



# HANDEL

## Ode for St Cecilia's Day (1739)

**Dorothee Miels, Soprano**  
**Mark Wilde, Tenor**  
**Alsfelder Vokalensemble**  
**Concerto Polacco**  
**Wolfgang Helbich**

## George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

### Ode for St Cecilia's Day

Georg Friedrich Händel, later more generally known under the English forms of name that he assumed in London, George Frideric Handel, was born in Halle in 1685, the son of a successful barber-surgeon and his much younger, second wife. His father opposed his son's early musical ambitions and after his father's death Handel duly entered the University in Halle in 1702 as a student of law, as his father had insisted. He was able to seize the chance of employment as organist at the Calvinist Cathedral the following month, holding the position for a year, until his departure for Hamburg, to work there at the opera, at first as a violinist and then as harpsichordist and composer, contributing in the latter capacity to the Italian operatic repertoire of the house. At the invitation of the son of the Medici Grand Duke of Tuscany, he travelled, in 1706, to Italy, where he won considerable success during the next four years. Connections he had made in Venice, brought appointment in 1710 as Kapellmeister to the Elector of Hanover. From here he was granted immediate leave to fulfil a commission in London.

Handel's first opera for London was *Rinaldo*, with which he won general acclaim, and after little over a year in Hanover again, he returned to England in the autumn of 1712. The following year he took up residence at Burlington House in Piccadilly as a guest of Lord Burlington. After a brief return to Germany in the summer of 1716, Handel returned to England, joining the establishment of James Brydges, Earl of Carnarvon and later Duke of Chandos, at Cannons, near Edgware. Principally, over the following years, Handel established himself as a composer of Italian opera, for which there was a fashionable audience, gradually achieving a dominant position in the musical life of the English capital. He enjoyed the royal patronage of George I, Elector of Hanover, who had succeeded to the English throne in 1715, on the death of Queen Anne, and on the death of the former in 1727 was commissioned to provide anthems for the

coronation of George II. In the following years he was again called upon to provide music for royal occasions. At the same time his involvement with Italian opera brought increasing commercial difficulties, particularly after the establishment of a rival opera company in 1733 under the patronage of Frederick, Prince of Wales, himself later a strong supporter of Handel.

While Handel's work in Italian opera continued, with a final opera to be staged in 1741, he increasingly turned his attention to a new English form, that of the oratorio. This had certain very practical advantages, in language, lack of the need for expensive spectacle and the increasing employment of native singers. The content of oratorios appealed to English Protestant susceptibilities, providing a winning synthesis of religion and entertainment, and offering no offence to those who had found operatic conventions ridiculous in a city with strong pre-existent dramatic traditions. Handel's first English oratorio, in 1732, was *Esther*, with a libretto based on Racine, followed, in 1733, by the biblical *Deborah* in March and in July *Athalia*. During the following years he continued to develop the form, chiefly on biblical subjects but with an occasional excursion into the mythological. These works, with their Italianate melodies, strong choral writing and demonstrable dramatic sense, ensured their composer's continued popularity and dominance, particularly, after his death, with the wider development of choral singing in the nineteenth century.

Handel died in London in April 1759 and was buried, as he had requested, in Westminster Abbey, to be commemorated there three years later by an imaginative and slightly improbable monument by Louis François Roubiliac, who had provided, thirty years before, a statue of the composer for the pleasure gardens at Vauxhall, represented in his night-cap and slippers, in the guise of Apollo, an indication of his

popular reputation. His funeral drew a crowd of some three thousand mourners, while posthumous Handel celebrations could muster a similar audience in the Abbey, with a proportionate number of performers.

