamò le schiere all'armi,
or si scioglie in dolci carmi,
e vittorie a noi rimbomba.

Scena 10
Serse, e detti.

22. Recitativo
Amastre
(Ecco Serse, oh che volto, oh che splendore!)

Serse
Ariodate, v'abbraccio. Il vostro ferro
sempre porta vittoria.

Ariodate
Del vostro nome sol questa è la gloria.

Serse
In premio de' disagi, ch'ora diamo
alla vostra città, che di nostr'armi
fatta è piazza, a sostener l'impresa
d'Atene; or vi prometto,

Amastres
(Then the Mauri's king is conquered? Oh joy!)

Ariodates
And Xerxes' glory swells by the hour!

21. Chorus of Soldiers
Soldiers
Hear the trumpet
which summoned the ranks to arms
soften its tone with mellow strains,
victory resounding in our ears.

Scene 10
Xerxes, and the above

22. Recitativo
Amastres
(Xerxes is coming: oh how glorious, how
splendid he is!)

Xerxes
Ariodate, I embrace you. Your sword
never fails to bring victory.

Ariodates
Our glory is owed to your name alone.

Xerxes
In compensation for the hardships
endured by your city, which has become
our army's garrison in the struggle
against Athens, we pledge to you

Romilda, vostra figlia,
avrà sposo reale
della stirpe di Serse, a Serse eguale.

Ariodate
Così arditi fantasmi
nel pensier non ammetto.

Serse
Ite, così prometto.

23. Aria
Ariodate
Soggetti al mio volere
gli astri non voglio, no.
Ma quel che fan le sfere
sempre lodar saprò.

24. Coro di Soldati
Soldati
Già la tromba,
che chiamò le schiere all'armi,
or si scioglie in dolci carmi,
e vittorie a noi rimbomba.

Partono Ariodate e i soldati.

Scena 11
Serse, ed Amastre col suo scudiere in disparte.

25. Recitativo
Serse
Queste vittorie, io credo,
predicono trionfi anco al mio amore.

that your daughter Romilda
shall have a royal husband:
a man of Xerxes' own kin, equal to Xerxes!

Ariodates
That is beyond
my most audacious dreams.

Xerxes
Go; you have our word.

23. Aria
Ariodates
I would never expect the stars
to submit to my wishes.
But I will always accept
whatever they think fit.

24. Chorus of Soldiers
Soldiers
Hear the trumpet
which summoned the ranks to arms
soften its tone with mellow strains,
victory resounding in our ears.

Exeunt Ariodates and soldiers.

Scene 11
*Xerxes, and Amastres in the background with
her page*

25. Recitativo
Xerxes
These victories, I am certain,
are a foretaste of my triumphs in love.

Amastre
(Parla di me; hai vinto, sì, mio core.)

Serse
Impaziente io vivo
d'abbracciar quell'amato mio tesoro.

Amastre
(E di gioia non moro?)

Serse
Ma pur, che dirà Amastre,
e l'offeso suo padre
del mio imeneo, del mio novello amore?

Amastre
(E così mi schernisce il traditore?)

Serse
Benché di regio sangue
non sia l'idolo mio,
una vassalla illustrar poss'io
colle mie nozze. Al fin, crede decenti
i voler d'un gran rege il mondo.

Amastre (*con voce alta*)
Menti.

Serse (*voltandosi*)
Chi parla olà? Chi siete?

Amastre
Forastieri, Signor.

Amastres
(He speaks of me! Yes, you have conquered my
heart.)

Xerxes
How I yearn to hold
my beloved treasure in my arms.

Amastres
(I shall die with delight!)

Xerxes
And yet what will Amastres,
and her outraged father,
say to this marriage and to my new love?

Amastres
(Is he rejecting me? The traitor!)

Xerxes
Though the woman I worship
is not of royal blood,
yet as her husband I can ennoble her.
And in the end the world approves
the actions of a great king.

Amastres (*aloud*)
You lie!

Xerxes (*turns around*)
Who said that? Who are you?

Amastres
Strangers, my lord.

Serse
Ma a chi mentita
tu desti?

Amastre
Al mio compagno,
che sostener volea, che il vasto Euftrate...
e che'l ponte che fate...
sarebbe esposto ai venti;
io per discorso allor dissi: tu menti.

(accennando Serse)

Serse
Sciocchi mi rassemblete. Ite lontani!
(Amastre parte.)
Non dee render ragione il mio decoro.
Sempre mi torna in mente il bel che adoro.

26. Aria

Serse
Più che penso alle fiamme del core
più l'ardore crescendo sen va.

E'l mio petto è ricetta ben poco
di quel foco che pena mi dà.

Parte.

Scena 12
Arsamene ed Elviro.

Xerxes
And whom did you call
a liar?

Amastres
My companion,
who claims that the mighty Euphrates...
and that the bridge that you are building...
will be destroyed by the wind;
so I disagreed by saying: 'You lie!'

(indicating Xerxes)

Xerxes
You sound like fools. Begone!
(Amastres leaves.)
It is not becoming to my state to explain myself.
My beloved returns constantly to my mind.

26. Aria

Xerxes
The more I think of the flames in my heart,
the more I burn with passion.

But my breast can hardly contain
the fire that consumes me.

Exit.

Scena 12
Arsamenes and Elviro

27. Recitativo

Arsamene

Eccoti il foglio, Elviro,
a Romilda lo porta.

(gli da una lettera)

Elviro

Siete pur risoluto?

Arsamene

Sì, vanne!

Elviro *(in atto di partire, poi ritorna)*

Io vi saluto.

Che parlarle volete,
altro non le scrivete?

Arsamene

No.

Elviro

Ma sono, voi sapete,
con voi bandito; e se son conosciuto?
Siete pur risoluto?

Arsamene

Vanne, non tardar più.

Elviro

Come gliel'ho da dar?

Arsamene

Pensaci tu.

27. Recitative

Arsamenes

Here is the letter, Elviro;
deliver it to Romilda.

(gives him a letter)

Elviro

Are you absolutely sure?

Arsamenes

Yes – go!

Elviro *(about to go, then turns back)*

As you wish.

But don't you want to write anything
other than that you wish to speak to her?

Arsamenes

No!

Elviro

But, you see, I am
banished with you... what if they recognise me?
Are you absolutely certain?

Arsamenes

Just go.

Elviro

And how am I supposed to deliver it?

Arsamenes

You can think about that yourself.

Elviro
Che stravagante scena!

(Pensa un poco e poi risoluto dice:)

28. Arioso

Elviro
Signor, Signor, lasciate fare a me:
io l'ho pensata bene.
Corro, volo, parto, vo,
e più presto tornerò
che se avessi l'ali al piè.

Parte.

29. Aria

Arsamene
Non so se sia la speme
che mi sostiene in vita
o l'aspro mio dolor.

So che quest'alma geme,
dacché mi fu rapita
la gioia del mio cor.

Parte.

Scena 13

Amastre sola.

30. Recitativo

Amastre
Tradir di regia sposa
la fé promessa? E chiamerallo il mondo

Elviro
What a circus!

(thinks for a moment, then speaks decisively:)

28. Arioso

Elviro
My lord, my lord, leave it to me,
I've thought it out quite brilliantly!
I'll run, I'll fly, I've packed my sack,
and in a flash you'll see me back,
as fast as if my feet had wings!

Exit.

29. Aria

Arsamenes
Is it hope
that keeps me alive,
or is it this bitter pain?

For certain, this soul has been sighing
ever since the joy of my heart
was wrenched from me.

Exit.

Scene 13

Amastres alone

30. Recitativo

Amastres
And will he then break his promise
to his royal bride? And is the world supposed

un decente voler? No, che dei regi
son giustizia e clemenza i più gran pregi.

31. Aria
Amastre
Saprà delle mie offese
ben vendicarsi il cor.

Colui che l'ira accese
proverà il mio furor.

Parte.

Scena 14
Atalanta e Romilda.

32. Recitativo
Atalanta
Al fin sarete sposa al vostro Serse.

Romilda
Che? Mio, Serse non è.

Atalanta
Meno Arsamene.

Romilda
Egli sì, perché l'amo.

Atalanta
Egli no, perché parte esule errante.
Perdete un re per un perduto amante.

to approve this? Never, for justice and pity
are the greatest qualities of a monarch.

31. Aria
Amastres
My heart shall find its vengeance
for the offence I have endured.

The man who ignited my anger
will feel the weight of my fury.

Exit.

Scene 14
Atalanta and Romilda

32. Recitativo
Atalanta
So you can finally marry your Xerxes.

Romilda
What are you saying? He is not my Xerxes!

Atalanta
Nor is Arsamenes yours.

Romilda
Yes he is, for I love him.

Atalanta
No he isn't, for he is now a wandering exile.
You are losing a king for a lover you've already
lost.

Romilda
Perduto amante? E come?

Atalanta
Ha il core acceso
d'altre fiamme.

Romilda
Di chi?

Atalanta
Ben lo saprete.

Romilda
Dunque odierò Arsamene, e al re gli affetti
tutti darò; che dite?

