

MUSIC FOR BRASS SEPTET • 2

Handel • Purcell
Rameau • Blow

SEPTURA



Handel • Purcell • Rameau • Blow Music for Brass Septet • 2

Jean-Philippe RAMEAU (1683–1764)			19 Air	1:28
Suite from <i>Dardanus</i>			20 Hornpipe II	0:39
(arr. Simon Cox)			21 Jig	1:17
1	Ouverture	4:09	22 Trumpet Air	1:34
2	Menuet	3:00	23 March	1:26
3	Marche pour les différentes nations	1:17	24 Hornpipe on a Ground	1:23
4	Entrée d'Iphise	3:36	George Frideric HANDEL (1685–1759)	
5	Entrée pour les Guerriers	2:28	Suite from <i>Rinaldo</i>	
6	Sommeil de Dardanus	3:53	(arr. Simon Cox)	
7	Tambourin	1:45	21:19	
John BLOW (1649–1708)			25 Overture	5:40
Venus and Adonis: A Mournful Masque			26 Aria: Sibilare gli angui d'Aletto	
(arr. Matthew Knight)			<i>Soloist: Matthew Gee, Trombone</i>	4:47
8	Chorus of the Graces	1:34	27 Aria: Il vostro maggio de' bei verdi anni	
9	The Graces' Dance	1:18	<i>Soloist: Alan Thomas, Trumpet</i>	1:43
10	Gavatt	0:57	28 Sinfonia	2:49
11	Sarabande for the Graces	1:41	29 March	1:47
12	A Ground	1:48	30 Aria: Lascia ch'io pianga	
13	Act III: Act Tune	2:33	<i>Soloist: Huw Morgan, Trumpet</i>	4:10
14	Aria: With Solemn Pomp		Septura	
	Let Mourning Cupids Bear	2:32	Alan Thomas and Simon Cox, Trumpets in B flat	
15	Chorus: Mourn for thy Servant	3:12	Huw Morgan, Trumpet in E flat	
Henry PURCELL (1659–1695)			Matthew Gee and Matthew Knight, Trombones	
The Curious Impertinent			Dan West, Bass Trombone	
(arr. Simon Cox)			Peter Smith, Tuba	
16	Overture	3:04	Simon Cox, Founder and Artistic Director	
17	Hornpipe I	0:43	Matthew Knight, Artistic Director	
18	Slow Air	1:07		

Septura began the process of creating a canon of brass chamber music with a recording of nineteenth-century choral and organ works. We continue our counter-factual journey by travelling back a couple of centuries, to the music of Baroque opera: four works, one each by Rameau, Blow, Purcell and Handel. Brass instruments held important associations for these composers – think, for example, of the brass writing in Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks* – but there is no sustained body of brass chamber music for the simple reason that the instruments

were not technically advanced enough: more than a century before the invention of the valve, trumpets were limited to the basic tonics and dominants of the harmonic series in all but their highest range. So we turn to a genre that often featured brass, but only in the context of a subservient pit-dwelling orchestra: Opera.

This operatic repertoire poses more of an arranging challenge than the often straightforward choral and organ transcriptions of Volume 1 of this series. The size of the ensemble isn't an issue – the relative harmonic simplicity

ensures that there are rarely more than four distinct parts – but the huge range of colours of the Baroque orchestra requires particularly inventive arranging if the results are to be anything other than pale imitations.

Whether there is such a thing as an ‘authentic’ performance of this repertoire is debatable, but clearly re-imagining it for brass is about as inauthentic as you can get. Nevertheless, we have sought to incorporate the *stylistic* elements of ‘period performance’: the rhythmic details (in which rhythm is more a question of interpretation than prescribed mathematical certainty), note lengths and shapes, and expressive phrasing adopted by the period performance movement are what give this music its incredible character, bringing it to life regardless of the exact instrumentation employed.

