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CLASSICS

# Handelian Pyrotechnics

William Towers *countertenor*

Armonico Consort

Christopher Monks *director*



# HANDELIAN PYROTECHNICS GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685-1759)

<b>Xerxes, HWV 40</b>		<b>Rodelinda, regina de' Longobardi, HWV 19</b>	
[1] Ombra mai fù	[3.11]	[7] Dove sei	[4.44]
<b>Poro, re dell'Indie, HWV 28</b>		<b>Radamisto, HWV 12</b>	
[2] Se possono tanto due luci vezzose	[5.45]	[8] Qual nave smarrita	[6.12]
		[9] Ombra cara	[7.44]
<b>Giulio Cesare in Egitto, HWV 17</b>		<b>Agrippina, HWV 6</b>	
[3] Al lampo dell'armi	[3.17]	<b>Tacerò, purchè fedele</b>	
[4] Dall'ondoso periglio – Aure, deh, per pietà	[7.31]	[10]	[4.28]
<b>Rinaldo, HWV 7</b>		<b>Ottone, re di Germania, HWV 15</b>	
[5] Cara sposa	[8.24]	[11] Dopo l'orrore	[4.56]
<b>Orlando, HWV 31</b>		Total timings:	
[6] Cielo! Se tu il consenti	[4.33]		[60.52]

WILLIAM TOWERS COUNTERTENOR  
ARMONICO CONSORT  
CHRISTOPHER MONKS DIRECTOR

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The opportunity to record a disc of Handel's operatic arias came to me very early on in my life. I turned it down. As far as self-promotion and general career-advancement were concerned, I could see how useful such a recording might be. Artistically-speaking I could not feel comfortable with it. At this stage I had performed only a couple of Handel's operatic roles on stage and I had found them a stern examination of technique, stamina and emotional reserves. I resolved therefore to aim to revisit this concept only when I had performed a significant number of his operas, and to choose repertoire for a recording that I knew and loved; that I had fully lived with. All the recorded material here therefore is from roles that I have sung, in some cases many times over, in various productions.

My original title for this recording was 'Handel for Life'. I have had an association with his music for as long as I can remember. My father passed on a love of music to all his children, a love that he had acquired in the darkness of a Sheffield air-raid shelter; his earliest memories are of his mother's voice, singing to soothe him as the bombs fell. As a family we genuinely would gather around the piano in the evenings and sing together, and in these gatherings Handel was a recurrent presence. The *Messiah* was foremost of

course, but the very first operatic aria I knew and learnt was 'Art thou troubled? Music will calm thee': a not-very-faithful English rendering of 'Dove sei' from Handel's *Rodelinda*. My choices for this recording have thus been guided by what is significant to me, as well as their general excellence. 'Se possono tanto' may seem obscure to some, but Poro was my first ever Handel role, and I really need no excuse to include what is, along with 'Qual nave smarrita' and 'Dove sei', a shining illustration of how frequently and skilfully Handel uses the radiance of E major for a character's defining aria. Beethoven said of Handel: 'Go to him to learn how to achieve great effects by such simple means', and so I have gone to 'Tacerò, purchè fedele'; has anyone ever written so eloquently about being silent? I always begin the *da capo* relishing the irony of this repetition.

I once overheard a distinguished conductor being interviewed about how he 'lived for his art'. He refuted the concept: 'Bullsh\*t', said he, 'Art lives for us'. It is this life-affirming, live-giving aspect of Handel that I'm aiming to celebrate. So frequently his operas reveal their most devastatingly beautiful and uplifting music when life is at its darkest. Here the arias shine brightest, here we find Radamisto's 'Ombra cara' and the boundlessly optimistic 'Dopo l'orrore',

looking out beyond the darkest clouds to the faint glimmer of a dawning hope. This is the uncrushable, indomitable spirit that lies in all

of us, whatever air-raid shelter of life we might find ourselves in. We just need to take the time to listen.

William Towers

## TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

### 1 Ombra mai fù

Ombra mai fù di vegetabile,  
Care ed amabile  
Soave più.

*Never was the shade of a tree  
More dear and loveable  
Or more soothing.*

### 2 Se possono tanto

Se possono tanto due luci vezzose,  
Son degne di pianto le furie gelose  
D'un alma infelice, d'un misero cor.

*If a beautiful gaze can have such power  
The jealous rage of an unhappy soul,  
Of a tortured heart is worthy of pity.*

S'accenda un momento chi sgrida,  
Chi dice che vano è il tormento,  
Che ingiusto è 'l timor.

*Let him now stand and fight  
Who cries out, declaring such torments to be  
Vain, such fears to be wrong.*

### 3 Al lampo dell'armi

Al lampo dell'armi  
Quest'alma guerriera Vendetta farà.  
Non fia che disarmi  
La destra guerriera Chi forza le dà.