Handel's setting of John Dryden's 1687 *Ode for St Cecilia's Day* was first performed in 1739 at the Theatre Royal in Lincoln's Inn Fields on the appropriate feast day, 22nd November. Included in the advertised programme were *Alexander's Feast*, an earlier setting of Dryden's 1697 celebration of St Cecilia, two new concertos for several instruments and a concerto on the organ. The same announcement in the *London Daily Post* and *General Advertiser*, assures patrons that 'Particular Care has been taken to have the House well-air'd; and the Passage from the Fields to the House will be cover'd for better Conveniency'. An earlier advertisement of the event had brought the assurance that the house would be 'warm'd', something that was very necessary in a particularly cold winter, when the Thames was frozen. The time was unpropitious, as conflict had broken out with Spain in the so-called War of Jenkins Ear, and public attention was drawn to that, while significant spectacle in London was limited. Nevertheless there were further performances during the season and further assurances of the necessary heating, with 'constant Fires ... kept in the House 'till the Time of Performance'. The singers for whom Handel wrote were the French soprano Elisabeth Duparc, known as La Francesina, who became increasingly associated with Handel performances over the years, and the English tenor John Beard, who had worked with Handel since 1734.

The *Ode for St Cecilia's Day* opens with a French *Overture*, introduced by ceremonial dotted rhythms, leading to a lively fugal section and a *Minuet*. The text that follows, in praise of music, offers many chances of word-painting, exploited by Handel in a work that draws to some extent on Gottlieb Muffat's *Componimenti Musicali per il Cembalo* for material

that is then transformed, applied to its new purpose. A brief unaccompanied tenor recitative introduces the more extended accompanied recitative of *When Nature underneath a heap / Of jarring atoms lay*, with harmonies that follow the imagery. The chorus takes up the opening text, while Handel seizes the opportunity to provide ascending vocal and descending instrumental scales to illustrate the words *Through all the compass of the notes it ran*, before concluding with the more sonorous *The diapason closing full in Man*.

The air *What passion cannot Music raise and quell?* employs a solo cello, matching the text of the soprano solo *When Jubal struck the chorded shell*, in a G major saraband. A solo trumpet starts *The trumpet's loud clangour*, a D major movement in which the tenor soloist evokes the *mortal alarms* of war, while *The double double beat / Of the thund'ring drum*, echoes musically and verbally Purcell and Dryden's *King Arthur*. The chorus adds further strength to the suggestion of warfare, leading, naturally, to a *March*.

The following B minor soprano air, *The soft complaining flute*, finds a natural place for flute and lute, the instruments mentioned in the verse, its delicate sentiments translated aptly into instrumental terms. To this the tenor adds the A major *Sharp violins proclaim / Their jealous pangs*. There is immediate contrast in the following F major soprano air *But oh! what art can teach, / What human voice can reach / The sacred organ's praise?*, a movement provided with an organ obbligato that allowed Handel a chance of further improvisation in performance. The soprano continues with the D minor *Orpheus could lead the savage race*, a hornpipe in the marked rhythm associated with that English dance. The soprano introduces the saint herself and the harmony of the spheres, her phrases answered by the chorus, before the final fugal climax of the work.

Keith Anderson

## Dorothee Mields

The German soprano Dorothee Mields was born in Gelsenkirchen in 1971 to German-Ukrainian parents. As a child she learned the violin and piano, and had her first singing instruction from Therese Maxsein in Essen and then from Elke Holzmann in Bremen. There she discovered her love for the music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. After passing successfully her graduate examinations, she continued her studies with Julia Hamari in Stuttgart. Dorothee Mields has sung and played in many opera and theatre productions under important directors, including the rôle of Euridice in Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* with the Viennese Festival Weeks, and collaborated with conductors including Thomas Hengelbrock, Philippe Herreweghe and Gustav Leonhardt. Her wide repertoire is represented in many CDs and broadcast productions, but her special interest is in Lieder from the seventeenth century until today.

