Trousers & Tiaras:
Gender Roles in Handel Operas

Monica Huggett, artistic director and violin • Vicki St. Pierre, alto

Friday February 14, 7:30pm
Saturday February 15, 7:30pm
First Baptist Church

Sunday February 16, 3:00 pm
Kaul Auditorium, Reed College

The Orchestra
Monica Huggett, artistic director and violin
Adam LaMotte, assistant leader
Rob Diggins, principal 2nd violin
Toma Iliev, violin
Janet Strauss, violin
Christine Wilkinson Beckman, violin
Nanae Iwata, violin
Victoria Gunn, principal viola
Hillary Oseas, viola
Joanna Blendulf, principal violoncello
Adaiha MacAdam-Somer, violoncello
Curtis Daily, contrabass
Jonathan Oddie, harpsichord and organ
Richard Stone, theorbo
Kathryn Montoya, principal oboe and recorder
Luke Conklin, oboe II
Nate Helgeson, principal bassoon

Pre-concert talk
Monica Huggett, artistic director,
in conversation with Executive Director
Abigail McKee.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

Selections from Handel's Alcina, HWV 34
Entrée; Tamburino
Aria: "E' gelosia"
Aria: "Verdi prati"
Aria: "Vorrei vendicarmi"
Entrée des songes agréables
Entrée des songes funestes
Entrée des songes agréables effrayés
Le combat des songes funestes et agréables

Selections from Handel's Radamisto, HWV 12
Aria: "Qual nave smarrita"
Aria: "Vanne, sorella ingrata"
Aria: "Ombra cara di mia sposa"
Recitative: "Vieni, d'empietà mostro crudele" (accompagnato)
Aria: "Vile! Se mi dai vita"

INTERMISSION

Selections from Handel's Orlando, HWV 31
Overture: Lentement – Allegro
Aria: "Gia lo stringo gia l'abbraccio"
Aria: "Stimulato dalla gloria"
Recitative: "Già per la man d'Orlando"
Aria: "Già l'ebro il mio ciglio"

Suite from Rodrigo/The Alchemist, HWV 43
Overture
Prelude
Gigue
Sarabande
Matelot
Menuet
Bourée
Air
Menuet
Passacaille

Mad Scene from Handel's Orlando, HWV 31
Arias: “Ah! stigie larve” — “Già latra Cerbero” — “Vaghe pupille”
Program Notes

The vocal music in this wonderful program was written for the voice of an alto or mezzo-soprano castrato (with the exception of two arias from Alcina). The act of castrating a boy before puberty for the purposes of keeping the voice from changing was popular, especially in Italy, in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. These castrati sang mostly in church choirs (the most famous being the Sistine Chapel choir), and in operas in Italy and most of Europe. By around 1680, the primo uomo and hero in many Italian operas was a castrato, and they were paid very well for these performances! Castration finally went out of fashion, and even became illegal in the nineteenth century, and the last castrato died in 1922.

What did an alto castrato’s voice actually sound like? Nobody really knows, and while we have recordings of one castrato from 1902 and 1904 (Alessandro Moreschi), he was allegedly “past his prime” and the recording technology was so poor as to be unhelpful in determining any nuance of vocal quality. We do have anecdotal evidence from many reviews and accounts that the alto castrato voice was very flexible, well equipped to sing fast passages, fairly even through to the lower range (unlike most countertenors who must switch from falsetto to their chest voice in order to sing lower notes), and had a very full tone.

As I was growing up, I sang along with the likes of Karen Carpenter and Canadian folk icon Anne Murray on the radio. They both had very low voices that I later understood to be real alto voices. A few years later, I made the transformative discovery of a cassette tape of the great Canadian contralto Maureen Forster. She became my idol, and I wanted nothing more than to sound just like her! I was lucky to meet her and have a coaching with her just before her Alzheimer’s disease really took hold. It was a dream come true for a baby contralto, and her advice of being patient and biding my time until my voice really matured was difficult to hear, but some of the most valuable advice I’ve ever received. I give you this peek into my past to warm you up to the notion that the voice you will hear tonight is about as close as you’re ever going to get to the sound of an alto castrato!

Tonight’s program begins with selections from Handel’s opera Alcina. The role of Bradamante was written for a woman contralto, and the role of Ruggiero was written for a mezzo-soprano castrato, the great Giovanni Carestini. Bradamante has spent most of her adult life finding and rescuing Ruggiero from perils, and spells, and sorcery. So of course, she marches herself to Alcina’s magic island, finds Ruggiero, snaps him out of his reverie, and brings him back to his senses. In “È gelosia”, Bradamante (who is disguised as a man), is trying to convince Morgana (who has fallen in love with Bradamante in disguise!) that she really ought to be focussing on Oronte (who is Morgana’s lover). “Verdi prati” is a gorgeous aria in rondo form, sung by Ruggiero. He has just been released from Alcina’s spell, and realizes that he must flee the island with Bradamante. He recognizes that the island is terrible, and inhabited by statutes and magical beasts, but also knows that it’s beauty will haunt him forever. “Vorrei vendicarmi” is an iconic rage aria sung by Bradamante. Ruggiero is unsure that Bradamante is who she claims to be, believing that she may be another of Alcina’s illusions. Bradamante has had enough, and turns her rage toward Ruggiero with this exciting aria, with a fabulous contrasting B section.

The next set of arias comes from the opera Radamisto. This opera premiered in April of 1720, with the role of Radamisto (son and heir to the throne of King Farasmane of Thrace) played by a soprano. In December of 1720, one of the most famous castrati had arrived in London, and Handel rewrote the part of “Radamisto” for him. This castrato, Senesino (Francesco Bernardi), played the role both in 1720, and then again for another rewrite in 1728.

