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Handel

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ABC
Classics

HIS GREATEST HITS

George Frideric Handel

1685-1759



CD1

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| 1 | Arrival of the Queen of Sheba from Solomon, HWV67
West Australian Symphony Orchestra, David Measham <i>conductor</i> | 2'52 |
| 2 | Zadok the Priest, HWV258
Sydney Philharmonia Symphonic Choir, Sydney Philharmonia Orchestra,
Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> LIVE RECORDING | 5'33 |
| 3 | Ombra mai fù (Never was shade so lovely) from Xerxes, HWV40
David Hobson <i>tenor</i> , Sinfonia Australis, Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> | 2'40 |
| 4 | Pifa from Messiah, HWV56
Orchestra of the Antipodes, Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> | 1'04 |
| 5 | Va tacito e nascosto (The hunter stalks his prey in silence)
from Julius Caesar in Egypt, HWV17
Graham Pushee <i>countertenor</i> , Dominic Harvey <i>Baroque horn</i> ,
Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, Paul Dyer <i>director</i> | 6'44 |
| 6 | Air from Water Music: Suite No. 1 in F, HWV348
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Graham Abbott <i>conductor</i> | 2'45 |
| 7 | The Trumpet Shall Sound from Messiah
Teddy Tahu Rhodes <i>bass-baritone</i> , Leanne Sullivan <i>Baroque trumpet</i> , Orchestra of the Antipodes,
Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> | 4'02 |
| 8 | Siciliana from Concerto grosso in C minor, Op. 6 No. 8, HWV326
Lucinda Moon, Ben Dollman <i>violins</i> , Jamie Hey <i>cello</i> , Australian Brandenburg Orchestra,
Paul Dyer <i>director</i> | 3'21 |

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| 9 | V'adaro, pupille (Beautiful eyes, I adore you) from Julius Caesar in Egypt
Yvonne Kenny <i>soprano</i> , Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, Paul Dyer <i>director</i> | 6'00 |
| 10 | Allegro from Water Music: Suite No. 1 in F
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Graham Abbott <i>conductor</i> | 2'31 |
| 11 | Laudate pueri Dominum (Praise the Lord, all you his servants), HWV237 (First movement)
Emma Kirkby <i>soprano</i> , Cantillation, Orchestra of the Antipodes, Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> | 3'26 |
| 12 | Waft Her, Angels, Through the Skies from Jephtha, HWV70
David Hobson <i>tenor</i> , Sinfonia Australis, Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> | 3'20 |
| 13 | Rejoice Greatly from Messiah
Yvonne Kenny <i>soprano</i> , Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Vladimir Kamirski <i>conductor</i> | 4'13 |
| 14 | Andante from Water Music: Suite No. 1 in F
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Graham Abbott <i>conductor</i> | 2'24 |
| 15 | The Trumpet's Loud Clangor from Ode for St Cecilia's Day, HWV76
David Hobson <i>tenor</i> , Cantillation, Sinfonia Australis, Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> | 3'15 |
| 16 | Verdi prati, selve amene (Green pastures, pleasant woods) from Alcina, HWV34
Sally-Anne Russell <i>mezzo-soprano</i> , Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Nicholas Milton <i>conductor</i> | 3'49 |
| 17 | Alla hornpipe from Water Music: Suite No. 2 in D, HWV349
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Graham Abbott <i>conductor</i> | 3'04 |
| 18 | Where'er You Walk from Semele, HWV58
Angus Young <i>tenor</i> , Sirius Ensemble, Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> | 4'28 |
| 19 | Let the Bright Seraphim from Samson, HWV57
Yvonne Kenny <i>soprano</i> , Geoffrey Payne <i>trumpet</i> , Melbourne Symphony Orchestra,
Vladimir Kamirski <i>conductor</i> | 5'15 |
| 20 | Passacaglia from Keyboard Suite No. 7 in G minor, HWV432
John O'Donnell <i>organ</i> | 4'17 |

