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HOLLANDIA

NOVA *Detecta A° 1644*

MAP: Johannes Van Keulen *Oost Indien (detail) c1689*

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ABC CLASSICS

# HANDEL Semele



PINCHGUT OPERA

George Frideric Handel 1685-1759

# Semele HWV58

In Three Acts

Libretto by William Congreve (1670-1729) after Ovid

*Semele* was first produced, as an oratorio, at Covent Garden, London on 10 February 1744 and was first produced as an opera in Cambridge on 10 February 1925.



Semele	Anna Ryberg
Ino/Juno	Sally-Anne Russell
Jupiter	Angus Wood
Cadmus/Somnus	Stephen Bennett
Athamas	Tobias Cole
Iris	Belinda Montgomery
A Deity	Shelli Gilhome
Apollo	Paul McMahan
Priest	Craig Everingham

Cantillation  
Sirius Ensemble  
Antony Walker *conductor*

<b>CD 1</b>	[42'40]		
<b>Act I</b>			
1 Overture – Gavotte	6'53		
<b>Scene 1</b>			
2 Accompagnato: 'Behold! auspicious flashes rise' <i>Priest</i>	1'40		
3 Chorus: 'Lucky omens bless our rites' <i>Priests</i>	2'37		
4 Recitative and Arioso: 'Daughter, obey, hear and obey!' <i>Cadmus, Athamas</i>	1'08		
5 Accompagnato: 'Ah me, ah me! what refuge now is left me?' Air: 'O Jove! in pity teach me which to choose' <i>Semele</i>	2'57		
6 Recitative: 'See, she blushing turns her eyes' <i>Athamas</i>	0'20		
7 Recitative: 'Alas! she yields, and has undone me!' <i>Ino, Athamas, Semele</i>	0'44		
8 Quartet: 'Why dost thou thus untimely grieve' <i>Cadmus, Ino, Athamas, Semele</i>	2'52		
9 Chorus: 'Avert these omens, all ye pow'rs!' <i>Priests</i>	1'54		
10 Accompagnato: 'Again auspicious flashes rise' <i>Priest</i>	0'40		
11 Recitative: 'Thy aid, pronubial Juno, Athamas implores!' <i>Athamas, Semele</i>	0'18		
12 Chorus: 'Cease, cease your vows, 'tis impious to proceed' <i>Priests</i>	0'32		
<b>Scene 2</b>			
13 Recitative: 'O Athamas, what torture hast thou borne!' <i>Athamas</i>	0'32		
		14 Air: 'Turn, hopeless lover, turn thy eyes' <i>Ino</i>	4'16
		15 Recitative: 'She weeps!' <i>Athamas</i>	0'25
		16 Air: 'Your tuneful voice my tale would tell' <i>Athamas</i>	5'08
		17 Recitative: 'Too well I see, thou wilt not understand me' <i>Ino, Athamas</i>	0'57
		18 Duet: 'You've undone me' / 'With my life I would atone' <i>Ino, Athamas</i>	2'25
		<b>Scene 3</b>	
		19 Recitative: 'Ah, wretched prince, doom'd to disastrous love!' <i>Cadmus, Athamas</i>	1'52
		Accompagnato: 'Wing'd with our fears and pious haste' <i>Cadmus</i>	
		Recitative: 'Oh prodigy, to me of dire portent!' <i>Athamas, Ino</i>	
		<b>Scene 4</b>	
		20 Air and Chorus: 'Endless pleasure, endless love' <i>Semele, Chorus</i>	4'27
		<b>CD 2</b>	[49'21]
		<b>Act II</b>	
		1 Sinfonia	1'28
		<b>Scene 1</b>	
		2 Recitative: 'Iris, impatient of thy stay' <i>Juno, Iris</i>	0'52
		3 Air: 'There, from mortal cares retiring' <i>Iris</i>	3'57
		4 Recitative: 'No more! I'll hear no more!' <i>Juno</i>	1'49

	Accompagnato: 'Awake, Saturnia, from thy lethargy!'	
	<i>Juno</i>	
	Recitative: 'Hear, mighty queen'	
	Accompagnato: 'With adamant the gates are barr'd'	
	<i>Iris</i>	
5	Air: 'Hence, Iris, hence away'	3'11
	<i>Juno</i>	
	<b>Scene 2</b>	
6	Air: 'Come, Zephyrs, come'	6'09
	<i>A Deity</i>	
7	Air: 'O sleep, why dost thou leave me?'	3'16
	<i>Semele</i>	
	<b>Scene 3</b>	
8	Recitative: 'Let me not another moment bear the pangs of absence'	0'21
	<i>Semele</i>	
9	Air: 'Lay your doubts and fears aside'	3'10
	<i>Jupiter</i>	
10	Recitative: 'You are mortal and require time to rest'	0'25
	<i>Jupiter</i>	
11	Air: 'With fond desiring'	3'21
	<i>Semele</i>	
12	Chorus: 'How engaging, how endearing'	1'20
	<i>Loves, Zephyrs</i>	
13	Recitative: 'Ah me!' / 'Why sighs my Semele?'	1'19
	<i>Semele, Jupiter</i>	
14	Air: 'I must with speed amuse her'	3'36
	<i>Jupiter</i>	
15	Chorus: 'Now Love that everlasting boy invites'	2'28
	<i>Loves, Zephyrs</i>	
16	Recitative: 'By my command'	1'06
	<i>Jupiter, Semele</i>	