## Mark Wilde

The tenor Mark Wilde was born in Scotland and was a chorister at Dundee Cathedral, going on to study at the University of East Anglia and the Royal College of Music. In 2000 he made his Glyndebourne début as Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* and appeared as second soldier in Stephen Pimlott's highly acclaimed production of *The Coronation of Poppea* at English National Opera. Previously he had appeared in *Albert Herring* at the Perth Festival, Handel's *Arminio* at the Royal College of Music and in rôles in Vivaldi's *Giustine*, and as Ottone in *La Serenissima* for BBC Radio 3. He has also covered Tamino in *The Magic Flute*, the Evangelist in staged performances of the *St John Passion* and Narciso in *Il Turco in Italia* at English National Opera and most recently sang Jacquino in *Fidelio* for Glyndebourne Touring Opera, Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* for Welsh National Opera, Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* for the Mostly Mozart Festival at the Barbican, the Male Chorus in *The Rape of Lucretia* for the European Opera Centre in St Petersburg and Riga, and Giannetto in *La gazza ladra* at Garsington Opera. His career has brought regular concert appearances in Britain and abroad, including *Acis and Galatea* at St John's Smith Square, *Messiah* at Winchester Cathedral and Britten's *War Requiem* in Westminster, Norwich and Ypres Cathedrals.

## Alsfelder Vokalensemble

The Alsfelder Vocal Ensemble was established in 1971 by Wolfgang Helbich with the aim of achieving the highest standards of choral performance based on historical performance principles and in collaboration with instrumental ensembles such as Musica Fiata Köln and the Bremen Baroque Orchestra. The wide repertoire of the vocal ensemble includes standard oratorio and unaccompanied works as well as the revival of music that has been neglected.

## Concerto Polacco

Concerto Polacco was formed in 1991 by Marek Toporowski, a renowned Polish harpsichord and organ player. Starting initially as a small chamber music ensemble, Concerto Polacco soon became a real baroque orchestra performing with period instruments. Marek Toporowski founded the Sine Nomine chamber choir in 1996. Its repertoire consists of renaissance, baroque, classical and romantic music. Together Concerto Polacco and Sine Nomine form the first Polish early music ensemble consisting of a chamber choir and an orchestra playing on period instruments. The principal aim of both ensembles and their artistic director, Marek Toporowski, is to present the greatest masterpieces of vocal and instrumental music with the main emphasis on seventeenth and eighteenth century music. In 1998 they began a series of concerts titled “Masterpieces of Oratorium and Cantata Music”. Within this series the groups presented the *St. John Passion*, the *Mass in B minor* and many cantatas by J. S. Bach, the *Chandos Anthems* by G. F. Handel and other masterpieces. In addition they perform Polish baroque and classical music.

## Wolfgang Helbich

A native of Berlin, Wolfgang Helbich studied school and church music and conducting at the Hochschule there and at Detmold, embarking on his career in Ansfeld in 1969. Two years later he founded the Ansfelder Vokalensemble, of which he remains director. In 1972 he moved to the Grünewald Church in Berlin, with responsibility for the Berliner Kantorei and in 1976 he became director of church music and master of the choir at the Cathedral of St Peter in Bremen. He is Professor of Choral Conducting at the Saar Musikhochschule at Saarbrücken. Recordings under his direction since 1974, notably with the Alsfelder Vokalensemble, have won particular recognition, while his career has taken him to engagements abroad, throughout Europe and in the United States of America.

**1 Overture**

**2 Interlude**

**3 Recitative** (Tenor)

From harmony, from Heav'nly harmony  
This universal frame began.

When Nature underneath a heap

Of jarring atoms lay,

And could not heave her head,

The tuneful voice was heard from high,

"Arise ye more than dead!"

Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry,

In order to their stations leep,

And music's pow'r obey.

**4 Chorus**

From harmony, from Heav'nly harmony

This universal frame began:

From harmony to harmony

Through all the compass of the notes it ran,

The diapason closing full in man.

**5 Air** (Soprano)

What passion cannot music raise and quell!

When Jubal struck the corded shell,

His list'ning brethren stood around

And wond'ring, on their faces fell

To worship that celestial sound:

Less than a god they thought there could not dwell

Within the hollow of that shell

That spoke so sweetly and so well.