Atalanta
Allor prudente
certo vi chiamerò; ed Arsamene
in sposo io chiederò.

Romilda
E che dunque l'amate?

Atalanta
No, ma poi l'amerò.

Romilda
E sì tosto potrete
render d'amore i vostri sensi accesi?

Atalanta
Mi sforzerò.

Romilda
A lost lover? What do you mean?

Atalanta
Another woman's flames
light up his heart.

Romilda
Whose?

Atalanta
You ought to know.

Romilda
And must I then hate Arsamenes, and give my
affection
to the king? Is that it?

Atalanta
I would consider that wise;
and I could then ask
to be Arsamenes' wife myself.

Romilda
Do you love him?

Atalanta
No, but I might soon.

Romilda
And could you really
fall in love that quickly?

Atalanta
I could try.

Romilda
Ah, che pur troppo intesi!

33. Aria
Romilda
Se l'idol mio
rapir mi vuoi,
cangia desio, ch'è vanità.

Quei dolci lacci
snodar non puoi,
che mi legaro la libertà.

Parte.

Scena 15
Atalanta sola.

34. Recitativo
Atalanta
Per rapir quel tesoro
che te colma di gioia e me d'affanni,
se amor non basta, adoprero gl'inganni.

35. Aria
Atalanta
Un cenno leggiadretto,
un riso vezzosetto,
un moto di pupille
può fare innamorar.

Lusinghe, pianti e frodi
son anche certi modi,

Romilda
Ah, it is all too clear now!

33. Aria
Romilda
If you intend to take
my love from me,
come to your senses, for it is all in vain.

You shall never
untie the sweet bonds
destined to tether my freedom.

Exit.

Scene 15
Atalanta alone

34. Recitativo
Atalanta
If love will not suffice
to seize the treasure that fills you with joy
and me with distress, I must resort to deceit.

35. Aria
Atalanta
A graceful little gesture,
a coquettish little smile,
or a twinkle in the eye:
these should bewitch the man.

Flattery, tears and guile
are also trusty methods

che destano faville
e tutti io li so far.

Fine dell'Atto primo

COMPACT DISC TWO

Atto secondo

Scena I

*Piazza della città con loggia.
Amastre, e poi Elviro, che vende fiori, e parla la
lingua franca.*

1 36. **Arioso**
Amastre
Speranze mie fermate,
non mi lasciate ancor.

2 37. **Arioso**
Elviro
Ah, chi voler fiora di bella giardina,
giacinta, indiana, tulipana, gelsomina?

3 38. **Recitativo**
Elviro
E chi direbbe mai ch'io sono Elviro?
Ma se del foglio poi sapesse il re?

Amastre
(Che parla egli del re?)

of stoking a fire –
and I'll try all of these!

End of Act I

COMPACT DISC TWO

Act II

Scene I

*A square in the city with an arcade.
Amastres, then Elviro, selling flowers, and
speaking in a common dialect.*

36. **Arioso**
Amastres
Stay a while longer, my hopes;
do not leave me yet.

37. **Arioso**
Elviro
Who will buy flowers from my pretty garden?
Hyacinths, cotton plants, tulips, jasmine!

38. **Recitativo**
Elviro
And whoever would have guessed that I am
Elviro!
But what if the king discovers about the letter?

Amastres
(What is he saying about the king?)

Elviro
Credo Arsamene
pianti e sospiri al vento spargerà;
e che per moglie al fin il re l'avrà.

Amastre
(Il re per moglie? Chi? Cieli, che sento!)

Elviro
Serse però dovrebbe aver per sposa
dama di regio sangue, e non vassalla:
questa non gli fa onore.

Amastre
(Dunque io sono schernita. Ah, traditore!)
Amico...

Elviro (*vuol scappar via*)
Ah, ci fui colto.

Amastre
Ferma, olà, dico a te; perché scappar?

Elviro
Da mia che cercar?
Voler fiora comprar? Ma...

Amastre
No. Si dice
che Serse sarà sposo in questo dì:
vorrei saper di chi?

Elviro
Well, if you ask me, Arsamenes
can shed his tears and sighs to the winds,
for in the end the king will have her for his wife.

Amastres
(Wife to the king? Who? Heavens, what do I
hear!)

Elviro
Xerxes should really marry a lady
with proper royal blood, and not a vassal:
this woman doesn't do much for his dignity.

Amastres
(Then I really am rejected? The traitor!)
Listen, my friend...

Elviro (*tries to escape*)
Help! I've been caught out!

Amastres
Stop! You there! There is no need to run away!

Elviro
What do you want from me?
Did you want some flowers? Here...

Amastres
No! I hear it said
that Xerxes will be married today,
and I would like to know to whom!

Elviro

Ma dire, tu chi star?
e perché dimandar?

Amastre

Viaggiante curioso, e ch'ama il re.

Elviro

Poiché ti star buon uom, mi dir a te.
Ma taser, non parlar!

Amastre

Di' pur, non dubitar.

Elviro

Ariodate, de chista
città signor, che stare a re vassallo,
aver figlia Romilda, e re voler
chista sposar; ma chista sempre dir:
"Se mi sposar, morir."

Amastre

Ma Romilda ama il re?

Elviro

No, ma fratello,
ch'aver nome Arsamene.

Amastre

E questo forse
i dolor suoi le scrive?

Elviro

Who are you, anyway?
And why do you want to know?

Amastres

A curious traveller, who is fond of the king.

Elviro

You seem a good enough fellow, so I'll tell you.
Keep it to yourself, mind! Not a word –

Amastres

You may trust me.

Elviro

Ariodates, a gentleman
of this city and vassal to the king,
has a daughter called Romilda, and the king
wants to marry her; but all she says is:
'If he marries me, I'll die.'

Amastres

But Romilda loves the king?

Elviro

No, she loves his brother,
a fellow named Arsamenes.

Amastres

And this fellow has perhaps
written to her of his grief?

Elviro
Ahimè! Ti star devina?
(*spasseggiando*)
Chi voler fiora di bella giardina?

Amastre
Dimmi!

Elviro
Nu saper altro.
(*spasseggiando*)
Tulipana, gelsomina!

Amastre
Perché m'uccida il duolo
mancava solo esser tradita ancora.

Elviro
Chi voler fiora, fiora?

4 39. Aria

Amastre
Or che siete, speranze, tradite,
sì, fuggite, fuggite da me.

E in quest'anima oppressa dal duolo
resti solo la bella mia fé.

Parte.

Scena 2
Elviro, poi Atalanta.

Elviro
Mercy on us! You must be a fortune teller!
(*paces up and down*)
Who will buy flowers from my pretty garden?

Amastres
Tell me!

Elviro
That's all I know!
(*padding up and down*)
Tulips, jasmine!

Amastres
My grief needed only this final stroke
of infidelity to end my life.

Elviro
Who will buy flowers? – Flowers!

39. Aria

Amastres
Now that you are betrayed, my hopes,
you may go – yes, you may leave me.

And let nothing remain in this grieving soul
but my own faithfulness.

Exit.

Scene 2
Elviro, then Atalanta

5 40. Recitativo
Elviro
Quel curioso è partito, oh! che indiscreto!
Matto non son per dirgli il mio segreto.
La signora Atalanta a me sen viene.
Oh! bene, bene, bene!

6 41. Arioso e Recitativo
Atalanta
A piangere ogn'ora
amor mi destina.

Elviro
Ah! Chi voler flora di bella giardina?
Voler giacinta? Voler gelsomina?

Atalanta
Olà! Vien qua. Degli aspri miei dolori
le acute spine adorerò co' fiori.

Elviro
Ma mi chi star?

Atalanta
Non so.

Elviro
Mi ben guardar.

Atalanta
Tu quivi? O sventurato! Guarda bene...
Che porti?

40. Recitative
Elviro
That inquisitive fool's gone... how indiscreet
he was!
At least I wasn't so stupid as to give away my
secret.
Oh good, good, good:
here comes the lady Atalanta.

41. Arioso and Recitative
Atalanta
I am destined by love
to shed tears forever.

Elviro
Hey! Who will buy flowers from my pretty
garden?
Would you like hyacinths? Some jasmine?

Atalanta
You there! Come here! (I shall adorn
the sharp thorns of my anguish with flowers.)

Elviro
Excuse me, and who might I be?

Atalanta
I do not know.

Elviro
Well, look carefully!

Atalanta
You, here? Oh, you poor man! Do be careful!...
And what do you have there?

Elviro
Porto un foglio di Arsamene
all'amata Romilda.

Atalanta
A me lo porgi!

Elviro
Glielo darete poi?

Atalanta
Sì!

Elviro
Ma dov'è?

Atalanta
Sta nelle stanze sue scrivendo al re.

Elviro
Al re? Ma che gli scrive?

Atalanta
Che in lui spera, in lui vive.

Elviro
E d'Arsamene?

Atalanta
Punto non si sovviene.

7 42. *Arioso*

Elviro
Ah, tigre infedele!
Cerasta crudele!

Elviro
I have a note from Arsamenes
for his sweetheart, Romilda.

Atalanta
Give it to me!

Elviro
Will you give it to her?