17	Air: 'Where'er you walk'	4'27
	<i>Jupiter</i>	
	<b>Scene 4</b>	
18	Recitative: 'Dear sister, how was your passage hither?'	0'45
	<i>Semele, Ino</i>	
19	Air: 'But hark, the heav'nly sphere turns round'	2'05
	<i>Ino</i>	
20	Duet: 'Prepare then, ye immortal choir!'	1'59
	<i>Semele, Ino</i>	
21	Chorus: 'Bless the glad earth with heav'nly lays'	2'14
	<i>Nymphs, Swains</i>	
	<b>CD 3</b>	[58'56]
	<b>Act III</b>	
1	[Sinfonia] Larghetto e piano per tutto	1'16
	<b>Scene 1</b>	
2	Accompagnato: 'Somnus, awake! raise thy reclining head!'	0'28
	<i>Juno, Iris</i>	
3	Air: 'Leave me, loathsome light'	3'27
	<i>Somnus</i>	
4	Recitative: 'Dull God, canst thou attend the water's fall'	0'35
	<i>Iris, Juno</i>	
5	Air: 'More sweet is that name'	2'33
	<i>Somnus</i>	
6	Recitative: 'My will obey, she shall be thine'	1'12
	<i>Juno, Somnus</i>	
7	Duet: 'Obey my will' / 'All I must grant'	1'47
	<i>Juno, Somnus</i>	
	<b>Scene 2</b>	
8	Air: 'My racking thoughts by no kind slumbers freed'	3'10
	<i>Semele</i>	

<b>9</b>	<i>Scene 3</i> Recitative: 'Thus shap'd like Ino' <i>Juno, Semele</i>	1'44
<b>10</b>	Air: 'Myself I shall adore' <i>Semele</i>	6'41
<b>11</b>	Recitative: 'Be wise, as you are beautiful' <i>Juno, Semele</i> Accompagnato: 'Conjure him by his oath' <i>Juno</i>	1'49
<b>12</b>	Air: 'Thus let my thanks be pay'd' <i>Semele</i>	2'32
<b>13</b>	Recitative: 'Rich odours fill the fragrant air' <i>Juno, Semele</i> <i>Scene 4</i>	0'22
<b>14</b>	Air: 'Come to my arms, my lovely fair' <i>Jupiter</i>	3'47
<b>15</b>	Recitative: 'O Semele! Why art thou thus insensible?' <i>Jupiter</i>	0'10
<b>16</b>	Air: 'I ever am granting, you always complain' <i>Semele</i>	2'03
<b>17</b>	Recitative: 'Speak, speak your desire' <i>Jupiter, Semele</i> Accompagnato: 'By that tremendous flood, I swear' <i>Jupiter</i>	0'42
<b>18</b>	Recitative: 'You'll grant what I require?' <i>Semele, Jupiter</i>	0'13
<b>19</b>	Accompagnato: 'Then cast off this human shape' <i>Semele</i>	0'27
<b>20</b>	Air: 'Ah! take heed what you press!' <i>Jupiter</i>	1'18
<b>21</b>	Air: 'No, no, I'll take no less' <i>Semele</i>	4'07

<b>22</b>	<i>Scene 5</i> Accompagnato: 'Ah, whither is she gone!' <i>Jupiter</i>	2'48
<b>23</b>	<i>Scene 6</i> Air: 'Above measure is the pleasure, which my revenge supplies!' <i>Juno</i> <i>Scene 7</i>	3'06
<b>24</b>	Accompagnato: 'Ah me! too late I now repent' <i>Semele</i> <i>Scene 8</i>	2'52
<b>25</b>	Recitative: 'Of my ill-boding dream' <i>Ino</i>	0'14
<b>26</b>	Chorus: 'Oh, terror and astonishment!' <i>Priests</i>	3'45
<b>27</b>	Recitative: 'How I was hence remov'd' <i>Ino, Cadmus, Athamas</i>	0'54
<b>28</b>	Recitative: 'See from above the belying clouds descend' <i>Cadmus</i> <i>Scene the last</i>	0'14
<b>29</b>	Sinfonia	1'22
<b>30</b>	Accompagnato: 'Apollo comes, to relieve your care' <i>Apollo</i>	0'49
<b>31</b>	Chorus: 'Happy, happy shall we be' <i>Priests</i>	2'26

Total Playing Time 150'57

## Semele (1743)

### Synopsis

#### *Argument* (William Congreve, 1706)

'After *Jupiter's* Amour with *Europa*, the Daughter of *Agenor*, King of *Phœnicia*, he again incenses *Juno* by a new Affair in the same family, viz. With *Semele*, Neice [sic] to *Europa*, and Daughter to *Cadmus* King of *Thebes*. *Semele* is on the Point of Marriage with *Athamas*; which Marriage is about to be solemnized in the Temple of *Juno*, Goddess of Marriages, when *Jupiter*, by ill Omens, interrupts the Ceremony, and afterwards transports *Semele* to a private Abode prepared for her; *Juno*, after many Contrivances, at length assumes the Shape and Voice of *Ino*, Sister to *Semele*; by the Help of which Disguise and artful Insinuations, she prevails with her to make a Request to *Jupiter*, which being granted must end in her utter Ruin.'

(The directions in italics below come directly from Handel's manuscript).

#### Act I

*The scene is the temple of Juno. Near the altar is a golden image of the Goddess. Priests are in their solemnities, as after a sacrifice newly offer'd; flames arise from the altar, and the statue of Juno is seen to bow.* Semele is to be married to Athamas and the temple Priests declare that 'lucky omens bless our rites.'

Both Cadmus, Semele's father, and Athamas beg Semele 'to invent no new delay' with the wedding proceedings, but Semele, aside, declares her passion for Jupiter, King of the Gods. Athamas misinterprets Semele's blushing as signs of love whilst Ino (Semele's sister), who harbours a secret affection for Athamas, desperately calls to her sister: 'Thou hast undone me!' The three wonder what can be the cause of Ino's grieving when suddenly *Thunder is heard at a distance and the fire is extinguished on the altar.* Jupiter is displeased at the marriage for Semele is his favourite. The Priests, Cadmus and Semele depart in confusion. Ino attempts to sympathise with the stricken Athamas and tries to convey her passion for him but she is deeply ashamed ('Look not on me!'). The astonished Cadmus returns to tell them that Semele has been 'snatch'd' away by Jupiter in the form of an eagle and taken to Olympus. The Priests and Augurs declare this a happy event, for Semele has entered the realm of the Gods. The Act ends with Semele and the chorus singing of the 'endless pleasure, endless love Semele enjoys above'.