What passion cannot music raise and quell!

**6 Air and chorus** (Tenor)

The trumpet's loud clangour

Excites us to arms

With shrill notes of anger

And mortal alarms.

The double double double beat

Of the thund'ring drum

Cries, hark the foes come;

Charge, charge, 'tis too late to retreat.

**7 March**

**8 Air** (Soprano)

The soft complaining flute

In dying notes discovers

The woes of hopeless lovers,

Whose dirge is whisper'd by the warbling lute.

**9 Air** (Tenor)

Sharp violins proclaim

Their jealous pangs, and desperation,

Fury, frantic indignation,

Depth of pains and height of passion,

For the fair, disdainful dame.

**10 Air** (Soprano)

But oh! what art can teach

What human voice can reach

The sacred organ's praise?

Notes inspiring holy love,

Notes that wing their Heav'nly ways

To mend the choirs above.

**11 Air** (Soprano)

Orpheus could lead the savage race;

And trees unrooted left their place;

Sequacious of the lyre:

**12 Recitative** (Soprano)

But bright Cecilia rais'd the wonder high'r;

When to her organ, vocal breath was giv'n,

An angel heard, and straight appear'd

Mistaking earth for Heav'n.

**13 Air and Chorus**

As from the pow'r of sacred lays

The spheres began to move,

And sung the great Creator's praise

To all the bless'd above;

So when the last and dreadful hour

This crumbling pageant shall devour,

The trumpet shall be heard on high,

The dead shall live, the living die,

And music shall untune the sky.

*John Dryden (1631-1700)*

Handel's setting of John Dryden's 1687 *Ode for St Cecilia's Day* was first performed in 1739 on the appropriate feast day, 22nd November. Although Handel relied to some extent on borrowed material, he incorporates a variety of colourful instrumental effects in vivid illustration of the text. The *Ode* ends with one of Handel's noblest final choruses, and one of Dryden's most visionary verses, celebrating together the all-embracing glory of music itself. It is easily the most substantial movement of the *Ode*, and reminds us that the composition of *The Messiah* was only two years away.

## George Frideric HANDEL

(1685-1759)

### Ode for St Cecilia's Day (1739)

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|----|---|------|
| 1  | Overture  | 3:35 |
| 2  | Interlude   | 1:23 |
| 3  | Recitative: From harmony, from heav'nly harmony †   | 3:20 |
| 4  | Chorus: From harmony                                | 3:27 |
| 5  | Air: What passion cannot Music raise *              | 8:19 |
| 6  | Air and chorus: The trumpet's loud clangour †       | 3:25 |
| 7  | March   | 2:02 |
| 8  | Air: The soft complaining flute *                   | 5:08 |
| 9  | Air: Sharp violins proclaim †                       | 4:10 |
| 10 | Air: But oh! what art can teach *                   | 4:15 |
| 11 | Air: Orpheus could lead the savage race *           | 1:46 |
| 12 | Recitative: But bright Cecilia *                    | 0:42 |
| 13 | Air and chorus: As from the powers of sacred lays * | 7:11 |

**Dorothee Miels, Soprano \* • Mark Wilde, Tenor †**  
**Alsfelder Vokalensemble • Concerto Polacco • Wolfgang Helbich**

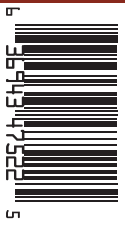
Recorded 12th - 16th August, 1999 in the Maria Magdalenen Kirche, Templin, Germany  
 This recording has been made and edited at 20bit resolution and at a pitch of A = 415Hz  
 Producer: Andrew Walton (K&A Productions Ltd.) • Engineer: Eleanor Thomason  
 Post-production: Peter Newble & Andrew Walton • Booklet Notes: Keith Anderson  
 Cover Image: *Saint Cecilia* by Charles Mellin (c. 1600-1649) (Bridgeman Art Library)



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Playing Time  
48:44



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