“Qual nave” is an introspective, beautifully melodic aria describing Radamisto’s misery at again being separated from Zenobia (his wife), and being condemned to die. In stark contrast, “Vanne, sorella ingrata!”, Radamisto banishes his sister (Polinessa) from his sight, as she refuses to play a part in the plot to stop her husband and rival king (Tiridate) from killing all of the armies of Thrace. “Ombra cara di mia sposa” comes at a moment in the opera when Radamisto believes Zenobia to be dead, and grief-stricken, he prays for her soul to rest peacefully. In “Vieni, d’empieta”, and “Vile! se mi dai vita”, we’ve jumped ahead in the opera to just before “Qual nave”. Tiridate has just given the order for Radamisto to be executed, and naturally, Radamisto must sing a rage aria in response!

The vocal selections from Orlando are pieced together to show the mental anguish and madness of Orlando. We’re ending with the “mad scene” from the end of Act II, and (continued on page 18...)
prefacing it with a dream/vision sequence that Orlando experiences at the hands of the sorcerer Zoroastro. Orlando has rescued Angelica (a pagan princess) during a battle, and has fallen deeply in love with her. However, Angelica is already in love with someone else. Orlando's inability to be with her has driven him to madness, and Zoroastro is the only person able to stop Orlando from causing catastrophic damage to everyone around him.

Interestingly, Orlando was the last opera role that Senesino sang for Handel. Part of their falling-out may have had something to do with the lack of da capo arias in the show (only three). Usually, a large number of da capo arias gave the singer opportunities to showcase vocal fireworks. Another factor may have been the madness of Orlando. Senesino was renowned as a bad actor, with many instances of fabulous reviews for his singing and equally poor reviews of his acting. Being asked to stretch his skills to show the many facets of madness may have bruised his ego!

I hope you enjoy this evening's performance, and that hearing a contralto voice sing these roles has whetted your appetite for more!

—Dr. Vicki St. Pierre

The Brobdingnagische Gigue describes the island of giants, where the shortest note value is a whole note rather than the usual 16th note. In the flying island of Laputa, his third voyage, the inhabitants all have one eye pointing inward and one pointing upward. They are so lost in thought that they must be reminded of life's daily tasks by servants who flap them with inflated bladders. The final movement is a visit to an island inhabited by the noble Houhnhnms, a race of highly rational and benevolent horses who must share their country with the wild, filthy and greedy Yahoos. The Houhnhnms attempt to maintain their nobility with a stately Loure while the Yahoos cavort around them.

In 1740, Prince Frederick Christian of Poland visited Venice and the Ospedale della Pietà where Vivaldi taught and composed for much of his life. In March of that year, the Prince attended a concert in his honor where he heard some of Vivaldi's most prized young students. Among the pieces they performed was the Concerto in A Major for Violin and Three Violins per eco in lontano, RV 552. The unusual title, per eco in lontano, refers to the group of three violinists that form the echo choir, apart from the solo violin and ripieno group. This choir of violinists, placed theatrically in another part of the hall, refers to the famous tradition of spatially separate choirs in San Marco. Throughout the three-movement work, the interplay between the solo violin and the echo choir is evident and forms the basis for Vivaldi's expressive range, texture and use of violinistic color. Each solo gesture of the solo violin is enhanced by its repetition sounding in the distance by the echo choir.

Giovanni Antonio Guido was a Genoese-born violinist and composer who spent nearly all of his professional life in musical service to the French Duke of Orleans. His Scherzi arminici sopra la quattro stagioni dell'anno were published at his own expense in Versaille, but unfortunately without any indication of date. It would be hard to imagine that his set of 'Four Seasons' was not inspired by Antonio Vivaldi's verifiably famous Quattro Stagione of 1725, which were very popular in France and a known favorite of King Louis XV. Following Vivaldi's lead, Guido provides an explanatory poetic cycle along with the music, and here we find the comparable references to murmuring streams, singing birds, stormy winds, stag hunting, and shivering cold. But Vivaldi is much more deliberate in linking his musical ideas to the provided sonnets, even writing his text directly into the performing parts. Guido's four poems, Les Caracteres des Saisons, are longer and more formal in style, and show an overriding philosophical concern for the inevitable passing of time and the decay of all living things. Guido also has a greater variety of movements in his 'Seasons' and he includes a number of movements that are not directly connected to the programmatic content of the seasons themselves. For this concert program, we have elected to focus on the movements that, like Vivaldi's collection, stay true to the most picturesque elements of each season.

—John Dornenburg and Carla Moore

Theatrical Concerti Program Notes

(continued from page 8…)

The Brobdingnagische Gigue describes the island of giants, where the shortest note value is a whole note rather than the usual 16th note. In the flying island of Laputa, his third voyage, the inhabitants all have one eye pointing inward and one pointing upward. They are so lost in thought that they must be reminded of life's daily tasks by servants who flap them with inflated bladders. The final movement is a visit to an island inhabited by the noble Houhnhnms, a race of highly rational and benevolent horses who must share their country with the wild, filthy and greedy Yahoos. The Houhnhnms attempt to maintain their nobility with a stately Loure while the Yahoos cavort around them.

In 1740, Prince Frederick Christian of Poland visited Venice and the Ospedale della Pietà where Vivaldi taught and composed for much of his life. In March of that year, the Prince attended a concert in his honor where he heard some of Vivaldi's most prized young students. Among the