#### Act II

*The scene is a pleasant country.* Juno, jealous wife of Jupiter, meets with her confidante, Iris, in order to plot the downfall of Semele. Iris describes the splendid palace Jupiter has

erected for Semele before Juno angrily interrupts her and, in a fit of rage, calls curses upon the head of the 'curst adulteress'. Iris then tells Juno of the obstacles they face in order to gain entrance to the palace. Juno decides to utilise the help of Somnus, the God of sleep. They depart. *An apartment in the palace of Semele. She is sleeping, Loves and Zephyrs waiting.* Cupid sings to the sleeping Semele before she *awakes and rises*, her sleep disturbed – she is restless and misses Jupiter, her lover. Jupiter now enters and Semele declares, 'Let me not another moment bear the pangs of absence.' Jupiter tells her to lay her 'doubts and fears aside.' Jupiter explains that she is a mortal and so needs time to rest and that even in his absence, 'Love and I are one', but Semele is still not satisfied. A Chorus of Loves and Zephyrs proclaim 'how engaging, how endearing is a lover's pain and care.' But Semele, still sorrowful, declares that she feels 'conscious of a nature far inferior'. Zeus realises that she wants to become immortal – a 'dangerous ambition'. The Chorus comment on the wiles of Cupid, the 'everlasting boy', before Jupiter, realising that he must divert Semele, transports Ino to the celestial palace to keep her company. Ino is captivated by the beauty of the palace, and as the scene turns to Arcadia Nymphs and Swains sing blessings to the 'glad earth'.

#### Act III

*Scene: the Cave of Sleep; the god of Sleep lying on his bed. A soft Symphony is heard afterwards. Juno and Iris appear.* Juno attempts to wake the slothful Somnus, only succeeding when she promises him a Nymph by the name of Pasithea. Juno then extracts three promises of Somnus: to conjure up in Jupiter an enticing dream so that he will wake with ardour and thus grant Semele any wish she desires; to put Ino to sleep so that Juno can impersonate her; and to give Juno his magical wand so she can charm the dragons that guard Semele's palace. Somnus agrees. Back in the palace, Semele is still distracted and restless. Juno enters, disguised as Ino, and carrying a mirror. She invites Semele to look in the mirror, declaring that Jupiter must have admitted to her to the ranks of immortals, so beautiful is she. Semele is so taken with this fantasy that she gazes at herself lovingly, singing, 'Myself I shall adore.' Juno then advises her to take advantage of this magical boon, and demand of Zeus that he appear at her bed not in mortal attire but as 'the mighty thunderer' and thereby render her immortal. Juno departs. *Jupiter enters, offers to embrace Semele; she looks kindly on him, but retires a little from him.* He is inflamed by Somnus' dream and is ready to grant any favour she wishes in return for love. Semele

exacts powerful oaths from the King of the Gods before asking him to ‘cast off this human shape which you wear, and Jove since you are, like Jove too appear!’ Jupiter is horrified, knowing that to carry out her wish would kill her, and tries to warn her. But Semele insists (‘I’ll take no less, than all in full excess’) and leaves. *Jupiter pensive and dejected*. Alone, Jupiter realises that ‘She must a victim fall.’ *Above* Juno celebrates her victory. *The scene discovers Semele lying under a canopy leaning pensively, while a mournful symphony is playing. She looks up and sees Jupiter descending in a cloud, flashes of lightning issue from either side, and thunder is heard grumbling in the air.* Semele is destroyed. *The cloud bursts, and Semele with the palace instantly disappear.* The Chorus of Priests declare their astonishment and moralise: ‘Nature to each allots his proper sphere, But that forsaken we like meteors err.’ Jove decrees that Athamas should marry Ino and Apollo descends to announce that from Semele’s ashes, ‘a phoenix shall rise’ – this is the god Bacchus (Dionysus) who was rescued from Semele’s womb. *The Story of Semele* ends with the Chorus singing: ‘All that’s good and just we’ll prove, And Bacchus crown the joys of love!’

## The Story of Semele

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‘... a delightful piece of music, quite new and different from anything he has done ...’

MARY DELANY TO HER SISTER, 24 JANUARY 1744

‘No Oratorio, but a boudy Opera ... An English Opera, but called *by fools* an Oratorio’

CHARLES JENNENS’ HANDWRITTEN ANNOTATIONS  
IN MAINWARING’S *LIFE OF HANDEL*

Much has been made of Handel’s dissociation with Italian opera in the late 1730s and early 1740s and his growing preoccupation and fruitful experimentation with dramatic works set in ‘the Oratorio way’. Reinhard Strohm states, ‘Handel was searching in different directions for ways of escaping from [opera seria’s] conventions.’<sup>1</sup> The ‘different directions’ Handel experimented with involved, for the most part, dramatic works that were not staged and were in English. The libretti Handel utilised derived from various sources including the Old Testament, Greek mythology and English poetry (as in the masterful *L’Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*). By putting on oratorios, Handel was saving a great deal of money in not needing sets or expensive Italian singers. Was this one of the reasons why Handel

withdrew from writing, managing and acting as an impresario for Italian opera? Handel’s last Italian opera for the London stage was *Deidamia*, produced in the 1740–41 season. Two years later, Horace Walpole wrote, ‘Handel has set up an Oratorio against the Operas, and succeeds. He has hired all the goddesses from farces and the singers of *Roast Beef* from between the acts at both theatres, with a man who can sing one note in his voice, and a girl without ever an one; and so they sing, and make brave hallelujahs ...’<sup>2</sup> Walpole is referring here to Handel’s predilection for English singers trained for the theatre. In March Walpole added, ‘the Oratorios thrive abundantly.’<sup>3</sup> Why did Handel suddenly alter his successful pattern of composition in order to set *Semele*, which was neither Italian opera nor oratorio and closed quickly to disappointing houses? Certainly, the ever-changing reaction of London audiences in a climate of war to both oratorio and opera in their equally mutable guises influenced and inspired Handel in the composition of a brilliant but badly timed ‘compromise’: *The Story of Semele*.<sup>4</sup>