Atalanta
Yes!

Elviro
Where is she?

Atalanta
She is in her rooms, writing to the king.

Elviro
To the king? What is she writing?

Atalanta
That her hopes, indeed her life, lie with him.

Elviro
But what about Arsamenes?

Atalanta
She can barely remember him.

42. *Arioso*

Elviro
Oh, the faithless tigress,
the vicious viper!

8 43. Recitativo

Atalanta
Parti, il re s'avvicina.

Elviro
Ah! Chi voler fiora di bella giardina!

Va via in fretta.

Scena 3

Serse ed Atalanta, che legge il foglio d'Arsamene.

Atalanta
(Con questo foglio mi farò contenta.)

9 44. Arioso

Serse
È tormento troppo fiero
l'adorar cruda beltà.

Vede Atalanta, che finge di leggere.

10 45. Recitativo

Serse
Di quel foglio, Atalanta,
lice saper gli arcani?
Saran forse amorosi?

Atalanta
È ver, ma strani.

Serse
Son più curioso.

43. Recitative

Atalanta
Go now, the king is coming.

Elviro
Ah! Who will buy flowers from my pretty
garden?

He hurries away.

Scene 3

Xerxes and Atalanta, who is reading Arsamenes' letter

Atalanta
(This letter should bring me happiness.)

44. Arioso

Xerxes
It is too harsh a torment
to adore so cruel a beauty.

He sees Atalanta, who is pretending to read.

45. Recitative

Xerxes
Will you share, Atalanta,
the mysteries of that letter?
Might they be of love?

Atalanta
They are indeed, my lord, but most peculiar.

Xerxes
I am even more curious to know.

Atalanta
Ma...

Serse
Ma che?

Atalanta
Io temo...
Mi perdonate?

Serse
Sì.

Atalanta
Dunque leggete.
(*Serse prende la lettera e guarda la firma.*)
(Deh! Seconda l'inganno, o ignudo arciero!)

Serse
Scrivi Arsamene.

Atalanta
È vero.

Serse (*legge basso*)
A chi scrive Arsamene?

Atalanta
A me.

Serse
A voi?

Atalanta
But...

Xerxes
But what?

Atalanta
I fear that...
oh do forgive me, my lord...

Xerxes
I do.

Atalanta
Please read it.
(*Xerxes takes the letter and looks at the signature.*)
(Oh Love, help my enterprise!)

Xerxes
It is written by Arsamenes.

Atalanta
Yes, it is from him.

Xerxes (*reading the letter*)
To whom is Arsamenes writing?

Atalanta
To me.

Xerxes
To you?

Atalanta
Vi sdegnate?

Serse
Stupisco. Ma s'egli ama
Romilda?

Atalanta
No, Signor: ella ben l'ama
ma lui finge d'amarla, affinché quieta
non sturbi il nostro amore.

Serse
Strana avventura! Godi sì, mio core!

Atalanta
Dunque vi prego, o Re, se l'approvate,
che pubblico imeneo lo faccia mio.

Serse
Bella, farò, che sia
o vostro sposo, o preda all'ira mia.

11 **46. Aria**
Atalanta
Dirà che amor per me
piagato il cor non gli ha.

Ma non gli date fé,
ch'egli fingendo va.

12 **47. Recitativo**
Serse
Voi quel foglio lasciate a me per prova.

Atalanta
Does it offend you?

Xerxes
I am bewildered: does he not love
Romilda?

Atalanta
No, my lord: she loves him dearly,
but he only pretends to love her, to keep her
from interfering with our own love.

Xerxes
A strange scheme! But what joy this brings to
my heart!

Atalanta
I beseech you, my lord: if you approve,
let him be mine by public marriage.

Xerxes
I shall ensure, fair Atalanta, that he becomes
either your husband, or prey to my fury.

46. Aria
Atalanta
He will tell you that Love
has not wounded his heart on my account.

But do not believe him,
for he is simply pretending.

47. Recitative
Xerxes
Leave me the note as proof.

Atalanta
(Bella frode, se giova!)

Serse
Itene pure.

Atalanta
Ma vi ricordo...

Serse
E che?

13 **48. Aria**
Atalanta
Dirà che non m'amò
che mai per me languì.

Ma non credete, no,
che fingerà così.

Parte.

Scena 4
Serse e Romilda.

14 **49. Recitativo**
Serse
Ingannata Romilda!
(*Le dà la lettera d'Arsamene.*)
Ecco, leggete,
dite poi se Arsamene amar dovete.

Romilda
Leggo.

Atalanta
(A fine ruse, if it works!)

Xerxes
You may go.

Atalanta
Do not forget, however...

Xerxes
What?

48. Aria
Atalanta
He will tell you that he never loved me,
that he never pined for me.

But do not believe it – no!
for he will pretend just so!

Exit.

Scene 4
Xerxes and Romilda

49. Recitativo
Xerxes
How you are deceived, Romilda!
(*He gives her Arsamenes' letter.*)
Here, read this
and then tell me if Arsamenes deserves your love.

Romilda
I will, my lord.

Serse
Né vi sdegnate?

Romilda
A chi scrive?

Serse
Alla sua cara Atalanta,
sapete già, io non mento.

Romilda
(Non m'uccider, tormento!)

Serse
Che farete?

Romilda
Piangendo ognor vivrò.

15 50. Duettino

Serse
L'amerete?

Romilda
L'amerò.

Serse
E pur sempre vi tradi?

Romilda
L'empia sorte vuol così.

Serse
Se ben fiero v'ingannò?

Xerxes
Are you not outraged?

Romilda
To whom is he writing?

Xerxes
To his beloved Atalanta.
You know I am telling the truth.

Romilda
(Oh torture, do not kill me!)

Xerxes
What will you do now?

Romilda
I shall weep for the rest of my days.

50. Duettino

Xerxes
Will you still love him?

Romilda
I shall.

Xerxes
Yet you are betrayed...

Romilda
Pitiless fate decrees it.

Xerxes
And if he proudly rejects you?

Romilda
L'amerò.

Serse
L'amerete?

Romilda
L'amerò.

16 51. Aria

Serse
Se bramate d'amar chi vi sdegnà,
vuò sdegnarvi, ma come non so.

La vostr'ira, crudel, me l'insegna;
tento farlo, e quest'alma non può.

Parte.

Scena 5
Romilda sola.

17 52. Accompagnato

Romilda
L'amerò? Non fia vero.
Amante traditor! Sorella infida!
Godete di mie pene.
Barbara, menzognero!
L'amerò? Non fia vero.
Ma voi, che delirante me ascoltate,
forse saper bramate
la mia furia crudele ora chi sia?

Romilda
I shall still love him.

Xerxes
Will you still love him?

Romilda
I shall.

51. Aria

Xerxes
If you still love the man who rejects you,
I too should reject you, but know not how.

Your anger, cruel one, is urging me to do so:
I try to obey, but my soul will not respond.

Exit.

Scene 5
Romilda alone

52. Accompanied recitative

Romilda
Will I still love him? Oh, that it were untrue!
My lover betrays me, and my sister deceives me!
How you must relish my suffering...
Barbarous woman! Treacherous man!
Will I still love him? Oh, that it were untrue!
But all you who hear my frenzy,
do you wish to know the name
of the ravening fury that grips me?

18 53. Aria
Romilda
È gelosia
quella tiranna
che tanto affanna
l'anima mia.

Del suo veleno
m'asperge il seno,
e mi condanna
a pena ria.

Parte.

Scena 6
Amastre in atto di uccidersi, ed Elviro.

19 54. Recitativo
Amastre
Giacché il duol non m'uccide,
m'uccida questo ferro.

Elviro (*la trattiene*)
Ohibò, che fate?
Pensate, e poi, se mi volete credere,
vivete sol per ben mangiar e bere.

Amastre
Via su, pria di morire
a quell'alma crudel corriamo a dire:

53. Aria
Romilda
The tyrant that so
afflicts my soul
is jealousy
herself.

She injects her venom
in my breast
and condemns me
to implacable agony.

Exit.

Scene 6
*Amastres, on the point of killing herself, and
Elviro*

54. Recitativo
Amastres
Since grief will not kill me,
may this sword bring my end.

Elviro (*restrains her*)
How now! What are you doing?
Listen here, if you'll take my advice:
live, if only for the sake of wine and a good dinner.

Amastres
I have made up my mind: before I die,
I shall find that cruel man and tell him:

20 55. Aria

Amastre

Anima infida,
tradita io sono.
Vien, tu m'uccida,
io ti perdono.

Parte infuriata.

Scena 7

Elviro, poi Arsamene.

21 56. Recitativo

Elviro

È pazzo affè.

Arsamene

Elviro...

Elviro

Voi qui, Signor? Fuggiamo.

Arsamene

Che ti disse Romilda?

Elviro

Ad Atalanta
diedi il foglio, e mi disse
che la vostra Romilda amava il re,
che stava a lui scrivendo.

Arsamene

Di nera infedeltate o mostro orrendo!
Ma, non bene intendesti? Parla a me...

