



EMMA BELL  
HANDEL  
OPERATIC ARIAS

Scottish Chamber Orchestra  
DIRECTED BY Richard Egarr





## EMMA BELL

### Handel Operatic Arias

Scottish Chamber Orchestra - Leader Ruth Crouch

Directed by Richard Egarr

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It is tempting to go down the “star is born” path with Emma Bell. Her taking over the title role in Handel’s *Rodelinda* at five hours’ notice for Glyndebourne on Tour in 1998 while still a student at the London Opera Centre was a really lucky break, but the fact that she sang so well that she was given performances in her own right at the Festival the following year confirms that her success was based on more than just luck - it was the combination of serious hard work and great talent.

And of course it was also based on her voice. Her soprano, so bright and vibrant at the top, so warmly coloured and expressive lower down, is phenomenal, and so is her range. Her London debut early in 2005 was as Vitellia in Mozart’s *La Clemenza di Tito* at the Coliseum, and the role goes down to bottom G and up to top D. She managed it all without turning a hair, not quite the right expression in that she played the role with what looked like a crew cut, and her acting drew as much praise as her singing. No doubt a three-year contract at the Komische Oper in Berlin, where as much emphasis is placed on dramatic as on vocal values, has helped her hone her skills as an actress.

Coinciding with the release of this disc she made her Covent Garden debut as Leonora in Nielsen’s *Maskarade*, and her career is now in full swing. Known mostly in the UK for her Handel and her Mozart, she has sung a wider repertoire abroad - Mimì and Micaela in Berlin, and Britten’s Miss Jessel in Geneva. The most exciting news is that she is to sing Verdi’s *Violetta* for the first time in 2006, for ENO, and before that Agathe in *Der Freischütz* in Berlin. Her horizons are ever-expanding.

But since her earlier successes were in Handel - Tigrane in *Radamisto* and Almirena in *Rinaldo* as well as that unforgettable *Rodelinda* - it is nice that her first operatic recital disc should be devoted to that composer. The well-chosen extracts sample the whole of Handel’s London operatic career, from his first (*Rinaldo*, 1711) to his last (*Deidamia*, 1741), and demonstrate his (and the singer’s) wide range of moods, from defiance to resignation, from love to the wilder shores of hatred. It is especially nice that the disc includes *Rodelinda*’s “Se’l mio duol”, since Bell’s delivery of that heart-piercing aria remains the most vivid memory of those wonderful evenings at Glyndebourne.



### AMADIGI (1715)

*Amadigi* was last in the group of five early operas that Handel composed for London before the great period following the foundation of the Royal Academy of Music in 1720. It seems plain that Handel was seeking to repeat the success of the first, *Rinaldo*: here too we have a lovesick sorceress, Melissa, laying amorous siege to a hero, Amadigi, who loves Princess Oriana. And *Amadigi* was a success, not least because of its visual spectacle: it was revived twice, and was also staged in Hamburg. Following two acts of intricate amorous intrigue, Amadigi persists in rejecting Melissa and Oriana spiritedly defies the sorceress: Melissa closes the second act - as did Armida in *Rinaldo* - with an aria of fury, her rage enhanced by the trumpet obbligato and barely tempered by the more contemplative middle section.

MELISSA	Desterò dall'empia Dite	<i>I will summon from Hell</i>
	Ogni furia, a farmi guerra	<i>Every Fury to make war</i>
	Crudi, perfidi, sì si;	<i>On these heartless traitors.</i>
	Ombre tetre, omai sortite	<i>Arise, dark shadows</i>
	Dall'anello che vi serra	<i>From your dungeons,</i>
	A'dar pene,	<i>And wreak revenge</i>
	A colui che mi scherni.	<i>On those who scorn me.</i>
	Desterò ecc.	<i>I will summon etc.</i>

### DEIDAMIA (1741)

*Deidamia* was Handel's last opera, given at the Theatre Royal in Lincoln's Inn Fields and a failure: there were only three performances. It was, maybe, ahead of its time rather than out of date in a period when public enthusiasm for *opera seria* was on the wane. The tone of the libretto is ironic, cynical even, adroitly

mixing the comic and the serious in near-Mozartian manner. The hero Achilles is in hiding on the island of Skyros, in disguise as the nymph Pyrrha, because prophecies have foretold both that he will die in Troy, and that the Greeks will not succeed without him. The king's daughter Deidamia has seen through his female disguise, and they are in love. The wily Ulysses comes to Skyros to find Achilles and pays court to both Deidamia and "Pyrrha", whose skill at the hunt and unfeminine interest in weapons of war betrays his identity. Lightly-treated gender confusion is indeed one of the opera's main attractions. In the finale Achilles leaves for Troy and Deidamia is heartbroken. In her third-act aria she berates Ulysses, whose courtship she took seriously, for having ruined her life; at this late stage Handel was adapting da capo form, and instead of ABA we have ABAB, largo followed by allegro with both repeated and decorated. Deidamia's reference to an "unfaithful heart" is indeed ironic: Ulysses's wife was the constant Penelope.