For London audiences of the 1730s, going to Handel’s novel ‘Oratoria’ was very much like going to the Italian opera except for three important, obvious differences:

Handel’s innovative use of the chorus (Italian opera, in contrast, consisted of a succession of arias and duets with a final perfunctory chorus); an absence of scenery and sets; and a libretto in English. The first oratorios featured singers from the Italian opera house and Winton Dean notes that there ‘was no pretence of unseemly reverence.’<sup>5</sup> We know frustratingly little about audience behaviour during the performances of these early oratorios. Were they as noisy and as informal as when they were present at the Italian opera?<sup>6</sup> Or did the English text or sometimes the occasional religious content make them more attentive or even pious? Being held in theatres that were designed for opera (the Haymarket, Covent Garden and Lincoln’s Inn Fields), there is good reason to suppose that they at first might have behaved at Handel’s oratorios just as they did for a performance of opera seria, that is, talking through recitatives, retiring to the galleries or other boxes for long stretches of time as well as vociferously supporting or, more frequently, *not* supporting popular singers. Handel’s practice of occasionally inserting Italian opera arias in order either to bring back an audience that had deserted him<sup>7</sup> or at least knit the new form together with familiar structures seems to point towards a deliberate conjuring of an operatic atmosphere in the theatre, even

with the absence of sets. Thus the 'oratorio way' was by no means clearly defined or delineated.

Things changed in April 1739 when Handel's setting of *Israel in Egypt* featured a story lifted straight from the Bible. The English words of the Holy Scripture were, for the first time, sung in theatres dominated by a Catholic artform – opera seria. Predictably, the anti-Handel party led the outcry. 'An *Oratorio* either is an *Act of Religion*, or it is not; if it is, I ask if the *Playhouse* is a fit *Temple* to perform it in, or a *Company of Players* fit *Ministers of God's Word*, for in that Case such they are made.'<sup>8</sup> They had previously seized on any motive in order to discredit Handel and in this case, the charge of blasphemy suited quite well. In response, an anonymous Handel supporter 'R.W.'<sup>9</sup> praised the work soon after in the *London Daily Post*. This letter is one of our only references to audience reaction and behaviour during a Handel oratorio. R.W. suggests that, in order to enjoy this 'masterly Composition ... every one should come with a reasonable Desire of being entertain'd themselves, or with the polite Resolution, no ways to interrupt the Entertainment of others. And that to have a truce with Dissipation, and noisy Discourse, and to forbear the silly Affectation of beating Time

aloud on such an Occasion, is, indeed, in Appearance, a great Compliment paid to the divine Author of so sacred an Entertainment, and to the rest of the Company near them; but at the same time, in reality, a much greater Respect paid to themselves ... I cannot but add this Word, since I am on the subject, "That I think a profound Silence a much more proper Expression of Approbation to Musick, and to deep Distress in Tragedy, than all the noisy Applause so much in Vogue, however great the Authority of Custom may be for it." I am, Sir, &c. R. W.'<sup>10</sup> Did people, in excitement, really 'beat Time aloud'?<sup>11</sup>

There were further admonitions from Handel supporters, castigating concertgoers for their noisiness and frivolity at these 'sacred dramas'. They recommended that people purchase the wordbooks beforehand and ponder the contents religiously. Handel's new choice of solemn, sacred and pious drama seemed to have awakened a newfound seriousness and profundity in London audiences that was quite at odds with the prevailing atmosphere at the Italian opera. By the same token, Handel was also influenced by the changing needs and wishes of a society encountering religious upheaval and reassessment, besieged by a frustrating war with economic crises that were coupled with

blunders of foreign policy and seemingly ineffectual Parliamentary debate. Handel gave London the 'kind of harmony as seems the only language adapted to devotion'.<sup>12</sup> It was a balm for uncertainty. This rapid change in audience behaviour, from vigorous vocal participation with the singers and the drama to a newfound solemnity, marks the crossroads at which *Semele* found itself. It is worth quoting Dean, who is most astute on this point: 'Oratorio was now between several fires: it was insufficiently entertaining for frivolous opera-goers, but far too theatrical for the growing power of the Puritans, who were no longer content with objections to performance in costume; while High and moderate churchmen, caught between the upper and the nether millstone, branded it as a dangerous compromise.'<sup>13</sup> The gulf between Lord Middlesex's<sup>14</sup> opera company and Handel's oratorio productions was widening and, at the beginning of 1744, the situation was tense.

In early May 1743, Handel, now a 58-year-old, suffered a return of his 'Paralytick Disorder', Jennens remarking that it affected his 'Head & Speech'.<sup>15</sup> But by June it seems he was completely recovered and was able to turn his attention to planning the next year's subscription series. Public tastes would have been hard to judge at this time for

England had been involved in the stop-start War of the Austrian Succession since 1740. Earlier in 1743 there had been disastrous campaigns in the West Indies and abortive expeditions to Cuba and Panama against the Spanish.<sup>16</sup> Worse, Spain had just signed a treaty of alliance with France<sup>17</sup>, and their combined fleet was patrolling the Channel, a formidable foe for the humiliated British. London was nervous. The newspapers didn't know who to condemn – Parliament, Walpole, the Whigs, Hanoverian dominance in English foreign policies, even the Jews were conjured up to serve as scapegoats to a dejected people who needed someone to blame. Handel's very successful 1743 production of *Samson* seems to have captured, and manipulated, the public mood brilliantly. *Samson's* initial ineptitude and then eventual triumph over the Philistines must have seemed a convincing and appropriate image of British fortunes of war for London audiences, even if the actual triumph hadn't quite occurred yet. This is the time of Walpole's famous comment: 'The Oratorios thrive abundantly.' What would Handel set next, in this disturbing climate of uneasiness?