Despite not composing his first opera until he was almost 50, **Rameau** quickly became the principal composer of French opera, inheriting a well-established tradition from Lully. Whilst the main plot of his 1739 opera *Dardanus* was so absurd (a convoluted love story with sea monsters, magicians and dream sequences) that it had to be extensively re-written after its premiere, the prologue, following a Lullian convention, is a straightforward allegory rooted in classical mythology. Cupid banishes Jealousy, but Love can’t survive without her – Cupid and the Pleasures fall into a deep sleep, and Venus has to recall Jealousy to bring them all back to life. The classic ‘French’ *Overture*, with its grandiose dotted-rhythm opening giving way to a compelling energetic movement, is a musical highlight of the opera; and as the mortals pay homage to Cupid through dance, Rameau’s ballet music, for which he was rightly renowned, is especially colourful – demonstrating the revolutionary use of harmony, melodic and rhythmic quirks, and range of emotional expression that conservative ‘Lullistes’ found so grotesque. It was common practice in Rameau’s time to produce a suite of ballet movements from operas to perform in concert, and this collection also contains three such movements from the main opera: the sorrowful *Entrée d’Iphise*, the martial *Entrée pour les Guerriers*, and the *Sommeil de Dardanus* (inexplicably he falls asleep next to a monster) in which Rameau vividly depicts the hero’s snoring.

Whilst opera was flourishing in France, this side of the channel it was still in its infancy, and **Blow**’s 1683 *Venus*

and Adonis – “a masque for the entertainment of the King”, Charles II, who had enjoyed French opera in Paris during the years of the Interregnum – is widely regarded as the first English opera. A truly groundbreaking work, it is largely through-composed, rather than resorting to separate set-pieces, distinct arias and spoken dialogue, and this greatly heightens its dramatic impact. The story is well known from both Ovid and Shakespeare: Cupid accidentally pricks his mother, Venus, with one of his arrows, and she falls in love with mortal Adonis – even the goddess of love is not immune from her own domain, and succumbs to love’s destructive power. In the earlier versions Adonis snubs Venus to go on a fatal hunting trip; in Blow’s account, by contrast, Venus encourages Adonis to go hunting despite his protestations:

Adonis:

Adonis will not hunt today:
I have already caught the noblest prey.

Venus:

No, my shepherd haste away:
Absence kindles new desire,
I would not have my lover tire.

The significance of this alteration is that it places Venus at the centre of the tragedy, with her hubris, rather than that of the human Adonis, culminating in her downfall.

Our ‘mournful masque’ focuses on this mortal end of the opera, beginning with the Act II *Chorus of the Graces*, which emphasises the human element of love, mirroring the intense eroticism of Shakespeare’s version (Venus will “beget desire and yield delight”). The form of Blow’s opera was heavily influenced by Lullian French opera, not least in the instrumental dances that follow the chorus: the sprightly *Graces’ Dance*, an energetic *Gavatt*, a portentous *Sarabande*, and a fateful *Ground*. The unfolding tragedy is ushered in by the mournful Act III *Tune*, with bucket mutes here providing a haunting, ethereal colour, after which Adonis, gored by a boar, dies in Venus’ arms. Struck by grief she laments her lover in a heart-rending *Aria*; not only does her intense grief humanise her, but she explicitly renounces her immortality: “[Adonis] shall adorn the heav’n’s, here I will weep till I am fall’n into as cold a sleep”. The final G minor chorus (*Mourn for thy servant*) takes the

form of a funeral march and offers scant consolation for the fallen goddess, “the wretched Queen of Love in this forsaken grove”.

Of much greater renown than Blow is his pupil Henry **Purcell**. Blow’s *Venus and Adonis* inspired Purcell to compose his more celebrated opera of 1689, *Dido and Aeneas*, and the importance of these two works is that they are sung throughout, the action progressing in recitative rather than spoken dialogue. But around this time Purcell produced a huge amount of music for so-called ‘semi-operas’ in which the characters speak their lines, with the drama accompanied by incidental music. In the final six years of his life Purcell wrote music for 42 such plays, one of which was the 1694 farce *The Curious Impertinent*, also known as *The Married Beau*. Unpublished until after Purcell’s premature death in 1695, this collection of short movements is typical of his theatre suites, some numbers of which achieved the status of popular tunes in his lifetime. It features a two-part French *Overture* in the Lullian style, with the energetic fugal second section substituting its initial subject with a second theme halfway through. Apart from an elegant, minuet-like slow air, the ensuing movements are decidedly more English than French: no *allemandes*, *courantes* or *sarabandes*, but two lively hornpipes, two breezy airs (the trumpet air particularly cheery), a jig, a stately march, and finally the most famous number, a hornpipe on a ground bass. The movements wouldn’t actually have been performed in this order, with the overture first; in practice, overtures were played after the ‘first music’ and ‘second music’ – free samples, with the audience entitled to a full refund before the overture if they didn’t like what they heard!