Total Playing Time 76'36

CD2

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| 1 | Tomami a vagheggiar (Come back and admire me) from Alcina
Yvonne Kenny <i>soprano</i> , Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, Paul Dyer <i>director</i> | 4'20 |
| 2 | He Was Despised from Messiah
Alexandra Sherman <i>mezzo-soprano</i> , Orchestra of the Antipodes, Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> | 4'48 |
| 3 | Andante – Allegro (First movement) from Organ Concerto in B-flat major, HWV294,
arranged for two guitars by Eduard Grigoryan
Slava Grigoryan, Leonard Grigoryan <i>guitars</i> , Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra,
Benjamin Northey <i>conductor</i> | 6'05 |
| 4 | I Know That My Redeemer Liveth from Messiah
Sara Macliver <i>soprano</i> , Orchestra of the Antipodes, Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> | 6'32 |
| 5 | Love in Her Eyes Sits Playing from Acis and Galatea, HWV49b
David Hobson <i>tenor</i> , Sinfonia Australis, Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> | 4'54 |
| 6 | Adagio e staccato from Water Music: Suite No. 1 in F
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Graham Abbott <i>conductor</i> | 2'19 |
| 7 | For Unto Us a Child is Born from Messiah
Cantillation, Orchestra of the Antipodes, Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> | 3'36 |
| 8 | Care selve, ombre beate (Beloved woods, blessed shade) from Atalanta, HWV35
David Hobson <i>tenor</i> , Sinfonia Australis, Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> | 2'24 |
| 9 | La Réjouissance (Rejoicing) from Music for the Royal Fireworks, HWV351
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Graham Abbott <i>conductor</i> | 2'02 |
| 10 | Lascia ch'io pianga (Let me weep) from Rinaldo, HWV7
Yvonne Kenny <i>soprano</i> , Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, Paul Dyer <i>director</i> | 4'18 |
| 11 | Allegro from Concerto grosso in D minor, Op. 6 No. 10, HWV328
Lucinda Moon, Ben Dollman <i>violins</i> , Jamie Hey <i>cello</i> , Australian Brandenburg Orchestra,
Paul Dyer <i>director</i> | 2'45 |

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| 12 | Sound an Alarm from Judas Maccabaeus, HWV63
David Hobson <i>tenor</i> , Cantillation, Sinfonia Australis, Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> | 3'35 |
| 13 | Oh Sleep, Why Dost Thou Leave Me? from Semele
Yvonne Kenny <i>soprano</i> , Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, Paul Dyer <i>director</i> | 3'05 |
| 14 | Ev'ry Valley from Messiah
Paul McMahon <i>tenor</i> , Orchestra of the Antipodes, Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> | 3'23 |
| 15 | Hornpipe from Water Music: Suite No. 1 in F
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Graham Abbott <i>conductor</i> | 0'53 |
| 16 | Piangerò la sorte mia (I shall weep at my fate) from Julius Caesar in Egypt
Yvonne Kenny <i>soprano</i> , Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, Paul Dyer <i>director</i> | 5'37 |
| 17 | Iris, Hence, Away from Semele
Sally-Anne Russell <i>mezzo-soprano</i> , Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Nicholas Milton <i>conductor</i> | 3'37 |
| 18 | Andante larghetto e staccato from Concerto grosso in A major, Op. 6 No. 11, HWV329
Lucinda Moon, Ben Dollman <i>violins</i> , Jamie Hey <i>cello</i> , Australian Brandenburg Orchestra,
Paul Dyer <i>director</i> | 3'48 |
| 19 | Oh! Had I Jubal's Lyre from Joshua, HWV64
Shu-Cheen Yu <i>soprano</i> , Sinfonia Australis, Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> | 2'38 |
| 20 | Hallelujah! from Messiah
Sydney Philharmonia Choirs, Sydney Philharmonia Orchestra,
Antony Walker <i>conductor</i> LIVE RECORDING | 3'51 |
| Total Playing Time | | 76'09 |





George Frideric Handel

magnificent **Zadok the Priest** at their coronation ceremonies – as have audiences around the world at countless concerts. The excitement builds through the music's slow orchestral introduction, the chords unfolding inexorably, tension mounting almost to breaking point until the choir bursts in with words taken from the Old Testament's first book of Kings, describing the coronation of Solomon, famous for his wisdom and for the glories of his reign, renowned as a golden age of Israel's history.