Handel decided to eschew the Bible as a source for his next oratorio and revisited instead his favoured world of ancient Greece. Perhaps he felt that the public needed

something closer to the spirit of his rival Middlesex's opera productions with their requisite gods, goddesses, nymphs and swains. They didn't need ancient Hebraic moralising or bloody Biblical tales which would remind them of the war. London needed a diversion, perhaps something along the lines of his perennial success *Acis and Galatea*. Possibly Handel needed a change too, having set and produced *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*; *Deidamia*; *Messiah* and *Samson* (a heady mixture of English ode, opera seria, scriptural oratorio and 'religious opera') over the course of three busy years. After his short but debilitating illness, Handel may also have looked to ancient Hellas as a source of succour. So he chose a 37-year-old libretto written by William Congreve during the reign of Queen Anne. Congreve took his plot from Ovid's third book of *Metamorphoses* and called it *The Story of Semele*. John Eccles had set it to music in January 1707 but it was never performed. The sudden brilliance of Italian opera in all its splendour had then descended upon London and so this English opera was quickly shelved as the managers of the Queen's (later the King's) Theatre sought out Italian works and singers in order to compete with Drury Lane.<sup>18</sup> It is interesting that such a libretto would have been taken up by Handel

at a time when Italian opera was fast going out of fashion. A Congreve libretto (*The Judgement of Paris*) had been set by Arne in 1742 and had enjoyed a healthy run.<sup>19</sup> This would have undoubtedly encouraged Handel in his choice of setting.

We do not know for certain who arranged the libretto for Handel. Quite rightly, Dean<sup>20</sup> first suggested Newburgh Hamilton and this was re-asserted by Trowell in 1970<sup>21</sup> and Smith in 1995.<sup>22</sup> The revisions are skilful, briskly modernising and unobtrusive – traits representative of Hamilton's revisions of *Alexander's Feast* and *Samson*. The arranger augmented Congreve with Pope<sup>23</sup> and even included some lines from the Reverend Daniel Prat's 1722 poem *An Ode to Mr. Handel On his Playing on the Organ*. Many revisions seemed to have taken place whilst Handel was actually in the middle of composition. The autograph<sup>24</sup> contains several settings of Congreve text which was then excised and never used again. Curiously Handel does not, as in other cases, re-use or re-work these fragmentary beginnings in other parts of the drama.

Characteristically, Handel worked quickly. He started on 3 June 1743, had finished Act I on 13 June, Act II on 20 June and the entire work was 'filled up'<sup>25</sup> (i.e. orchestrated and completed) on 4 July. He would have

been working on Act III when news arrived in London that George II had defeated the French on the field of Dettingen on the River Main. With the help of Hanoverian troops, battle was joined and closed on 27 June and it left some two thousand British and Hanoverian troops and two generals dead.<sup>26</sup> Suddenly, the memories of drifting uncertainty and the continual chatter in the press of the wasted opportunities of previous months vanished. National rejoicing was proclaimed. Handel put aside *Semele* once it was completed and immediately composed a Te Deum and the anthem *The King shall rejoice*. Hogwood speculates that he may have gone on to compose a second work after *Semele* if the victory at Dettingen had not compelled him to write.<sup>27</sup> In the end it turned out that Handel only had time to set one more new work for the next year's season. He completed *Joseph and his Brethren* some time in September. As winter set in public opinion started to sour yet again. The Allied victory had not been followed through with further action and there were rumblings in the army by British troops who perceived preferential handling of George II's German-speaking kinsmen, the Hanoverians, at the hands of the King's closest officers. It smelt of nepotism and overt favouritism and Lord Stair, a veteran officer of the old school,

resigned in protest.<sup>28</sup> In the same paper that advertised the start of Handel's 1744 subscription series, we find angry articles that assert that Dettingen was merely a 'lucky fluke' and in all the papers anti-Hanoverian sentiment and xenophobia was running high.

Added to this climate was the bitter rivalry between Middlesex and Handel, the stories of which alternately left London bemused or downright shocked. Middlesex's company had run into deficit in 1742-3 and, desperate, Middlesex had offered Handel £1000 for two new operas. Handel refused for reasons not so clear (was he wary of Middlesex's precarious financial situation?) but a compromise must have been reached for Middlesex commissioned Lampugnani to rearrange Handel's *Alexander*.<sup>29</sup> It ran successfully at the Haymarket in November for twelve performances. For a moment it looked like 1744 would start amicably between the two impresarios, each keeping to his own, Italian opera and oratorio. But things turned ugly when Handel opened with *Semele* on 10 February. It seems that Lord Middlesex (or his associates) actually resorted to hiring ruffians who loitered near the Covent Garden theatre, the scene of Handel's subscription series, and there harassed and insulted the concertgoers. Even worse, after the performances there were beatings and

muggings as people made their way to their carriages or, most dangerously, walked home with the aid of the infamous 'link-boys' who lit the way with lanterns and were often in the pay of robbers themselves.<sup>30</sup> Middlesex was at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket and so the two feuding houses were not more than three blocks from each other, with the Strand close by. Did the ruffians seek refuge in the Haymarket after their nightly disturbances? Nothing could be proven outright of course and although the King put in an attendance and there were a few token arrests, the disturbances continued. The absence of any altercation was noteworthy enough for Mary Delany to mention it in a letter to Mrs Dewes: 'there was no disturbance at the play-house [tonight].' Not surprisingly, the house was 'not crowded'.<sup>31</sup>