55. Aria

Amastres

Before you, oh faithless soul,
stands a wronged woman.
Come, then, kill me;
I forgive you.

She leaves in a frenzy.

Scene 7

Elviro, then Arsamenes

56. Recitativo

Elviro

He's completely mad!

Arsamenes

Elviro...

Elviro

You here, my lord? Let's disappear!

Arsamenes

What did Romilda tell you?

Elviro

I gave the letter
to Atalanta, and she told me
that your Romilda was in love with the king,
and that she was just then writing to him!

Arsamenes

Oh traitor of the blackest dye!
– But you must have misunderstood... Tell me!

Elviro
V'ho detto già, ch'ama e che scrive al re.
Che volete di più?

Arsamene
Forse scherzò?

Elviro
Ohibò, ohibò! Parlò troppo da vero.

Arsamene
O di tigre crudel core più fiero!

22 57. Aria

Arsamene
Quella che tutta fé
per me languia d'amore,
no, che più mia non è,
perduto ho il core.

Che pensa il Ciel, che fa?
Non sa col suo rigore
punir chi reo sen va
di tanto errore.

Partono.

Scena 8

*Ponte costruito sopra vascelli in mezzo al mare,
e che congiunge l'Asia all'Europa, sopra il lido
dell'Asia accampamento di Serse.
Serse, Ariodate e coro di marinari.*

Elviro
I've told you: she loves the king and she's writing
to him.
What more do you want?

Arsamenes
Perhaps she was teasing!

Elviro
Oh dear, no. She was telling the truth.

Arsamenes
Oh heart more savage than the cruel tiger!

57. Aria

Arsamenes
The very woman who pined for me,
so unswervingly truthful,
is no longer mine
and my heart is lost.

What will you do now, ye heavens?
Do you not know that anyone
guilty of such transgression
deserves your implacable rage?

Exeunt.

Scene 8

*A pontoon stretching across several ships, linking
Asia with Europe. Along the Asian shore is
Xerxes' camp.
Xerxes, Ariodates and a chorus of sailors*

23 58. Coro di Marinari
Marinari
La virtute sol potea
giunger l'Asia all'altra riva.
Viva Serse, viva, viva!

24 59. Recitativo
Serse
Ariodate.

Ariodate
Signore.

Serse
Del mare ad onta
e sin del vento infido
seppi giunger ancor Sesto ad Abido.
Tu vanne pronto ad ordinar le schiere.

Ariodate
Ubbidirò.

Serse
Pria della terza aurora
di passar in Europa è il mio volere.

Ariodate
Per esempio dei regi
i tuoi gloriosi pregi
con caratteri d'or la fama scriva.

Parte.

58. Chorus of Sailors
Sailors
Genius alone could have
joined Asia's shore with yonder bank.
Long live Xerxes, hurrah, hurrah!

59. Recitativo
Xerxes
Ariodates!

Ariodates
My lord.

Xerxes
See how in spite
of the swell and the fearsome wind
I have linked Sestos with Abydos.
Go and assemble the ranks immediately.

Ariodates
I am your servant.

Xerxes
My plan is to cross into Europe
within three days.

Ariodates
May fame inscribe in golden letters
your glorious worth
as an example to all kings.

Exit.

25 60. Coro di Marinari
Marinari
La virtute sol potea
giunger l'Asia all'altra riva.
Viva Serse, viva, viva!

Scena 9
Arsamene e Serse.

26 61. Arioso
Arsamene
Per dar fine alla mia pena
chi mi svena per pietà?

27 62. Recitativo
Serse
Arsamene, ove andate?

Arsamene
A ber l'onda di Lete,
sol per scordarmi che fratel mi siete.

Serse
Cessi lo sdegno...

Arsamene
E in voi la tirannia.

Serse
Voglio sposarvi al bel che v'innamora.

Arsamene
E mi schernite ancora?

60. Chorus of Sailors
Sailors
Nothing but genius could have
joined Asia's shore with yonder bank.
Long live Xerxes, hurrah, hurrah!

Scene 9
Arsamenes and Xerxes

61. Arioso
Arsamenes
Oh, that some kind soul might kill me,
and put an end to my suffering!

62. Recitativo
Xerxes
Arsamenes, where are you going?

Arsamenes
To drink the waters of Lethe,
and forget that you are my brother.

Xerxes
Enough of this indignation...

Arsamenes
And enough of your tyranny.

Xerxes
I want you to marry the woman you love.

Arsamenes
Do you mock me still?

Serse

So di qual fiamma ardete.
Lessi le vostre note, invan tacete.

Arsamene

(Ah! Che Romilda, oh Dei! mostrò il mio
foglio!)
Ed or che lo confesso,
e che già lo sapete?

Serse

Per consorte l'avrete.

Arsamene

Ora lasciate
ch'io vi baci la man.

Serse

Tanto l'amate?

Arsamene

Più che l'anima mia.

Serse

Che nol diceste pria?
Lieti saremo ambo in un stesso dì.
Io sposo di Romilda...

Arsamene

Ed io di chi?

Serse

D'Atalanta.

Xerxes

I know whom you love so passionately:
I have read your letter. Your silence is in vain.

Arsamenes

(Oh heavens, has Romilda shown him my
letter?)
And must I now confess my love
when you know it already?

Xerxes

You shall have her for your bride.

Arsamenes

Allow me
to kiss your hand!

Xerxes

Do you love her so very dearly?

Arsamenes

More than my own life.

Xerxes

Why did you not say so before?
We shall both find happiness on the same day:
I as Romilda's husband –

Arsamenes

And I...?

Xerxes

As Atalanta's.

Arsamene
E così voi m'ingannate?

Serse
So che Atalanta amate.

Arsamene
Amo Romilda.

Serse
Eh, non fingete più.

Arsamene
Dunque Romilda
a me non concedete?

Serse
Lo so; non la volete.

28 **63. Aria**
Arsamene
Sì, la voglio e l'otterrò!

E se il Ciel per me non splende,
gli empî mostri e l'ombre orrende
di Cocito invocherò.

Parte.

Scena 10
Atalanta e Serse.

29 **64. Recitativo**
Atalanta
V'inchino, eccelso Re.

Arsamenes
Do you think you can deceive me like this?

Xerxes
I know you love Atalanta.

Arsamenes
I love Romilda!

Xerxes
Oh, enough of this pretence!

Arsamenes
So you will not
grant me Romilda?

Xerxes
I know you do not want her.

63. Aria
Arsamenes
I want her, and I shall have her!

And if the heavens will not shine upon me,
I shall invoke the vile monsters
and hideous shades of Cocitus.

Exit.

Scene 10
Atalanta and Xerxes

64. Recitativo
Atalanta
I bow to you, great king,

Serse
Negò Arsamene
d'essere vostro amante,
e per Romilda sol egli è costante.
Dunque da ver non v'ama; e voi lasciate
di soffrir tante pene, e non l'amate.

65. Aria
Atalanta
Voi mi dite che non l'ami
ma non dite se potrò.
Troppo belle
son le stelle
ch'al suo volto il Ciel donò.
Troppo stretti quei legami
onde amor m'incatenò.

Parte.

66. Recitativo
Serse
Saria lieve ogni doglia,
se potesse un amante
amar e disamar sempre a sua voglia.

67. Aria
Serse
Il core spera e teme
penando ognor così,
se goderà in amore
saper ancor non può.

Lo chieggo alla mia speme,
ella mi dice, sì,

Xerxes
Arsamenes denies
that he is in love with you
and appears resolutely true to Romilda.
He clearly does not love you, and you
might ease your suffering by not loving him.

65. Aria
Atalanta
You tell me not to love him,
but you do not tell me how.
Far too lovely
are the eyes
heaven gave his handsome face.
Far too tight are the bonds
that tether me with love.

Exit.

66. Recitativo
Xerxes
How bearable pain would be,
if a lover could only fall
in and out of love at his leisure.

67. Aria
Xerxes
All the while suffering,
the heart lives in hope and fear,
never knowing whether love
will bring any pleasure.

When I question hope,
her reply is yes;

ma poi freddo timore
sento che dice, no.

Parte.

Scena 11
Elviro solo.

33 68. Accompagnato

Elviro

Me infelice, ho smarrito il mio padrone!
Ma mi confesso reo; son pazzo affé.
Egli ha smarrito me.
Forse per questo ponte ci se ne andò;
no, ch'io nol vedo, no...
Ma qual adombra il Ciel nubiloso oscuro?
Sento che l'onde fremono,
sento che l'aria sibila;
son restato all'oscuro;
voglio partir in fretta.
Si spezza il ponte,
(corre al lido)
a te, fa cor, gambetta.
Perché nemico al mio temperamento
è l'acquoso elemento.

34 69. Aria

Elviro

Del mio caro Bacco amabile
nell'impero suo potabile
amo solo d'abitar.

then I turn to doubt:
her icy word is no.

Exit.

Scene 11
Elviro alone

68. Accompanied recitative

Elviro

Wretch that I am! I've lost my master!
And it's my fault, too, what a fool!
Well, actually, he's lost me.
I wonder if he's gone across this bridge.
No, I can't see him there.
My word, though, look at those black clouds!
Listen to those waves crashing
and the wind howling.
It's got quite dark!
I think I'll be off, and with all speed,
for if the bridge breaks up
(runs to the shore)
it's best to be well clear.
My temperament is no friend
to such watery elements!