This was by no means the first time Handel had written music for royalty. In 1717, he composed a series of more than twenty short pieces to entertain King George as he took a boat trip along the Thames one summer evening. The fifty or so musicians were loaded onto a barge which accompanied the king's vessel up and down the river; the king is said to have enjoyed the **Water Music** so much that he ordered it to be played three times!

Thirty-two years later, King George II ordered a public display of fireworks in London's Green Park to celebrate the signing of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, which brought to an end the War of Austrian Succession. Handel again was commissioned to provide music for the occasion. His **Music for the Royal Fireworks** caused a sensation at the public rehearsal six days earlier, creating traffic chaos as 12,000 people crowded into Vauxhall Gardens; the

fireworks themselves turned out to be a spectacle rather different from that originally planned, when the specially-designed wooden building in which the musicians were playing caught fire and burned to the ground, bringing the performance to an unexpectedly early close.

No such chaos attended the premiere of Handel's *Ode for St Cecilia's Day*, in the Theatre Royal in 1739. Cecilia is the patron saint of music, and composers have always loved to honour her feast day (22 November) with music in her praise. Handel chose a poem by John Dryden for his offering. The various movements celebrate the different instruments and the passions they arouse: the 'soft complaining flute' revealing the 'woes of hopeless lovers', the 'sharp violins' proclaiming jealousy and fury, the heavenly purity of the organ, and **The Trumpet's Loud Clangor** with its call to battle.

The Trumpet's Loud Clangor is proof of Handel's gift for bold musical drama, which stood him in good stead when writing for the stage, as he did with great success for 36 years. Italian opera was all the rage in London – at one point, the King and the Prince of Wales were sponsoring rival companies – but Handel's operas have outlasted their contemporaries because of Handel's unequalled ability to express in music the emotions of the characters. Baroque opera has an intensity unlike that of Romantic opera: each aria is focused on a single emotion (or

sometimes, two, by means of a contrasting central section) which the music explores with great passion and focus. Thus **Verdi prati, selve amene**, from *Alcina*, perfectly evokes a profound sense of regretful sorrow: the knight Ruggiero has just realised that the 'green pastures and pleasant woods' of the song's first line are in fact illusions, and that Alcina, with whom he had fallen hopelessly in love, is in fact an evil sorceress who can never be his. **Tornami a vagheggiar** is a declaration of love that glitters with triumph as Morgana, Alcina's sister, exults at having 'snared' the object of her affections, Ricciardo (who will turn out to be Ruggiero's beloved, Bradamante, who has disguised herself as a man and come to undo the enchantment that has captured Ruggiero).

Care selve, ombre beate, from *Atalanta*, is a very different love song: King Meleagro has come to the woodlands of Arcadia, disguised as a shepherd, in search of the princess Atalanta who has scorned his suit and run away to live with the country folk. With its air of serious dignity and its gently lilting pastoral rhythm, the song blends the worlds of court and country to paint a touching portrait of the rejected king. Even more dignified is **Ombra mai fù**, from *Xerxes*; the noble melody and stately pace, however, were originally ironic in tone, as the opera is a comedy and the singer, the King of Persia, is addressing his passion to a plane-tree which is providing him with welcome shade from the summer heat.