Why did such vicious activity surround the appearance of *Semele*? Handel had advertised *Semele* as being 'after the Manner of a Oratorio' and so it was, being performed without sets, but to all London it was quite clearly an opera. The Earl of Egmont called it an opera when he first heard it and an oratorio when he heard the ill-fated revival ten months later. Jennens called it 'no Oratorio, but a bawdy Opera' and Mainwaring in 1760 described it as 'an English opera, but called

an Oratorio, and performed as such'. Mrs Delany says in a letter of 21 February 1744 'all the opera people are enraged at Handel.' No small wonder, for Handel had managed to put on an opera without expensive Italian singers or the costly accoutrements of sets, costumes and backdrops. The uneasy, and probably unspoken, understanding that Handel and Middlesex had reached at the end of 1743 was shattered. Handel had not, from Middlesex's perspective, kept his part of the bargain. Soon it was not only hired ruffians who conspired against *Semele*. Lady Margaret, the wife of Sir Robert Brown, a diplomat, deliberately held lavish parties on the nights *Semele* played, siphoning off the cream of the town.<sup>32</sup>

*Semele* only played for three performances. The cast was:

Jupiter – Mr. Beard, tenor  
Cadmus – [Reinhold] bass  
Athamas – Mr. Daniel Sullivan, alto  
Somnus – Mr. Reinhold, bass  
Apollo – [Beard] tenor  
Juno – Miss Young, mezzo-soprano  
Iris – Signora Avoglio, soprano  
Semele – Signora Francesina, soprano  
Ino – Miss Young, alto  
High Priest – [Reinhold] bass<sup>33</sup>

Handel tried to revive it in December with a different cast and some inserted Italian arias but that too was a failure. It is the only work of Handel's not to be revived other than in the year of its performance.

For Mary Delany, who steadfastly braved the obstacles of getting to Covent Garden, *Semele* was a delight, even if it was too bawdy for her husband.

I was yesterday morning at Mr. Handel's to hear the rehearsal of *Semele*. It is a delightful piece of music, quite new and different from anything he has done ... Francesina is improved, and sings the principal part in it. (24 January)

I was yesterday to hear *Semele*; it is a delightful piece of music. Mrs. Donnellan desires her particular compliments to all *but* to my brother; she bids me say 'she loses half her pleasure in Handel's music by *his not being there* to talk over the particular passages.' There is a four-part song that is delightfully pretty; Francesina is extremely improved, her notes are more distinct, and there is something in her running-divisions that is quite surprising. She was much applauded, and the house full, though not crowded; I believe I wrote my brother word that Mr. Handel and the Prince had quarrelled, which I am sorry for.

Handel says the *Prince* is quite out of *his* good graces! There was no disturbance at the playhouse and the Goths were not so very absurd as to declare, in a public manner, their disapprobation of such a composer. (11 February)

Semele is charming; the more I hear it the better I like it, and as I am a subscriber I shall not fail one night. But it being a profane story D.D. [her husband – Dr. Delany] does not think it proper for him to go [he was a Doctor of Divinity]; but when Joseph or Samson is performed I shall persuade him to go – you know *how much* he delights in music. They say Samson is to be next Friday, for Semele has a strong party against it, viz. the fine ladies, the petit maitres and *ignoramus*'s. All the opera people are enraged at Handel, but Lady Cobham, Lady Westmoreland and Lady Chesterfield never fail it. (21 February)<sup>34</sup>

*Semele* was badly timed. Handel thought that the secular, erotic text might sweeten the public's taste and take their mind off the depressing state of current affairs. But 'the public found its tone too close to that of the discredited Italian opera, and set it down as an oratorio *manqué*; where they expected wholesome Lenten bread, they

received a glittering stone dug from the ruins of Greek mythology.<sup>35</sup> Carole Taylor also makes an important point: 'Does Handel's decision to set *Semele*, so surprising when considered in isolation, make more sense when seen as an attempt to satisfy two markets at once by effecting a compromise between choral music in English and Italianate dramatic music?'<sup>36</sup> So conscious was Handel's desire to write operatically that he extensively utilised the *da capo* aria format as well as the heightening accompanied recitative texture. There are more accompanied recitatives in *Semele* than there are in the operas. As for the absence of sets, it would have been relatively easy for audience members with wordbooks to imagine the action as the drama progressed.<sup>37</sup> These contained stage directions and scene descriptions and cuts were usually indicated by brackets. Handel meticulously wrote in Congreve's directions, sometimes with clarifications or omissions, in the autograph. Those without wordbooks would have found it a little confusing when character doublings occurred – Cadmus and Somnus were sung by the same singer, as were Juno and Ino. *Semele* was once thought to be free of any of Handel's unabashed borrowings from other composers and this has been cited by Dean, Dent and others as proof of its striking originality and depth of

inspiration. In fact, recent research has proved quite the opposite. John H. Roberts, editor of *Handel Sources – Materials for the Study of Handel's Borrowing* has identified eight borrowings from composers as diverse as Alessandro Scarlatti, Porta and Keiser<sup>38</sup>. There is one self-borrowing (Juno's final aria resembles an early Italian cantata). It seems, then, that Handel was sticking to his tried and true method of composition.

*Semele* ranks alongside *Hercules* as one of the greatest English music dramas ever written. Dean says that 'it is one of the purest recreations of the Greek spirit in modern European art'<sup>39</sup> and Dent calls it a 'masterpiece of airiness, ingenuity, and exquisite finish ... irresistible and as fresh as when it was composed.'<sup>40</sup> It is a finely balanced work – five mortals are opposed to five immortals. The key scheme seems carefully planned – the darker, warmer flat keys dominate Act I whilst Act II moves towards bucolic G major and includes some dramatic changes (the transition from Juno's angry F minor aria to Cupid's aria in G and then Semele's 'O Sleep' in E is one example). Act III starts out in D major before we reach a dominance of F in both modes (Semele's demise is set in F minor). The finale with trumpets is in a triumphant D major. The grand Overture in C minor immediately sets the scene,