*The soldier's foremost thought in battle  
Is to strike the enemy first. He cares for  
nothing more  
Than to disarm And kill his foe.*

### 4 Dall'ondoso periglio

Dall'ondoso periglio  
Salvo mi porta al lido  
Il mio propizio fato.  
Qui la celeste Parca  
Non tronca ancor lo stame alla mia vita!  
Ma Dove andrò? e chi mi porge aita?  
Ove son le mie schiere?  
Ove son le legioni?  
Che a tante mie vittorie il varco apriro?  
Solo in quest'erme arene  
Al monarca del mondo errar conviene?

Aure, deh, per pietà  
Spirate al petto mio,  
Per dar conforto, oh Dio! al mio dolor.  
Dite, dov'è, che fa l'idolo del mio sen,  
L'amato e dolce ben di questo cor?  
Ma d'ogni intorno io veggio  
Sparse d'arme e d'estinti  
L'infortunate arene:  
Segno d'infausto Annunzio al fin sar`

### 5 Cara sposa

Cara sposa, amante cara,  
Dove sei?  
Deh! Ritorna a' pianti miei!

*From the perilous billows  
I was brought safely to shore  
By my propitious destiny.  
The celestial Fate  
Has not yet severed the thread of my life!  
But where shall I go? And who will help me?  
Where are my troops?  
Where are the legions?  
Which to so many victories paved the way?  
Alone on these desert sands  
The ruler of the world must wander?*

*Ye breezes, in pity  
Blow upon my breast  
To give comfort, O God! to my grief  
Tell me, where is the idol of my breast  
The beloved and sweet goodness of this heart?  
But everywhere I see  
Arms and corpses scattered  
In this unfortunate arena:  
Sign of the ill-omened forecast of what is yet to be.*

*Beloved spouse, dearest love  
Where are you?  
Alas! Return to him who weeps*

Del vostro Erebo sull'ara,  
Colla face del mio sdegno  
Io vi sfido, o spiriti rei!

**6 Cielo! Se tu il consenti**

Cielo! Se tu il consenti  
Deh! Fa che nel mio seno  
Possa anche il ferro entrar;  
Perché a un sì rio dolore  
Dal misero mio core  
Sappia col ferro almeno  
L'uscita ritrovar.

**7 Dove sei**

Dove sei, amato bene?  
Vieni l'alma a consolar!  
Vieni, vieni amato bene!  
Son oppresso da tormenti,  
Ed i crudi miei lamenti Sol con  
te posso bear.

**8 Qual nave smarrita**

Qual nave smarrita tra sirti e tempeste,  
Nè luce, nè porto gli toglie il timor.  
Tal io senz'aita fra doglie funeste,  
Non trovo conforto al misero cor.

*On your altars of Erebus  
With my face of blazing anger  
I defy you, you guilty spirits!*

*Heaven! If you consent to this  
Ah! Into my heart let  
The sword enter also;  
For from such a bitter sorrow  
Of my wretched heart  
I can with the sword at least  
Find escape.*

*Where are you, so dearly loved?  
Come and console my heart.  
Come, come, beloved!  
I am oppressed by torments,  
And my cruel lamenting can only be soothed If I  
am with you.*

*Like a boat adrift midst quicksands and storms,  
With no light for guide and no sight of port,  
So I amid sorrows find no healing balm  
To comfort the griefs of a wretched heart.*

**9 Ombra cara**

Ombra cara di mia sposa,  
Deh! riposa,  
E lieta aspetta  
La vendetta che farò!

E poi tosto ove tu stai  
Mi vedrai  
Venire a volo,  
E fedel t'abbracerò.

**10 Tacerò, purché fedele**

Tacerò, purché fedele  
Nel tuo sen conservi amor.  
Soffrirò, benché crudele,  
Contro me sia il tuo rigor.

**11 Dopo l'orrore**

Dopo l'orrore  
D'un ciel turbato  
Più vago e bello Appare il dì.  
È tale more  
Se a un cor sdegnato  
Rende la calma  
Che gli rapì.

*Dear shade of my wife,  
Pray rest in peace,  
And joyfully await  
The vengeance I will take.*

*And very soon thereafter  
You will see me fly  
Whither you are now,  
And faithfully I will embrace you.*

*I will be silent,  
As long as you truly love me.  
I will suffer,  
Although your cruel severity is against me.*

*After the gloom  
Of a stormy sky,  
The day appears more delightful and lovely;  
So too does love,  
If it gives back  
To a scorned heart  
The calm which it took away.*

## WILLIAM TOWERS

William Towers read English at Cambridge University and was a postgraduate scholar at the Royal Academy of Music. He appeared extensively as a soloist in Sir John Eliot Gardiner's Bach Cantata Pilgrimage and his performances in the complete Bach series have been issued on CD.