DEIDAMIA	M'hai resa infelice;	<i>You have brought me misery,</i>
	Che vanto n'avrai?	<i>But with what honour to you?</i>
	Oppressi, dirai, un'alma fedel.	<i>Suppress, you said, a faithful love.</i>
	Le vele se darai	<i>If the waves speed you</i>
	De' flutti al seno infido,	<i>To an unfaithful heart,</i>
	Sconvolga orribil vento	<i>Then may the unstable elements</i>
	L'instabil elemento,	<i>Unleash a fierce gale,</i>
	E inanzi al patrio lido	<i>And as you approach your homeland</i>
	Sommergati, crudel.	<i>May you drown, you monster.</i>
	M'hai resa, ecc.	<i>You have brought etc.</i>
	Le vele, ecc.	<i>If the waves etc.</i>



## GIULIO CESARE (1724)

*Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, to give it its full title, was one of Handel's greatest successes, much revived in his lifetime, performed in Germany and France as well as London, and still the most popular of his operas world-wide today. One reason is the character of Cleopatra, whose "infinite variety" - she has eight arias - is conjured up in music utterly worthy of Shakespeare. She starts as a skittish teenager, matures as a skilled seductress, turns into a skilled politician, takes adversity in her stride, and ends in triumph as the second-most powerful ruler in the Mediterranean world. In the third-act "Piangerò", one of Handel's most heart-stoppingly beautiful arias, her fortunes are at their lowest ebb: defeated in battle and imprisoned by her devious brother Ptolemy, she faces death with stoicism, but the fast middle section reminds us of the spirited young woman we met earlier on.

CLEOPATRA	Piangerò la sorte mia, Sì crudele e tanto ria, Finchè vita in petto avrò.  Ma poi morta, d'ogn'intorno Il tiranno e notte e giorno Fatta spettro agiterò.  Piangerò ecc.	<i>I will lament my fate, So cruel and harsh, As long as there is life in me.  But if I die, at every turn By night and day My ghost will haunt the tyrant.  I will lament etc.</i>
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## LOTARIO (1729)

*Lotario* was the first opera of the so-called second Academy period; the original Academy had broken up, and Handel had to assemble an entirely new roster of singers for the venture, including Strada, who sang Adelaide. It was a fair success but never revived, and Handel cannibalised the score for later works.

For the plot he returned to early Italian history, already treated in *Ottone* and *Flavio*. The action is impenetrably convoluted even by the standards of *opera seria*. Adelaide, widowed Queen of Pavia, is besieged both physically and amorously by the family of Berengario, the rival King of Milan, and finally rescued by Lotario, King of Germany (in fact Otto, renamed to avoid confusion with the earlier opera). By the end of the first act Adelaide has been imprisoned by Berengario, and responds with a textbook "simile aria": whatever threatens her, she will never give in.

ADELAIDE	Scherza in mar la navicella, Mentre ride aura seconda; Ma se poi fiera procella Turba il ciel, sconvolge l'onda Va perduta a naufragar.  Non così questo mio core Cederà d'un empia sorte Allo sdegno, ed al furore, Che per anco in faccia a morte Sa da grande trionfar.  Scherza in mar ecc.	<i>A little ship dances on the waves While favourable breezes blow; But should a fierce gale Cloud the sky and arouse a storm The ship is wrecked and lost.  Not in this way will my heart Yield to a pitiless fate, To anger and to fury, For even in the face of death It will proudly triumph.  A little ship etc.</i>
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## RODELINDA (1725)

Just as it is hard to find a bad opera amongst the 36 Handel wrote (*Silla*, perhaps, though it may never have been performed, at least not in public), so is it impossible to decide which is the best, but *Rodelinda* is definitely amongst the top half-dozen, one of a group of astonishing masterpieces from the first Academy period. As a hymn to conjugal love it ranks with Beethoven's *Fidelio*,



and the protagonist is one of opera's great heroines. The plot is drawn from Italian history. Rodelinda's husband, Bertarido King of Lombardy, has been deposed and has fled abroad, putting it about that he is dead. For most of the first act Rodelinda believes this to be true, but rejects the advances of the usurper Grimoaldo. She sings "Ombre piante" by a memorial to her supposedly deceased spouse. But Bertarido returns, and the bliss of their reunion is shattered by his imprisonment. In a dungeon scene foreshadowing *Fidelio* Rodelinda finds bloodstained garments, and assumes that her rescue attempt has failed and ended in Bertarido's death. The effect of her heartrending lament "Se'l mio duol" is sharpened by the audience's knowledge that she is mistaken and that the Happy End is in sight.