with wide spanning figures that waft up and down, serving almost as a presage of the temple smoke in Scene I. A nervous fugue, brilliantly worked through, leads to a delicately rendered Gavotte. In fact, it is this dance form, along with certain tender rhythmical figures (notably in  $\frac{6}{8}$ ) and a light madrigalesque quality in the choruses that pervades the three acts and lends lightness to a potentially weighty theme. Tragedy is mirrored with pleasure and delight in *Semele*, just as illusion and reality entwine between the mortals and immortals with Juno disguising herself as Ino and literally using a mirror to exact her vengeance. The sublime (to use an 18th-century term) elements of the overture are revisited with Semele's first aria ('O Jove') and there is a curious restless melancholy in the remarkable quartet that Mary Delany thought 'pretty' – 'Why dost thou thus complain'. Ino's shame is portrayed by the halting figures of 'You've undone me', again in C minor. The joyous elements of Act I are infectious – 'Lucky omens' with its promise of a forthcoming wedding celebration, and the popular 'Endless pleasure, endless love', *alla Gavotta*.

Act II begins with a smart Hasse-like Sinfonia that must depict the Puck-like journeys of Iris, the ancient personification of the rainbow and messenger to the gods.

Juno immediately establishes herself as a character not to be messed with – headstrong, experienced, committed and full of vengeance, she lives up to her title of Queen of the Gods. The exquisite trio of three superbly set arias (Juno, Cupid then Semele) mentioned before is the glory of the act, as Handel turns the scene towards repose and introspection. Jupiter, King of the Gods, is a marvellously *galant* gentleman, as shown in the exuberant 'Lay your doubts and fears aside'. 'With fond desiring' utilises the touching  $\frac{6}{8}$  rhythmic figure that is found elsewhere in *Semele*. Here Handel employs the old Italian trick of unison writing, with elegant simplicity. 'Now Love that everlasting boy' *alla Hornpipe* is delightful with its touches of Mixolydian mode and droning bass. Ino's aria 'But hark!' utilises some lines from the *Ode to Mr. Handel On his Playing on the Organ* and it seems as if Handel has responded to this by unconsciously making the soft string band sound like quiet English diapasons. Act III begins with a *soft symphony* for bassoons and cellos. We are in the 'Cave of Sleep'. Somnus' first aria is exquisitely rendered and makes the following aria all the funnier for the quick change of character. 'Myself I shall adore' is in the best modern manner and moments sound like Bononcini or Galuppi, but it is the last outburst of

overt joy. Even Semele's vote of thanks to 'Ino' (Juno in disguise) is in F-sharp minor. Minor keys predominate here; even the virtuosic patterns of the D major 'No, no, I'll take no less' seem icy, doomed and pregnant with barely disguised violence. Jupiter's final scene shows not the *galant* lover anymore, but the pensive and humiliated god of Olympus. Juno's aria of victory precedes the extraordinary death scene. Two magnificent choruses complete the act and adroitly delineate the underlay of the drama – tragedy and happiness.

One cannot help but agree with Dean who says, writing warmly of the work, 'for all its tragic content there remains something idyllic about *Semele*. Like the *Iliad*, it combines emotional intensity with a proportion and a humour that never corrode the poetry.'<sup>41</sup> Even though it is one of the few music dramas of Handel's that ends with the death of a character who has our sympathy, there is an endearing and youthful quality about *Semele* that is almost nostalgic in its emotional depth. Not only does it recreate the magical land of Arcadia and ancient Hellas with Handel's colourful panoply of orchestral colours and lilting dance rhythms, but other, almost Purcellian, textures seem to imbue the work with a warm and lively ancient hue. Handel wanted to give London

audiences something different from his previous moralising oratorios that had found an immediate resonance with a disaffected and troubled public. Unfortunately, *Semele* was forgotten and ignored precisely because it stood between two camps. His lesson learnt, Handel went on to conquer a new audience in the late 1740s, that of the emerging middle class. These people were of the generation of Mary Delany, born in the 1710s and 1720s and brought up on the music of Handel, Hasse, Pergolesi and Galuppi. It was for this new mercantile and thriving part of society that he wrote his next series of oratorios and was rewarded with their patronage. It was for them that he wrote *Hercules*, *Judas Maccabaeus*, *Theodora* and *Jephtha*. His canny knack for reading the public temper had not failed him after all.

Erin Helyard

<sup>1</sup> R. Strohm, 'Handel and his Italian Opera Texts', *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Horace Walpole to Horace Mann, 24 February 1743 in Otto Erich Deutsch, *Handel: a Documentary Biography* (London, 1955), p. 560.

<sup>3</sup> Horace Walpole to Horace Mann, 3 March 1743, *ibid.*, p. 561.

<sup>4</sup> This title seems to echo the title of Handel's first oratorio: *The History of Esther*.

<sup>5</sup> W. Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques* (London, 1959), p. 133.

<sup>6</sup> Admittedly, English audiences seemed to have been 'better behaved' than audiences in the then world-renowned opera houses of North Italy. An exchange between Dr Samuel Sharp and Giuseppi Baretta in 1767 seems to indicate a polarisation of behaviour that may have its roots in the 1730s. Baretta remarks: 'Mr Sharp wonders also, that *it is not the fashion in Italy, as it is in England, to take a small wax-light to the opera, in order to read the book* [libretto]. A very acute remark as usual; to which I have nothing to say, but the Italians are not so good-natured as the English, who have patience enough to run carefully over a stupid piece of nonsense while a silly eunuch is mincing a vowel into a thousand indivisible particles.' It seems that the English, at least to the expatriate Italian Baretta (who possibly had an axe to grind), demonstrated more 'patience' at the opera and were more 'good-natured' than the Italians.

<sup>7</sup> On this see Dean, *ibid.* p. 133 and P. H. Lang, *George Frideric Handel* (London, 1966), p. 417 where he refers to the practice, in relation to *Semele*'s December revival, as an 'old and long-discredited subterfuge'.