69. Aria

Elviro

The only land I'd choose to live in
is the drinkable empire
of my dear, sweet Bacchus.

L'acqua rende ipocondriaco;
il bon vin sin nel zodiaco
la mia testa sa inalzar.

Parte.

Scena 12

*Luogo di ritiro contiguo alla città.
Serse da una parte, e Amastre dall'altra.*

35 70. Duettino

Serse
Gran pena è gelosia!

Amastre
Lo sa il mio cor piagato.

Serse
Per altri io son sprezzato...

Amastre
Per altri anch'io tradita...

Serse
e la mia fé tradita.

Amastre
schernita è l'alma mia.

Serse ed Amastre
Gran pena è gelosia!

36 71. Recitativo

Serse
Aspra sorte!

Water makes a man a hypochondriac,
but a decent wine sends my head
soaring into the heavens!

Exit.

Scene 12

*A secluded place near the city.
Xerxes on one side, Amastres on the other*

70. Duettino

Xerxes
Jealousy is an unbearable torment:

Amastres
My wounded heart knows well,

Xerxes
I am spurned for another man...

Amastres
I am betrayed for another woman...

Xerxes
...and my hopes have been betrayed.

Amastres
...and my soul has been scorned.

Amastres and Xerxes
Jealousy is an unbearable torment.

71. Recitativo

Xerxes
Oh bitter fate!

Amastre
Empie stelle!

Serse
O Romilda crudel!

Amastre
Serse rubelle!

Serse
Chi parla?

Amastre
Un infelice.

Serse
E chi sei tu?

Amastre
Un che vi servì in guerra, e fu ferito.

Serse
Vuoi tornar a servirmi?

Amastre
Ci penserò.

Serse
Perché?

Amastre
Perché non vuoi servir senza mercé.

Serse
Che? Mi trovasti ingrato?

Amastres
Oh inclement stars!

Xerxes
Oh heartless Romilda!

Amastres
Oh callous Xerxes!

Xerxes
Who goes there?

Amastres
A desolate soul.

Xerxes
And who are you?

Amastres
One who served you in war, and was wounded.

Xerxes
Do you wish to serve again?

Amastres
I shall think about it.

Xerxes
How so?

Amastres
I will not serve without a reward.

Xerxes
What? You found me ungrateful?

Amastre
Son rimasto ingannato.

Serse (*vede Romilda, che viene*)
(Ma sen viene il mio ben.)
Scostati; appresso noi parlerem.
Tengo un affar ch'importa.
Ritorni a me in brevi ore.

Amastre
(Tornerò per tua pena, o traditore!)

Si ritira in disparte.

Scena 13
Serse, Romilda ed Amastre in disparte.

Serse
Romilda, e sarà ver, che sempre in vano
pianger mi lascerete?
Che dite? Rispondete.

72. Aria
Romilda
Val più contento core
che quanto il mondo aduna.

Più vale un ben d'amore
che cento di fortuna.

73. Recitativo
Serse
Vuò ch'abbian fine i miei dolori immensi.

Amastres
I found myself deceived.

Xerxes (*sees Romilda approaching*)
(Here comes my beloved.)
Go away now; we shall talk later.
I have important business to deal with.
Come back to me soon.

Amastres
(I shall return to punish you, you traitor!)

She withdraws to one side.

Scene 13
Xerxes and Romilda, and Amastres to one side

Xerxes
Can it really be, Romilda, that I must
weep hopelessly forever?
What say you? Answer me!

72. Aria
Romilda
A happy heart is worth more
than the riches of the whole world.

A single bounteous love is worth more
than a hundred turns of good fortune.

73. Recitativo
Xerxes
I demand an end to my great suffering.

Romilda
Lasciate, ch'io ci pensi.

Serse
No, datemi la destra.

Amastre
Olà! Fermate,
ch' il re v'inganna.

Serse
Ch'ardimento è questo?
Olà, condotto sia
in oscura prigion!

Amastre
Morirò pria!

Si mette in difesa colla spada in mano.

Serse
Temerità importuna!
Strano disturbo!

*Parte sdegnato.
Le guardie attaccano Amastre che si difende.*

Romilda
(O mia buona fortuna!)
(ai soldati)
Cessate, olà!
(I soldati cessano l'attacco.)

Romilda
Allow me to think it over.

Xerxes
No, give me your right hand!

Amastres
No! Beware, you there:
the king deceives you!

Xerxes
How dare he?
Ho! Let him be taken
to the darkest dungeon!

Amastres
I shall die first!

She draws her sword and raises it in defence.

Xerxes
Troublesome but daring.
Quite remarkable!

*He leaves in a fury.
The guards set upon Amastres, who defends herself.*

Romilda
(What good fortune!)
(to the guards)
Stop there!
(They stop fighting.)

E voi, prode guerriero,
riponete quel brando.
Ite; approverà Serse il mio comando.

Le guardie partono.

Scena 14
Romilda ed Amastre.

Amastre
La fortuna, la vita, e l'esser mio
in eterno obbligate.

Romilda
Ite, non vi fermate.
Che se venisse il re! Ditemi solo,
che v'indusse del re a sturbar le voglie?

Amastre
Perché vi vuol sforzar d'esser gli moglie,
e fiamme più gradite
v'ardono il sen.

Romilda
Partite.

Amastre parte.

³⁹ **74. Aria**
Romilda
Chi cede al furore
di stelle rubelle
amante non è.

And you too, brave warrior,
put away your sword.
You may leave us; Xerxes will approve my
command.

The guards leave.

Scene 14
Romilda and Amastres

Amastres
I am eternally grateful to you
for my fate, my life, my very existence.

Romilda
Begone! Do not linger,
for the king may return. But tell me one thing:
what made you oppose the wishes of the king?

Amastres
He is forcing you to marry him,
whilst another flame
glows in your breast.

Romilda
Begone!

Exit Amastres.

74. Aria
Romilda
The lover who bows
to the fury of treacherous fate
cannot know the meaning of love.

Trionfa in amore
del fato spietato
l'invitta mia fé.

Fine dell'Atto secondo

COMPACT DISC THREE

Atto III

1 75. Sinfonia

Scena I
Galleria.

Arsamene, Romilda, Elviro.

2 76. Recitativo

Arsamene

Sono vani i pretesti...

Romilda

Sì, ad Atalanta scrivesti.

Arsamene

Elviro parlerà.

Romilda

Sì, Atalanta dirà...

Romilda ed Arsamene

Oh amare pene!

Romilda

Ecco Atalanta viene.

My faith is strong,
and triumphs in love,
scorning pitiless destiny.

End of Act II

COMPACT DISC THREE

Act III

75. Sinfonia

Scene I

A gallery.

Arsamenes, Romilda, and Elviro

76. Recitativo

Arsamenes

Your excuses are in vain...

Romilda

You wrote to Atalanta.

Arsamenes

Elviro will talk!

Romilda

Atalanta will tell you...

Romilda and Arsamenes

Oh what bitter torment!

Romilda

See, Atalanta is coming!

Scena 2

Atalanta e detti.

Atalanta

(Ahi! Scoperto è l'inganno! E che farò?)

Elviro

Brutti imbrogli son questi!

Ho la febbre, e la voce...

(ad Atalanta)

Deh, Signora,

dite per carità

quel che diceste a me.

Atalanta

Dissi: Romilda scrive, ed ama il re.

Arsamene

Che volete di più?

Romilda

Dunque ingannate?

Atalanta

Piano, non v'adirate!

Dissi così, per far partire il servo,
che voleva parlarvi.

Romilda

Seguite pur, son pronta ad ascoltarvi.

Scene 2

Atalanta, and the above

Atalanta

(My ploy has been uncovered! What shall I do?)

Elviro

These tricks aren't very fair!

I have a temperature, and my voice...

(to Atalanta)

Come, my lady,

please tell them

what you said to me.

Atalanta

I said that Romilda loved the king and was
writing to him.

Arsamenes

What more do you want?

Romilda

Are you deceiving both of us?

Atalanta

Please, please! Keep your temper!

I said it to make the servant go away,
because he wanted to speak to you.

Romilda

Go on: I am listening.

Atalanta
Serse mi sopraggiunse, e prese il foglio.
(*ad Arsamene*)
Io per giovarvi, dissi: è scritto a me;
mi finsi amante, ed ho ingannato il re.

Arsamene
Or che dite, Romilda?

Romilda
Or che dite, Arsamene?

Arsamene
Che v'adoro...

Romilda
Che siete il caro bene.
(*Si abbracciano.*)
Fate Atalanta pur quanto sapete,
Arsamene il mio ben non mi torrete.

3 77. *Aria*
Atalanta
No, no, se tu mi sprezzi,
morir non vuò.
Fo certi vezzi
col mio semblante,
che un altro amante
trovar saprò.

Parte.