Handel’s 1711 crusader opera *Rinaldo*, which pits the Christian Rinaldo against Argante, the Muslim King of Jerusalem, was the first Italian-language opera composed for the London stage. Handel composed the opera in just

two weeks, aided by the recycling of much existing material – so much that it has been described as an “anthology” of his Italian period. Our three arias are all recycled: *Sibilar gli angui*, here an aria for solo trombone, was lifted completely from a dramatic cantata, and has a “ludicrously inappropriate” text for the bellicose Argante’s grand Act I entrance; also from an earlier cantata, *Il vostro maggio* is here a trumpet solo, in which mermaids lead Rinaldo astray with a song about love’s delights; and *Lascia ch’io pianga*, played by the E-flat trumpet, was in its third incarnation in *Rinaldo* (it began life as an Asian dance in the 1705 opera *Almira*, before appearing in a later oratorio). The latter, in which Almirena bemoans her fate and longs for liberty, is an incredibly simple tune set to a plain accompaniment; but the result is intensely moving, and it has become by far the most famous aria in the opera.

So the story serves as a loose pretext for these virtuoso vocal numbers, and the supernatural subject also gives Handel an opportunity to demonstrate his orchestral prowess: after a gripping and incredibly varied *Overture*, a particular instrumental highlight is the Act III *Sinfonia* – the film music of its day, portraying the horror of Armida’s magic mountain, and culminating in two shocking rests for the entire group, moments of terrifying suspense, perhaps just before Goffredo’s soldiers are swallowed up by the mountain. The opera was particularly noted for Handel’s innovative use of brass instruments, harnessing their uniquely expressive powers for the war and pageantry scenes. Argante’s entrance is a fine example, as is the Act III *March* – indeed, according to Dean and Knapp, the sudden blast of trumpets provides “an effect of splendour and exhilaration that time has not dimmed”. And as with all four of our Baroque opera suites, far from dimming their impact, we hope that they will be positively illuminated in these latest reincarnations for brass.

Matthew Knight

Septura

Septura aims to redefine the brass ensemble as a serious artistic medium by creating a canon of classical art-music for brass septet, through transcriptions, arrangements and commissions. Currently Ensemble in Residence at the Royal Academy of Music in London, the group is recording a series of discs for Naxos, each of which explores a different period and genre of classical music. The group's members are the leading players of the new generation of British brass musicians, holding principal positions in the London Symphony, Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, City of Birmingham Symphony, Scottish Opera and Aurora orchestras. The group shares a passion for live performance, and believes in the idea of the concert as a real event, drawing people into its (perhaps unfamiliar) ever-increasing repertoire with imaginative and interesting programming, built around strong concepts and themes, and presented in a captivating manner.

Septura is represented worldwide by Percius www.percius.co.uk

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Photo: Bethany Clarke



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This second volume of Septura's brass chamber music series takes us back to the 17th century and the music of Baroque opera, in four contrasting works by Rameau, Blow, Purcell and Handel. The astounding variety in content, colour and character of the originals demands especially inventive arrangements, and these pieces are vividly brought to life by incorporating stylistic elements from 'period performance'. The exhilarating result is a stunningly virtuosic set of new Baroque works for brass. Volume 1 is available on Naxos 8.573314.

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Jean-Philippe RAMEAU (1683–1764)

1–7 Suite from *Dardanus* (arr. Simon Cox) 20:28

John BLOW (1649–1708)

8–15 Venus and Adonis: A Mournful Masque
(arr. Matthew Knight) 15:45

Henry PURCELL (1659–1695)

16–24 The Curious Impertinent (arr. Simon Cox) 12:51

George Frideric HANDEL (1685–1759)

25–30 Suite from *Rinaldo* (arr. Simon Cox) 21:19

A detailed track list can be found on page 2 of the booklet

Septura



Alan Thomas and Simon Cox, Trumpets in B flat
Huw Morgan, Trumpet in E flat • Peter Smith, Tuba
Matthew Gee and Matthew Knight, Trombones
Dan West, Bass Trombone

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