His opera engagements have included Medoro (Handel *Orlando*) and Farnace (Mozart *Mitridate Re di Ponto*) for the Royal Opera House Covent Garden; Oberon (Britten *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) for Teatro La Fenice Venice, Teatro Petruzzelli Bari, Teatro Municipale Valli Reggion Emilia, Staatsoper Hanover, for the Royal Opera at the Linbury, and for the Aldeburgh Festival; Apollo (Britten *Death in Venice*) for La Monnaie Brussels, Staatstheater Stuttgart, Luxembourg Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Prague State Opera, Aldeburgh Festival, Oper Frankfurt and the Bregenz Festival; Ottone (Handel *Agrippina*), Ruggiero (Vivaldi *Orlando Furioso*) and Egeo (Handel *Teseo*) for Frankfurt; Ottone (Handel *Ottone*) and Ozia (*La Guiditta*) at the Casa da Musica Porto; Orfeo (Gluck *Orfeo*) in Monte-Carlo; Ottone (Monteverdi *L'incoronazione di Poppea*) for the Teatro Real Madrid and Frankfurt; Orlando (Handel *Orlando*) at the Goettingen Festival,



at the Drottningholm Theatre and with the Philharmonia Baroque in San Francisco; Giunio (Porpora *L'Agrippina*) for the Barber Institute; Poro (Handel *Poro*) at the Goettingen Festival; Giulio Cesare (Handel *Giulio Cesare*) for Gothenburg Opera; Unulfo (Handel *Rodelinda*) for the Bolshoi Moscow; Marco Fabio (Caldara *Lucio Papirio Dittatore*) for Buxton International Festival; Radamisto (Handel *Radamisto*) for English Touring Opera; Cristiano Mago (Handel *Rinaldo*) for Glyndebourne Festival Opera; Lotario (Handel *Lotario*) for the London Handel Festival; and Eustazio (Handel *Rinaldo*) for Grange Park Opera.

Equally at home in contemporary work William's roles include 5th Innocent in Harrison Birtwistle's *Minotaur* for the Royal Opera Covent Garden, John Adams's *The Gospel According to the Other Mary* for Theater Bonn, The Guest in the UK premiere of Salvatore Sciarrino's *Luci mie traditrici*, Bishop Baldwyn in Birtwistle's *Gawain*, Der Leiermann in Benedict Mason's *Playing Away*, Lance in the world premiere of Paul Frehner's *Sirius on Earth*, Little James in Birtwistle's *The Last Supper*, and Refugee in Jonathan Dove's *Flight* for Pacific Opera, Canada.

His oratorio and recital schedule has featured appearances in many major venues and festivals in the UK and abroad, including the Wigmore Hall, Symphony Hall Birmingham, Barbican Hall, Royal Albert Hall, the Grosses Festspielhaus Salzburg, Konzerthaus Vienna, Fundación Juan March Madrid, National Auditorium Madrid, Three Choirs Festival, Ravenna Festival, Flanders Early Music Festival, the Festivale de Musique Ancienne de Lyon and La Chaise Dieu. Notable concert performances include Handel's *Solomon* in Estonia and Latvia, Handel's *Belshazzar* with Nicholas McGegan in San Francisco, Bach's Mass in B minor with L'Orquestra Simfònica de les Illes Balears and Jonathan Cohen, Handel's *Messiah* in Dresden with the MDR and with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Laurence Cummings, Bach's Christmas Oratorio with the Royal Northern Sinfonia and Lars Vogt, Bach's St John Passion with the BBC NOW and John Butt, Bach's Easter Oratorio with the BBC NOW and Steven Devine, and the premiere of Harrison Birtwistle's *Angel Fighter* in the Leipzig Bach Festival.

## ARMONICO CONSORT



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<b>Oboe</b>	Geoff Coates, Jane Downer
<b>Violin</b>	Kelly McCusker, Emma Lake
<b>Viola</b>	Joanne Miller
<b>Cello</b>	Poppy Walshaw
<b>Theorbo</b>	Toby Carr
<b>Bassoon</b>	Siona Spillett
<b>Harpsichord</b>	Christopher Monks

Armonico Consort began life in 2001, set up by Christopher Monks and a group of university

colleagues with a shared passion for music from the Renaissance to Baroque, coupled with the imagination to find new and unusual ways to present concerts. Audiences seemed to love their engaging and imaginative approach, and most concerts in the first years sold out. “That gave us confidence, energy and self-belief to carry on and do more, also to take more risks with our programming, and keep on experimenting” says Christopher.