Atalanta
Then Xerxes appeared and took the letter.
(*to Arsamenes*)
So, to help you I said it was to me;
I pretended to be your lover and misled the king.

Arsamenes
What do you say to that, Romilda?

Romilda
What do you say to that, Arsamenes?

Arsamenes
That I adore you!

Romilda
That you are my dearest love!
(*They embrace.*)
Do whatever you will, Atalanta,
you will never take my beloved from me!

77. *Aria*
Atalanta
Oh no, no, I will not die
on account of your contempt.
My looks
I can soon alter
and find a lover
elsewhere.

Exit.

Scena 3

Romilda, Arsamene, Elviro, e poi Serse.

4 78. Recitativo

Romilda (*ad Arsamene*)

Ecco in segno di fé la destra amica.

Elviro

Ecco Serse, ecco Serse...

Arsamene

Oh, che sciagura!

Elviro

Ed io v'aspetterò fuor delle mura.

Corre via.

Romilda

Nascondetevi!

Arsamene (*si nasconde*)

Oh sorte!

Serse

Che vi mosse, Romilda, a quel guerriero donar la libertate?

Romilda

Il suo valore.

Serse

Tutto potete; è vostro il regno e il core.
Già siete mia regina.

Scene 3

Romilda, Arsamenes, Elviro, and then Xerxes

78. Recitativo

Romilda (*to Arsamenes*)

Take my right hand as a token of my fidelity.

Elviro

Xerxes is coming, Xerxes is coming!

Arsamenes

Oh, misfortune!

Elviro

I'll be waiting for you outside the city walls.

He hurries off.

Romilda

Hide yourself!

Arsamenes (*bides*)

Oh, cruel fate!

Xerxes

Romilda, what moved you to grant that warrior his freedom?

Romilda

His valour, sir.

Xerxes

So be it: my kingdom and my heart are yours,
and you are already my queen.

Romilda
Signor, volo tant'alto è gran rovina.

Serse
Deh, non negate più.

Romilda
Negarò sempre.

Serse
Franger io ben saprò...
Intendete, Romilda?

Romilda
(Ahi, che farà?)

Serse
Non partirò, se pria... basta... che dite?

Romilda
Che del mio genitor ci vuol l'assenso.

Serse
E poi che dubbio v'è?

Romilda
Ubbidirò il mio re.

Serse
Vado a chiederlo, e intanto
mi stillo in gioia.

Romilda
My lord, to aspire to such heights would spell
my ruin.

Xerxes
Oh, deny me no longer!

Romilda
I will deny you for ever.

Xerxes
I always get my own way...
Do you understand, Romilda?

Romilda
(Ah! What does he mean?)

Xerxes
I shall not leave, before... enough! What do
you say?

Romilda
That you would need my father's consent.

Xerxes
And after that?

Romilda
Then I shall obey my king.

Xerxes
I shall go and ask him now,
and rejoice in my fortune!

Romilda
Ed io mi struggo in pianto.

5 79. Aria
Serse

Per rendermi beato
parto, vezzose stelle,
e poi, pupille belle,
a voi ritornerò.

Farfalla al vostro lume
il core innamorato
ardendo le sue piume
fenice io sorgerò.

Parte.

Scena 4

Arsamene e Romilda.

6 80. Recitativo
Arsamene

“Ubbidirò al mio re”?
Oh, che limpido amor! Che bella fé!

Romilda (*mezza svenuta vien, sostenuta dalle
sue damigelle*)
Ahi, ch'io mi moro!

Arsamene
Romilda?

Romilda
Vi fermate.

Romilda
Whilst I drown in my tears...

79. Aria
Xerxes

I leave you, oh graceful stars,
to secure my bliss;
and then, most beautiful eyes,
to you I shall return.

My yearning heart is like a moth
captivated by your light,
and if my wings are scorched
like a phoenix I shall rise again.

Exit.

Scene 4

Arsamenes and Romilda

80. Recitativo
Arsamenes

‘Then I shall obey my king.’ –
A love most pure, an exemplary faithfulness!

Romilda (*swooning, supported by her
ladies*)
Ah! I am dying!

Arsamenes
Romilda?

Romilda
Stop!

Arsamene
Romilda?

Romilda
Andate, andate... Serse il re
sovvenirmi potrà,
quando m'ucciderà.

Arsamene
Tanto m'odiate?

Romilda
Tanto v'adoro!
Addio, vi lascio, addio!

Arsamene
Vi fuggo...

Romilda
E dove andate, idolo mio?

Arsamene
Dove vuol fiera sorte.
E voi, dove?

Romilda
Alla morte.

Arsamene
Eh, dite al trono
che promesso vi fu.

Arsamenes
Romilda?

Romilda
Just go: Xerxes the king
will bring me comfort
by killing me.

Arsamenes
Is that how much you loathe me?

Romilda
That is how much I love you!
Farewell, I am leaving you, farewell!

Arsamenes
Then I shall go.

Romilda
Oh my darling, where to?

Arsamenes
Wherever a barbarous destiny will take me.
And you?

Romilda
To my death.

Arsamenes
Come, come! You mean to the throne
that is promised you.

Romilda
Vi lascio, addio, non mi vedrete più.

Le damigelle la conducono via sostenendola.

7 **81. Aria**
Arsamene
Amor, tiranno Amor,
per me non hai pietà,
farmi languir ognor
è troppa crudeltà.

Un core, un petto sol
tanto soffrir non sa,
o cangia tempre al duol,
o dammi libertà.

Parte.

Scena 5
Boschetto.
Serse ed Ariodate.

8 **82. Recitativo**
Serse
Come già vi accennammo
sposo del nostro sangue, a piacer vostro
destiniamo a Romilda.

Ariodate
Alto è l'onore! E...

Romilda
I am leaving you, farewell; you will see me no
more.

Still supporting her, her ladies lead her away.

81. Aria
Arsamenes
Love, oh love, you tyrant,
how pitiless you are.
You are far too cruel
to let me languish like this.

No heart or breast can endure
such relentless suffering:
then grant relief from this torment,
or give me back my freedom.

Exit.

Scene 5
A grove.
Xerxes and Ariodates

82. Recitativo
Xerxes
As we have already said,
a man of our kin, with your consent,
is destined to become Romilda's husband.

Ariodates
The honour is overwhelming! And...

Serse
L'approvate? Assentite?

Ariodate
Bramo sol d'ubbidirvi.

Serse
Dunque udite:
verrà tra poco nelle vostre stanze
persona eguale a noi, del nostro sangue:
fate che vostra figlia
per suo sposo l'accetti.

Ariodate
Del vostro sangue? E così noto a me?

Serse
Quanto Serse.

Parte.

Ariodate
Arsamene, altri non è.

83. Aria
Ariodate
Del Ciel d'amore
sorte sì bella
chi mai sperò!

Per mio splendore
qual fu la stella
che lampeggiò.

Parte.

Xerxes
Do you approve? Do you give your consent?

Ariodates
My sole desire is to obey you.

Xerxes
Then pay heed:
a person of equal rank to us, and of our own blood
will shortly arrive at your residence.
Ensure that your daughter
accepts him as her husband.

Ariodates
Of your own blood? And familiar to me?

Xerxes
As familiar as Xerxes!

Exit.

Ariodates
It has to be Arsamenes!

83. Aria
Ariodates
Who ever wished
for so happy an outcome
from the sphere of love!

What star could glow
so brightly
for my glory?

Exit.

Scena 6

Romilda che esce sdegnata.

10 84. Recitativo

Romilda

Il suo serto rifiuto,
e dite a Serse in riportargli il dono,
che fida amante ad altri sposa io sono.

Vuol partire, ed incontra Serse.

Scena 7

Serse e Romilda.

Serse

Fermatevi, mia sposa e mia regina!

Romilda

Che dite? Ohimè! Così non mi chiamate!

Serse

Perché?

Romilda

Perché oscurate
il decoro real...

Serse

Come?

Scene 6

Romilda, who is about to leave, full of indignation

84. Recitative

Romilda

I spurn Xerxes' crown!
And when you return his gift,
tell him that I am faithfully betrothed to
another.

She comes face to face with Xerxes himself.

Scene 7

Xerxes and Romilda

Xerxes

Stop, my bride and queen!

Romilda

What are you saying? Oh, do not call me that!

Xerxes

Why not?

Romilda

You bring a blemish
to your crown.

Xerxes

How so?

Romilda
Ascoltate.
Arsamene m'amò...

Serse
Principio infausto!

Romilda
Fu modesto e fedel...

Serse
Basta!

Romilda
Servimmi
tacito adoratore.

Serse
Ah, m'uccidete!

Romilda
Ma ardito al fin...

Serse
Che?

Romilda
Non ardisco, o Sire,
m'arrossisco, Signor, non lo dirò.
Parto, e lo scriverò.

Serse
No, no, seguite!

Romilda
Pay heed to me!
Arsamenes has been my lover...

Xerxes
An inauspicious start!

Romilda
He was discreet and loyal.

Xerxes
Enough!

Romilda
He served me
and adored me with modesty.

Xerxes
Ah! You are killing me!

Romilda
But eventually, he grew more bold...