<b>RODELINDA</b>	Ombre piante, urne funeste! Voi sareste Le delizie del mio sen,  Se trovassi in voi raccolto, Come il volto Anco il cener del mio ben.  Ombre piante, ecc.	<i>Sombre groves, funereal tombs, You would be A comfort to my heart  Were I to find in you The image And the ashes of the man I love.  Sombre groves etc</i>
<b>RODELINDA</b>	Se'l mio duol non è sì forte, Chi trafigge, oh Dio! Chi svena per pietà questo mio cor?  Ah! Che un duol peggior di morte Involare a un sen Che pena, è pietà, non è rigor. Se'l mio duol ecc.	<i>Since my grief is not enough to kill me, Who, oh God, will show sufficient pity To stop my heartbeat?  Ah, to free a suffering heart From sorrow worse than death Would be an act of pity, not cruelty. Since my grief etc.</i>

#### SCIPIONE (1726)

*Scipione* was written in great haste to open the season following *Rodelinda*; the planned new opera, *Alessandro*, had to be postponed pending the arrival of the new prima donna, Faustina. Closely based on history as retold by Livy, it tells of the Roman general Scipio's conquest of the Spanish port of Cartagena and his love for the captive Princess Berenice. But she, less historically, loves Lucejo, and so impressed is Scipio by her constancy that he surrenders her. The evident haste shows in an uneven score, but Berenice's gentle arioso "Tutta raccolta ancor", sung in prison while awaiting a fraught interview with Scipio, shows Handel at his simplest, his most eloquent and indeed his greatest.

<b>BERENICE</b>	Tutta raccolta ancor Nel palpitante cor Tremante ho l'alma.	<i>Still wholly contained Within a beating heart Is my trembling soul.</i>
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#### ARIODANTE (1735)

*Ariodante* was the first opera Handel wrote for John Rich's new and well-appointed Covent Garden Theatre: his old stamping ground, the King's, had been taken over by the rival Opera of the Nobility, to whom many of his singers defected. But he soon recruited a new team, and incorporated Marie Sallé's dance troupe into one of his richest scores. *Ariodante*, too, has to be in Handel's top ten, if not half-dozen. The plot, taken from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, is lucid and well worked-out. In the opening scene Ginevra, daughter of the King of Scotland, dismisses the rashly ardent Duke Polinesso with extreme, not to say insulting haughtiness (Tesifone was a notoriously ugly Fury), so much so that you feel she needs taking down a peg. Polinesso's revenge takes her down to the very depths of despair, falsely accused of fornication and disowned by her father. Not even the jauntiness of this aria deserves that.



GINEVRA Orrida a gl'occhi miei,  
Quanto, Signor, tu sei  
Tesifone non è!  
  
Amor, di noi per gioco  
Il core a te di foco  
Di gello fece a me.  
Orrida ecc.

*To my eyes  
Not even Tesifone  
Is as horrible as you, Sir.  
  
Cupid, as a joke on us,  
Gives you a heart of fire,  
And one of ice to me.  
To my eyes etc.*

#### RINALDO (1711)

*Rinaldo* was the first opera Handel wrote for London, and he was out to impress, re-using some of the best music from his Italian period and setting a libretto by Aaron Hill drawn from Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* that gave many opportunities for stage spectacle. It was a huge success, and much revived in the composer's lifetime. It also introduced Armida, the first of Handel's sorceress powerwomen and forerunner of Melissa, Medea and Alcina. Inevitably, this Syrian enchantress falls in love with her intended victim, the crusader knight Rinaldo, and in "Ah, cruel" prays that he take pity on her, with bassoon adding its own air of aching melancholy. The fast and furious middle section gives due warning of Rinaldo's fate should he remain obdurate.

ARMIDA Ah, crudel,  
Il pianto mio,  
Deh, ti mova per pietà.  
  
O infedel  
Al mio desio  
Proverai la crudeltà.  
Ah, crudel ecc.

*Oh, cruel man,  
May my tears  
Move you to pity.  
  
Or, if you spurn  
My desire, in turn  
You will feel my cruelty.  
Oh, cruel man etc.*

#### RADAMISTO (1720)

1719 saw of the foundation of the Royal Academy of Music and the start of one of Handel's most fertile periods. *Radamisto* was the first of the operas he wrote for the company, and one of his most successful, frequently revived. The plot, based at some remove on Tacitus's *Annals*, is extremely complex, but revolves around events in Asia Minor in the 1st century AD. Tiridate, King of Armenia and a ruthless tyrant, persecutes Radamisto, Prince of Thrace, whose wife Zenobia Tiridate desires. Perhaps the most interesting character is Tiridate's wife Polinessa, who launches the opera with the sombre arioso "Sommi dei". Her heart grieves not least because of her husband's brutality and serial infidelities. A faithful wife, she sticks by him, at one point even saving him from assassination, but by the third act she has had enough, hurling "Barbaro, partirò" at him and leaving to help incite the rebellion of his own troops that will lead to his downfall. At curtain-fall they are none-too-convincingly reconciled, and return to rule Armenia as if nothing had happened.