The ideas kept flowing, as did the titles (“many of them were created down the pub”) including the concert programmes *Naked Byrd* and *Supersize Polyphony*, and newly-created operas *Monteverdi’s Flying Circus*, *Too Hot to Handel* and *Baroque Around the Block* (opera’s answer to *Horrible Histories*). Their horizons broadened – alongside Purcell, Bach and Palestrina, one might find Elgar and Bernstein – but at the heart remained music of the Baroque and Renaissance, including some rarely-heard gems, performed by the finest singers and players using period instruments. “We take great care to craft programmes which bring as much little-known music to life as possible, and find new and imaginative ways to bring this music to audiences. I’m particularly proud of *Supersize Polyphony* where we perform 40 and 60-part works by Tallis and Striggio completely in the round, interspersed with *Hildegard of Bingen*”. It earned the group their first 5 star review, from *The Times*, and there were plenty more to follow.

An education programme was fundamental to Armonico Consort from the outset and now encompasses three AC Academy after-school choirs and an in-school Choir Creation programme which trains teachers as choir leaders, leaving a strong legacy in each school.

This Choir Creation scheme became the backbone of AC Academy reaching 15,000 children a year.

Since forming a workplace choir with our sponsors Phillips 66 in 2016, media coverage has shown the positive impact of singing in choirs, especially in the workplace. This has had an incredible effect on the mental health and well-being of the workforce, including increased positivity, teamwork and helping in the recovery of illness such as depression. In 2018, Armonico Consort formed *The Voice Squad* workplace choir programme in collaboration with Arts Council England and Coventry City Council, which rolled out nationwide in 2019.



## CHRISTOPHER MONKS

The founder and Artistic Director of Armonico Consort and its ground-breaking education programme, AC Academy, Christopher Monks has established himself as a versatile and prolific conductor and arts leader.

Specialising in the performance of music from the Baroque and late Renaissance, Christopher is equally at home with major and modern choral repertoire, and during his career he has conducted at many of the greatest concert halls in the UK, including the Royal Albert Hall, the Barbican, Wigmore Hall and Cadogan Hall in London, Symphony Hall Birmingham, and the RSC in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Christopher performs regularly at major national festivals and has worked extensively abroad, including in Israel, Italy, Ireland and France. Alongside his work with Armonico Consort, he has conducted internationally renowned orchestras and ensembles such as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philharmonia and the European Union Chamber Orchestra.



Many of Christopher's latest concerts and recordings, including Supersize Polyphony and his rendition of Purcell's *Dido & Aeneas*, have earned him several five-star reviews in The Times, The Independent and The Guardian.

Christopher is a guest lecturer, tutor and coach on the Cambridge MMus choral conducting course, and is a guest speaker on the Harvard Global Leadership programme.

A passionate advocate of reaching out to children of all backgrounds through the creation of youth choirs, Christopher has founded and developed AC Academy, a music education programme, as well as the Voice Squad workplace choir scheme, both of which offer life-changing experiences and first-class performance opportunities.

When not conducting, Christopher loves fine cooking. After a long day of music preparation, he often enjoys going for a cycle to process everything he has worked on, and on many occasions, this is where he feels that the real music learning takes place.

To anybody who asked him whether he has ever thought to give up his musical career, Christopher would bluntly reply: *"No, it feels bizarre when I talk to other people about their jobs for which they struggle to get out of bed, and I have never felt like I have a job. I just wake up and do a hobby."*



*Handelian Pyrotechnics has been generously sponsored by Jack and Hilary Eldridge who have enjoyed listening to William Towers since the early days of Armonico. The recording of this CD has been made possible by a gift from Hilary, Jack and his mother Peggy, in memory of Jack's father, Angus John Eldridge. Angus loved music all his life and would have been delighted with this memorial.*



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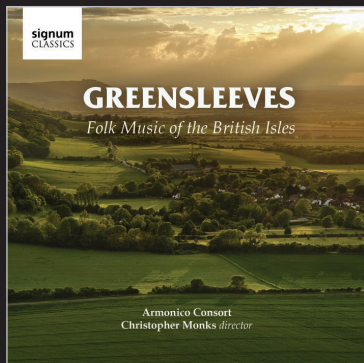
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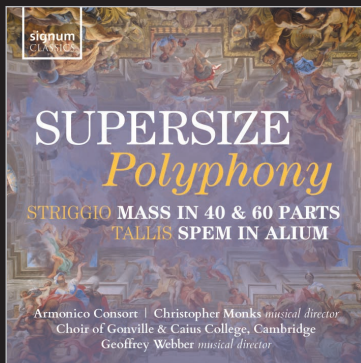
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