From *Julius Caesar in Egypt* comes the arch cunning of **Va tacito e nascosto**: Caesar, like a spider at the centre of a web of intrigue, contemplates the progress of his plotting to gain control of Egypt and especially of its queen, Cleopatra. Nefarious designs, he muses, need to be kept hidden, like a hunter tracking his prey. The music brilliantly captures both the stealthy tread of the hunter and the emperor's own barely suppressed desires. In **V'adoro, pupille**, Cleopatra, who is spinning her own web of deception, has presented herself to Caesar in disguise and serenades him in order to win his heart and so bend him to her will. The two eventually fall genuinely in love, however, and when Caesar is defeated by the Egyptian forces, Cleopatra is taken prisoner by her own brother; in **Piangerò la sorte mia** she mourns her fate in abject desolation, her grief exploding into a blazing cry for vengeance in the aria's central section.

Lascia ch'io pianga is another lament, this time from the opera *Rinaldo*, a tale set during the time of the Crusades. Almirena, daughter of the captain of the Christian armies and fiancée of the great warrior Rinaldo, has been captured by the Saracens and is in prison, fending off the unwanted attentions of the Saracen king. As in *Piangerò la sorte mia*, Handel is able to express the deepest human sorrow in music of utmost simplicity.

Italian opera was popular, but it hadn't completely frozen out the local musical tradition.

Acis and Galatea is an English-language opera in the pastoral style: the nobility loved to fantasise about the delights of the simple rural life, and elegant, courtly entertainments on the theme were frequently performed at Drury Lane. *Acis and Galatea*, however, was first performed at the country residence of the Earl of Carnarvon, probably on the terraces overlooking the garden; **Love in Her Eyes Sits Smiling**, sung by the shepherd Acis, celebrates the pleasures of rustic innocence in music of graceful beauty.

The passion for opera eventually burnt itself out; Handel responded by shifting his attention to oratorio, a kind of sacred drama in music performed with soloists, chorus and orchestra but without staging or costumes. These were especially popular during Lent, the period of abstinence leading up to Easter: opera, too frivolous for this time of religious penitence, was forbidden, but audiences flocked to hear Handel's oratorios, which they seem to have enjoyed with no less enthusiasm, applauding with great vigour. The church was unhappy at the general lack of reverence displayed by the often boisterous audiences, but the listeners could perhaps be forgiven their excitement, given that Handel had invested his oratorios with as much drama and emotion as his operas. The **Arrival of the Queen of Sheba**, from *Salomon*, is full of bustling excitement and eager anticipation; **Let the Bright Seraphim** from *Samson* and **Oh! Had I Jubal's Lyre** from *Joshua* are ecstatic hymns of triumph that soar

to heaven; in *Judas Maccabaeus*, the Hebrew armies rush to follow their hero's bold call to arms, **Sound an Alarm**. The audience would have wept with Jephtha in his aria **Waft Her, Angels, Through the Skies**, where he bids farewell to the daughter he is bound by his own ill-conceived vow to sacrifice.

With *Semele*, the operatic qualities are even more obvious, because Handel was deliberately blurring the boundary between opera and oratorio. For all the moral rectitude of the pagan story's ending (Semele's pride and lasciviousness bring about her death when she, a mere mortal, insists on seeing her lover Jupiter in his divine glory, and is consumed in his fire), the piece was condemned as 'baudy', and with justification. Semele's desires are brazen and unmistakably of the flesh: the luxurious sensuality of her aria **Oh Sleep, Why Dost Thou Leave Me?** is only the beginning. Jupiter tries to distract her with scenes of Arcadian delight in **Where'er You Walk**, but his wife Juno has already discovered her husband's duplicity and is planning her revenge (**Iris, Hence, Away**).

Curiously, a similar puritanical outrage was provoked by the best-loved of all Handel's oratorios, *Messiah*. His other oratorios were retellings of biblical stories; in *Messiah*, the libretto consists almost entirely of the actual words of scripture, and the idea of those sacred texts being sung in public theatres was, to

many of the church authorities, offensive in the extreme. The public did not share any such scruples, however, and *Messiah* has been an overwhelming success since its first performance, which took place in Dublin in 1742. By requesting that the ladies not wear hooped skirts, and that the gentlemen leave their swords at home, an extra hundred people were squeezed into the music hall on Fishamble St; audiences have been crowding in to experience *Messiah* ever since.