Xerxes
What?

Romilda
I dare not, my lord!
I am blushing, and cannot tell you.
Let me go and I shall write it to you.

Xerxes
No, no, continue!

Romilda
Non so se ardire o se fortuna fu...

Serse
Ah, che non posso più!

Romilda
Le sue labbra accostò...

Serse
Dove?

Romilda
Alle mie,
e... e... e...

Serse
E vi baciò, non è? Ditelo!

Romilda
Appunto.

Serse
Per fuggir le mie nozze, ora mentite.
Mia siasi ver o no: delle sue colpe
abbia il castigo.
(alle guardie)
Olà, pronti volate,
Arsamene uccidete!
Vedova di quel bacio,
poi sposa mi sarete.

Parte sdegnato.

Romilda
Whether by audacity or fate, I do not know...

Xerxes
Ah! I can bear this no longer!

Romilda
He drew his lips close...

Xerxes
To...?

Romilda
To mine...
and... and... and...

Xerxes
And he kissed you, did he not? Say it!

Romilda
In truth.

Xerxes
You are lying to avoid marrying me.
But whether it is true or not, he shall be
punished
for his transgression.
(to his guards)
Guards ho! Fly this instant
to Arsamenes and slay him!
You shall first become the widow of that kiss,
and then my bride!

Exit in a fury.

Romilda
Mio re, mio sposo, sì! Oh, amare pene!
Fermate, e viva il caro mio Arsamene!

Scena 8
Romilda ed Amastre con lettera alla mano.

Romilda
Prode guerrier...

Amastre
Signora...

Romilda
A me venite!
Se nel petto nudrite
alma cortese e pia,
le mie preghiere udite!

Amastre
Comandi, e non preghiere
a me porger dovete. Io mi sovvengo,
che toglieste il mio piè
da' lacci di quell'empio ingrato re.

Romilda
Ingratissimo appunto! Egli comanda
che Arsamene s'uccida.
In voi il mio cor si fida;
cercatelo, e per voi nota gli sia
questa sentenza ria.

Romilda
Be then my king and husband! Oh, the bitter
pain!
But hold your peace, and let my Arsamenes live!

Scene 8
Romilda and Amastres, who is holding a letter

Romilda
Brave warrior...

Amastres
My lady...

Romilda
Come to my help!
If your breast holds
a kindly and pious soul,
hear my prayer!

Amastres
You should command me
and not beseech me. I remember well
how you freed me from the chains
of that depraved and black-hearted king.

Romilda
The blackest of hearts, indeed! He has ordered
that Arsamenes be put to death.
I now place my trust in you:
seek him and tell him
of this wicked sentence.

Amastre

Vado pronto a servirvi, ed io vi priego
di far recare al re questo mio foglio.

Romilda

Volo per ispedirlo. (Oh, mio cordoglio!)

Parte.

11 85. Aria

Amastre

Cagion son io
del mio dolore,
e so perché.
Ama il cor mio
un traditore
con troppo amore,
con troppa fé.

Parte.

Scena 9

Arsamene e Romilda.

12 86. Recitativo

Arsamene

Romilda infida, e di me pensa ancora?

Romilda

Romilda, che vi adora
di voi pensa ad ogn'ora.

Amastres

I shall serve you without delay. And I ask you
that you convey this letter of mine to the king.

Romilda

I shall have it delivered this instant. (Oh, what
torment!)

Exit.

85. Aria

Amastres

I am the cause
of my own suffering,
and the reason I know well:
my heart loves
a traitor
with too much devotion,
with too much faith.

Exit.

Scene 9

Arsamenes and Romilda

86. Recitativo

Arsamenes

Is the faithless Romilda still thinking of me?

Romilda

Romilda adores you
and thinks of you incessantly.

Arsamene
Per spronarmi a partire,
non per salvar chi v'ama,
dite che Serse brama il mio morire.

13 87. Duetto

Romilda
Troppo oltraggi la mia fede,
alma fiera, core ingrato!

Arsamene
Troppo inganni la mia fede,
alma fiera, core ingrato!

Romilda
È tiranna la mercede
che riceve il mio petto innamorato.

Arsamene
Non è questa la mercede,
che si deve al mio petto innamorato.

Partono per diverse parti.

Scena 10

*Gran salone con illuminazione; nel fondo del
quale v'è il simulacro del sole con ara dinanzi, e
sopravi foco acceso.
Coro di ministri all'intorno del simulacro.*

14 88. Coro di Ministri

Ministri
Ciò che Giove destinò
impedir l'uomo non sa.

Arsamenes
You tell me of Xerxes' sentence
to spur my departure,
not to save the man who loves you.

87. Duet

Romilda
You insult my loyalty beyond measure,
merciless soul, ungrateful heart!

Arsamenes
You deceive my loyalty beyond measure,
merciless soul, ungrateful heart!

Romilda
A mercy most tyrannical
confronts my loving breast!

Arsamenes
This is not the mercy
deserved by my enraptured breast!

Exeunt in opposite directions.

Scene 10

*A grand and brightly lit hall. In the background,
an image of the sun and an altar, on which a fire
is burning.
A chorus of priests around the image.*

88. Chorus of Priests

Priests
What has been destined by Jupiter
cannot be hindered by man.

Ariodate, Romilda ed Arsamene dal fondo della scena.

15 89. Recitativo

Ariodate

Ecco lo sposo! Io ben ne fui presago,
quanto m'arride il fato.

Arsamene

Alma fiera!

Romilda

Core ingrato!

Arsamene e Romilda

Troppo oltraggi la mia fede!

Ariodate

A colmarmi d'onore,
Signor, so che veniste.

Romilda (*in atto di partire*)

Ah, il genitore!

Ariodate

Romilda, non partite!

Arsamene

Ariodate, che dite?

Ariodate

Che a voi do la mia figlia
per serva umile e sposa,
come m'impose il re.

Ariodates, Romilda, and Arsamenes appear from the back of the stage.

89. Recitativo

Ariodates

Here is the bridegroom! Just as I had foreseen –
destiny smiles upon me.

Arsamenes

Merciless soul!

Romilda

Ungrateful heart!

Arsamenes and Romilda

You insult my loyalty beyond measure!

Ariodates

I know why you have come, my lord,
and you overwhelm me with honour.

Romilda (*about to leave*)

Ah! Father!

Ariodates

Romilda! Do not go!

Arsamenes

What did you mean, Ariodates?

Ariodates

That I grant you my daughter,
to be your humble servant and wife,
as the king himself has commanded me.

Arsamene
Serse l'impose?

Ariodate
A me stesso.

Romilda
(Che ascolto?)

Ariodate
E voi veniste
per prenderla in consorte?

Arsamene
Altro non bramo.

Romilda
(Oh, me beata! Oh, sorte!)

Ariodate
Romilda, acconsentite?

Romilda
Sì, mio padre e Signore.

Ariodate
Stringete omai le destre...

Romilda ed Arsamene
E in uno il core!

Si danno la mano.

Arsamenes
Xerxes decreed this?

Ariodates
To myself.

Romilda
(What do I hear?)

Ariodates
Are you not here
to take her for your wife?

Arsamenes
I desire nothing else.

Romilda
(Oh bliss! Oh fortune!)

Ariodates
Do you accept, Romilda?

Romilda
Yes, my father and lord.

Ariodates
Then join your hands.

Romilda and Arsamenes
And our hearts too, as one!

They take each other's hands.

Ariodate
Ora corriamo a Serse
per render grazie d'un sì grande onore.

Partono tutti tre.

16 **90. Coro di Ministri**
Ministri
Chi infelice si trovò
pien di gioia or lieto va.

Scena 11
Serse, poi Ariodate.

17 **91. Recitativo**
Serse
Se ne viene Ariodate. È tempo omai
di scoprir che son io
che Romilda desio.
Eccomi, Ariodate.

Ariodate
Invitto Sire,
v'inchino...

Serse
Or che vi sembra?
Lo sposo egual vi dissi...

Ariodate
È un alto onore.

Serse
Romilda vaga
ne sarà paga?

Ariodates
Let us now hasten to Xerxes
and thank him for so high an honour.

Exeunt all three.

90. Chorus of Priests
Priests
Those afflicted with unhappiness
now leave blessed with joy and contentment.

Scene 11
Xerxes, then Ariodates

91. Recitativo
Xerxes
Here comes Ariodates. The time has come
to reveal to him that it is I
who want to marry Romilda.
Here I am, Ariodates!

Ariodates
Oh my great lord,
I bow before you...

Xerxes
What say you to this?
The husband I mentioned...

Ariodates
The honour is great!

Xerxes
Will fair Romilda
be happy with the choice?

Ariodate
Non brama più.

Serse
Ma perché mai non viene?
Dov'è?

Ariodate
Collo sposo.

Serse
Come?

Ariodate
Collo sposo, Signor.

Serse
Che sposo? Ahimè?

Ariodate
Come imponeste...

Serse
Che imposi? Che?

Ariodate
Egualè a voi, del vostro sangue, e venne
nelle mie stanze...

Serse
E sono sposi?

Ariodate
Sono.