POLINESSA Sommi dei,  
Che scorgete i mali miei,  
Proteggete un mesto cor.

*Great gods,  
Who know of my misfortunes,  
Protect a grieving heart.*

POLINESSA Barbaro, partirò,  
Ma sdegno poi verrà  
Che amore cangerà  
Tutto in fieraezza.

*Monster, I go,  
But soon you will see  
How love can change  
Into fierce pride.*

E quando tornerò,  
Punita si vedrà  
La cieca infedeltà  
Che mi disprezza.

*And when I return,  
You will see punished  
The blind disloyalty  
With which you humiliate me.*

Barbaro, partirò ecc.

*Monster, I go etc.*



## EMMA BELL

Soprano, Emma Bell is at the forefront of the younger sopranos of her generation. She studied at the Royal Academy of Music and at the National Opera Studio and won the Kathleen Ferrier Prize in 1998. She subsequently sang the title role in Handel's *Rodelinda* for Glyndebourne Festival and Touring Operas, at the Châtelet and the Royal Festival Hall with Sir Charles Mackerras, Harry Bicket, William Christie and Emmanuel Haim and appeared with Opera North, Grange Park and Garsington Festivals. She made her European debut with the Lausanne Opera.

She has given many recitals with Andrew West, Julius Drake, Malcolm Martineau and Roger Vignoles at the Wigmore Hall and for the Bath, Brighton, Buxton and Leamington Festivals. In 1999 she was made a BBC New Generation Artist and is now a frequent radio broadcaster. She sang in the opening concert of the BBC 2001 Promenade Concerts conducted by Leonard Slatkin. In 2002 she joined the Komische Oper in Berlin where her roles include Contessa in *Marriage of Figaro*, Micaela in *Carmen* and Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*. 2003 saw her debut at the Geneva Opera in *The Turn of the Screw* conducted by Jeffrey Tate and concerts with the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande in Geneva with Pappano and the Bayerische Rundfunk. 2004 included the title role in *Alcina* for the Komische in Berlin, the title role in *Rodelinda* for Glyndebourne Festival with Haim, a BBC Prom with The English Concert and Manze, and the title role of Merab in concert performances and a recording of *Saul* with René Jacobs.

2005 engagements include Vitellia in a new production of *La Clemenza di Tito* for ENO, her USA debut in the Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center with Louis Langrée and Jeremy Denk and her debut at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden as Leonore in Nielsen's *Maskarade*.

Her previous recording of songs by Strauss, Walter and Marx (Linn CKD 238) was well received - *A disc to be treasured* (Fanfare Magazine).

Future plans include *Rodelinda* in Bilbao, London's Barbican and the Konzerthaus, Vienna; Vitellia for the Opera de Montréal with Bernard Labadie; Rossini's *Stabat Mater* with the Accademia di Santa Cecilia and Pappano; Agathe *Der Freischütz* for the Komische, Berlin; a return to the Proms for *Alexander's Feast* and the *Johannes Passion* with Haim at the Châtelet. In 2008 she will sing the Countess in *Le Nozze Di Figaro* for the Liceu, Barcelona.

She is in much demand as a concert and recital singer and is admired for her richly coloured, beautiful voice, sensitive musicianship and dramatic intensity in performance.

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The SCO reaches an even wider audience through broadcasts on radio and television, and a substantial catalogue of recordings. These include a series of critically-acclaimed CDs in partnership with Linn Records; music by Mendelssohn, Mozart, Brahms, Sibelius, Prokofiev, Bartók and Kodály conducted by Conductor Emeritus Joseph Swensen and Conductor Laureate Sir Charles Mackerras.

## RICHARD EGARR

Richard Egarr is one of the most exciting and versatile musicians of his generation. He has worked with all types of keyboards: he has performed repertoire ranging from 15th-century organ intabulations, to Dussek, Schumann and Chopin on early pianos, to Berg and Maxwell Davies on modern piano. He is director of The Academy of the Begijnhof, Amsterdam, and is in great demand both as soloist and as accompanist for many of today's finest artists. His collaboration with long-time duo partner Andrew Manze has been setting new performance standards since 1984.



As a conductor, Egarr has presented a wide range of repertoire - from Baroque opera and oratorio, to works by 20th-century composers such as John Tavener and orchestral transcriptions by Stokowski. Recently named associate director of The Academy of Ancient Music, he appears regularly with this and other ensembles: the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the Orchestra of the Paris Conservatory, the Dutch Radio Chamber Orchestra, the Vienna Chamber Orchestra, and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe.

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