Always a fast worker, Handel completed the score of *Messiah* in just 24 days. Charles Jennens, who had put the libretto together, was famously disappointed by the music, complaining about 'some weak parts, which [Handel] was too idle & too obstinate to retouch, tho' I used great importunity to persuade him to it.' Most listeners have sided more with the composer, who declared that in writing the piece, 'I did think I did see all of Heaven before me, and the great God himself.'

Though it is traditionally performed at Christmas, *Messiah* was written for performance at Easter: it is a celebration of God 'manifested in the Flesh, justified by the Spirit, seen of Angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.' The first section does present the birth of Christ, but not in the familiar images of stables, shepherds and wise men. Instead, the texts come mostly from the Old Testament prophets who proclaimed the

coming of the Messiah as the event which would transform the world (**Ev'ry Valley, Rejoice Greatly**). There is only a brief interlude of actual Nativity narrative, introduced by the **Pifa** or Pastoral Symphony.

Part Two deals with the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. At the first performance, the singer who performed the alto aria **He Was Despised**, Mrs Susannah Cibber, was an actress rather than an opera singer; the depth of feeling with which she invested the part inspired the chancellor of St Patrick's Cathedral to call out, 'Woman, for this be all thy sins forgiven thee!' In Part Three, the focus is on Christ's ascension to heaven and his victory over death which will in turn liberate from death those who believe in him. The radiant beauty of the soprano aria **I Know That My Redeemer Liveth** expresses the believer's humble confidence in the resurrection; that day of resurrection is proclaimed in **The Tumpet Shall Sound**, a duet for solo trumpet and bass full of dignity and majesty.

One of the defining features of the oratorio is its use of the chorus, and *Messiah* contains some of the greatest choruses ever written. There is simply not room to include them all on an album like this, so two will have to stand for the many. The light, graceful music which begins the chorus **For Unto Us a Child is Born** actually originated as a secular duet for soprano and alto that Handel had written earlier, to Italian words –

Handel was a great recycler. The mighty **Hallelujah!** chorus comes at the end of Part Two: a shout of praise for the Messiah who has triumphed over death to reign over all creation.

Laudate pueri Dominum is a very early work: it was written in 1707, the year Handel spent travelling in Rome, Florence and Venice. There was little call for church music in Latin in Georgian England, and in any case Handel, once settled in England, wrote only occasionally for the church, so there are very few works of this kind in the Handel catalogue. The eloquence of the vocal line has however drawn this piece to the attention of soprano virtuosos such as Emma Kirkby, who appears on this recording.

It would be unfair to exclude Handel's keyboard music: after all, it was as an organist that he first displayed his talents in his native Halle, and he never ceased to perform on the instrument – he usually filled in the intervals in performances of *Messiah* with organ concertos, for example, and even when blindness prevented him for composing, he was able to improvise at the organ and harpsichord in concerts. The **Passacaglia** was originally written as a stand-alone piece, but Handel later included it as the final movement of the seventh of his eight Suites, published in 1720. A *passacaglia* is a set of variations on a repeating phrase in the bass line.

Apart from the *Water Music* and the *Music for the Royal Fireworks*, Handel's main contribution to the orchestral repertoire was a set of twelve

Concerti grossi, written in 1739. The *concerto grosso* is a type of concerto where the 'soloist' is actually a group of instruments. In the three concerti grossi represented on this album, the soloists are a trio of two violins and a cello.

The **Concerto for two guitars** is included here as a tribute to the universality of Handel's appeal. The piece as published by Handel was an organ concerto, though the first performance was actually on harp. The guitarists Slava and Leonard Grigoryan, however, lamenting the lack of Baroque music for their instrument, turned to this piece to help fill the gap. Hearing how beautifully the music transfers to the medium of guitar duo, it is difficult not to applaud them for their creativity, and rejoice that the miracle of Handel's music has become available to even more music lovers.

Natalie Shea

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