Ariodates
She yearns for nothing more.

Xerxes
But why does she not come?
Where is she?

Ariodates
With her new husband.

Xerxes
I beg your pardon?

Ariodates
With her new husband, my lord.

Xerxes
What husband? – Oh woe!

Ariodates
The one you decreed.

Xerxes
I decreed? What?

Ariodates
Of your standing and of your own kin, who
would come
to my residence...

Xerxes
And they are married?

Ariodates
Indeed.

Serse
Empio! Perfido! Indegno!

Ariodate
Mio Re?

Serse
Tu m'hai tradito,
e per tuo re tenti chiamarmi, ardito!
(Un paggio porta una lettera a Serse, e gli parla basso.)
Romilda a me l'invia? Perfida donna!
Crede co' inchiostrì rei
incantar follemente i sdegni miei?

Ariodate
(Perché non moro, o Ciel!)

Serse
Leggi!
(Dà la lettera ad Ariodate, che legge.)
Che fai?

Ariodate
"Ingratissimo amante!"

Serse
Come? Ingrato mi chiama? E tanto ella osa?

Ariodate
"Venni per esser vostra."

Xerxes
Traucherous, perfidious, worthless wretch!

Ariodates
My king?

Xerxes
You have betrayed me!
And you have the audacity still to call me your
king!
(A page brings him a letter and speaks to him.)
From Romilda? Oh, the perfidious woman!
Does she think she can appease my wrath
with the charms of her pen?

Ariodates
(Why does the ground not swallow me up?)

Xerxes
Read it!
(He hands the letter to Ariodates, who opens it.)
Well?

Ariodates
'Oh most thankless lover!'

Xerxes
What! Does she call me thankless? How dare
she?

Ariodates
'I came here to become yours.'

Serse
E altrui si sposa?

Ariodate
"Trovai che mi sprezzate."

Serse
Oh note sclerate!

Ariodate
"Parto, ma il Ciel punirà vostre colpe."

Serse
Colpe di averti amato.

Ariodate
"Io piangerò
sino all'ultimo fiato.
Amastre."

Serse
Che?

Ariodate
Non di Romilda è il foglio.

Serse prende con sdegno la lettera e guarda la firma.

Serse
Amastre? Vanne, e ti allontana indegno!
Non mancava altro tedio in tanto sdegno!

Ariodate si ritira in disparte.

Xerxes
And she marries someone else?

Ariodates
'And found that you had scorned me.'

Xerxes
Oh, venomous letter!

Ariodates
'I leave, but heaven will punish your offence.'

Xerxes
The offence of having loved you!

Ariodates
'I shall weep
till my dying breath.
Amastres.'

Xerxes
What?

Ariodates
The letter's not from Romilda.

Incensed, Xerxes takes the letter and looks at the signature.

Xerxes
Amastres! Get out of my sight, you wretch.
What more could happen to increase my pain?

Ariodates withdraws to one side.

18 92. Aria

Serse

Crude furie degl'orridi abissi,
aspergetemi d'atro veleno!

Crolli il mondo, e'l sole s'eclissi
a quest'ira che spira il mio seno!

*Nel partire sdegnato gli si fanno inanzi
Arsamene, Romilda, Amastre, Atalanta ed
Elviro.*

Scena ultima

Tutti.

19 93. Recitativo

Serse

Perfidi! E ancor osate
venirmi innanzi?

Ariodate

Che furor!

Arsamene

Cessate.
Umili al vostro piè...

Serse

Sol per schernirmi!

Arsamene

Come, Signor?

92. Aria

Xerxes

Oh savage Furies from the hideous abysses,
smother me with your venom!

May the world cave in and the sun be eclipsed
by my ire, may my breast finally meet its end!

*As he leaves in a fury he is confronted by
Arsamenes, Romilda, Amastres, Atalanta, and
Elviro.*

Final scene

All

93. Recitativo

Xerxes

Perfidious creatures! You dare still
cross my path?

Ariodates

What fury!

Arsamenes

Peace, my lord!
Humbly at your feet, we...

Xerxes

You come to insult me!

Arsamenes

How so, my lord?

Serse
Tu m'hai Romilda tolta.

Arsamene
Fu per vostro comando.

Ariodate
È ver...

Romilda
Confermo!

Serse
E quando?
Temerari pretesti!
(Tira la spada.)
Questo ferro a quell'empia in seno immergi!

Arsamene
Ch'io sveni la mia sposa?
Svenerò pria il tuo core!

Amastre (*a Serse*)
Datelo a me, Signore!

Serse
E chi sei tu, ch'ognor sempre mi sturbi?

Amastre
Uno che cerca far giusta vendetta.
Volete che si sveni
un'alma che tradi chi pur l'adora?

Xerxes
You have taken Romilda from me!

Arsamenes
By your own command.

Ariodates
It is true...

Romilda
I vouch for it.

Xerxes
And when?
This is all pretence!
(He draws his sword [; to Arsamenes].)
Plunge this sword into the heart of the traitress!

Arsamenes
I, kill my own wife?
I would sooner cut open your heart!

Amastres (*to Xerxes*)
Hand it to me, my lord!

Xerxes
And who are you, with your relentless pestering?

Amastres
One who seeks rightful revenge.
Do you wish me to pierce
that heart that has repaid true love with
treachery?

Serse
Sì.

Amastre
E si squarci quel core?

Serse
Sì.

Amastre
Mori dunque, ingrato e traditore!
*(Gli rapisce a forza il ferro, presentandoglielo al
petto.)*
Ecco Amastre tradita, e ognor fedele,
e tu spietato e rio
la disprezzi così?

Serse
Uccidetemi sì!

Amastre *(volge il ferro contro di sé)*
Morir degg'io.

Serse
Fermate! Ora mi pento...

Amastre
E torni ad amarmi?

Serse
Sì, ma di tua pietate indegno sono.

Xerxes
Yes!

Amastres
And cut it to pieces?

Xerxes
Yes!

Amastres
Then die, you shameless traitor!
*(She snatches the sword from Xerxes' hand and
offers it to his breast.)*
Before you stands Amastres, betrayed yet ever
loyal.
But so pitiless and iniquitous are you,
that still you show her scorn!

Xerxes
So be it: kill me!

Amastres *(turning the blade on herself)*
I am the one who should die.

Xerxes
Stop! Now I repent...

Amastres
And will you love me once again?

Xerxes
Yes, but I am unworthy of your mercy...

Amastre
Amami pur, o caro, io ti perdono!

Si abbracciano.

Elviro
Sono tutto tremante.

Ariodate
Or sparve il duolo.

Arsamene
Io respiro, e stupisco.

Romilda
Io mi consolo.

Atalanta
Ed io cercherò altrove un altro amante.

Serse
Amici, compatite i miei furori,
e godete felici i vostri amori.

²⁰ **94. Aria e Coro**
Romilda (*ad Arsamene*)
Caro voi siete all'alma
dolce voi siete al cor.
Son dalla vostra palma
fatta trofeo d'amor!

Amastres
Then love me, my dearest, for I forgive you.

They embrace.

Elviro
I am all a-tremble!

Ariodates
See how all affliction has vanished.

Arsamenes
I breathe again, but I'm amazed.

Romilda
Oh, what relief.

Atalanta
And I shall seek another lover elsewhere...

Xerxes
Forgive my past ill humour, good friends,
and take joy in your love!

94. Aria and Chorus
Romilda (*to Arsamenes*)
How dear you are to my soul.
How sweet you are to my heart.
I am the palm that you shall bear
as a trophy of our love.

Coro
Ritorna a noi la calma
riede la gioia al cor.
Per riportar la palma
s'uniro amore e onor!

Fine dell'Opera

Chorus
Calm and peace return to us;
joy smiles in our hearts.
And, to bear away the palm,
honour and joy have united.

End of the Opera

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Recording producer Rachel Smith
Sound engineer Ben Connellan
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3-disc set **CHAN 0797(3)**

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685–1759)

Serse

HWV 40 (1737–38)
Opera in Three Acts

On an anonymous revision of the libretto *Il Xerse* (Rome, 1694) by **Silvio Stampiglia** (1664–1725), in turn based on the libretto *Il Xerse* (Venice, 1655) by **Count Nicolò Minato** (c. 1630–1698)

Performing edition prepared by Peter Jones

Serse, King of Persia
Arsamene, his brother, in love with Romilda
Amastre, heiress to the kingdom of Tagor,
betrothed to Serse
Ariodate, a prince, vassal to Serse
Romilda, his daughter, in love with Arsamene
Atalanta, her sister, secretly in love with Arsamene
Elviro, servant of Arsamene
Setting: Abydos, Persia in ancient times

Anna Stéphany mezzo-soprano
David Daniels counter-tenor
Hilary Summers contralto
Brindley Sherratt bass
Rosemary Joshua soprano
Joëlle Harvey soprano
Andreas Wolf bass-baritone

Early Opera Company
CHRISTIAN CURNYN

COMPACT DISC ONE
Act I
TT 66:46

COMPACT DISC TWO
Act II
TT 60:16

COMPACT DISC THREE
Act III
TT 39:27

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