<sup>8</sup> 'Philaethes' to the Author of the *Universal Spectator*, 19 March 1743. Quoted in Deutsch, *op. cit.*, p. 563 ff. Philaethes was supposedly a lover of 'all Mr. Handel's Performances'. The Editor thought that 'the following Letter may to many of my Readers, especially those of a gay and polite Taste, seem too rigid a Censure on a Performance, which is so universally approv'd.'

<sup>9</sup> Chrysander suggested that this might be Richard Wesley, one of the subscribers to the full-score of *Alexander's Feast*. See Deutsch, *ibid.*, p. 483.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> This notion of beating time aloud brings to mind Handel's possibly apocryphal comment of 1746 to Gluck, who then related it to Burney, that the English liked something they could 'beat time to, something that hits them straight on the drum of the ear'. See Dean, *ibid.*, p. 136, and C. Hogwood, *Handel* (London, 1984), p. 203.

<sup>12</sup> Miss Catherine Talbot to Mrs Elizabeth Carter, 27 December 1743 in Deutsch, *op. cit.*, p. 577.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Charles Sackville, later second Duke of Dorset.

<sup>15</sup> quoted in Hogwood, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>16</sup> R. Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth Century Thought*, (Cambridge, 1995), p. 296.

<sup>17</sup> This was the Second Family Compact of 1743. See E. N. Williams, *The Ancien Régime in Europe – Government and Society in the Major States 1648-1789* (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 126 ff.

<sup>18</sup> For this interesting moment in the history of English opera and for Dean's masterly unravelling of complexities see Dean, *op. cit.*, p. 366 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Hogwood, *op. cit.*, p. 183 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Dean, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

<sup>21</sup> B. Trowell, 'Congreve and the 1744 Semele libretto', *Musical Times* 111 (1970), pp. 993-4.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

<sup>23</sup> from *Summer* – see Trowell, *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> Handel, *Semele An Oratorio*, R.M. 20 f. 7, British Museum, London. I am indebted to Ken and Elizabeth Nielsen for their kindness in procuring me a copy.

- <sup>25</sup> Handel writes *völlig geendiget* at the close of the manuscript.
- <sup>26</sup> See Hogwood, op. cit., p. 184, Smith, op. cit., p. 299 ff. and Williams, op. cit., p. 376 ff. and p. 234 ff.
- <sup>27</sup> Hogwood, *ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> See R. Harris, *A Patriot Press, National Politics and the London Press in the 1740s* (Oxford, 1993) p. 153 ff. and Smith, op. cit., 'In Time of War' pp. 288-303.
- <sup>29</sup> C. Taylor, 'Handel's Disengagement from the Italian Opera', *Handel Tercentenary Collection*, ed. S. Sadie and A. Hicks (London, 1987), p. 172.
- <sup>30</sup> Dent, op. cit., p. 418.
- <sup>31</sup> Deutsch, op. cit., p. 582.
- <sup>32</sup> Dent, op. cit., p. 418.
- <sup>33</sup> Deutsch, op. cit., p. 582.
- <sup>34</sup> *ibid.* pp. 579-584.
- <sup>35</sup> Dean, op. cit., p. 365.
- <sup>36</sup> Taylor, op. cit., p. 172.
- <sup>37</sup> These were printed by J. and R. Tonson in the Strand and advertised for sale on the day of the premiere in the *London Daily Post*. It is interesting to note that the Tonson firm originally published Congreve's libretto in 1710. See Deutsch, op. cit., p. 582.
- <sup>38</sup> For more details, see ed. J. Roberts, *Handel Sources – Materials for the Study of Handel's Borrowing* (New York & London, 1986), Scarlatti's 'Pompeo', Porta's 'Numitore', Keiser's 'Claudius' and 'Nebucadnezar'.
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid.* p. 370.
- <sup>40</sup> Dent, op. cit., p. 409.
- <sup>41</sup> Dean, op. cit., p. 370.

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

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Priest, Craig Everingham *bass*

Cadmus, King of Thebes, Stephen Bennett *bass*

Athamas, a Prince of Bœotia, in love with, and designed to marry Semele, Tobias Cole *alto*

Semele, Daughter to Cadmus, beloved by and in love with Jupiter, Anna Ryberg *soprano*

Ino, Sister to Semele, in love with Athamas, Sally-Anne Russell *mezzo-soprano*

Juno, Sally-Anne Russell *mezzo-soprano*

Iris, Belinda Montgomery *soprano*

A Deity, Shelli Gilhome *soprano*

Jupiter, Angus Wood *tenor*

Somnus, Stephen Bennett *bass*

Apollo, Paul McMahon *tenor*

Chorus, Cantillation

## ACT ONE

### 1 Overture – Gavotte

#### Scene 1

##### *Accompagnato*

##### *Priest*

- 2 Behold! auspicious flashes rise,  
Juno accepts our sacrifice;  
The grateful odour swift ascends,  
And see, the golden image bends!

##### *Chorus of Priests*

- 3 Lucky omens bless our rites,  
And sure success shall crown your loves;  
Peaceful days and fruitful nights  
Attend the pair that she approves.

##### *Recitative and arioso*

##### *Cadmus*

- 4 Daughter, obey,  
Hear and obey!  
With kind consenting  
Ease a parent's care;  
Invent no new delay,  
On this auspicious day.

##### *Athamas*

O hear a faithful lover's prayer!  
On this auspicious day  
Invent no new delay!

##### *Accompagnato*

##### *Semele (apart)*

- 5 Ah me, ah me!  
What refuge now is left me?  
How various, how tormenting  
Are my miseries!  
O Jove, assist me!  
Can Semele forego thy love,  
And to a mortal's passion yield?  
Thy vengeance will o'ertake such perfidy.  
If I deny, my father's wrath I fear.

##### *Air*

##### *Semele*

O Jove! in pity teach me which to choose,  
Incline me to comply, or help me to refuse!  
Teach me which to choose,  
Or help me to refuse!

##### *Recitative*

##### *Athamas*

- 6 See, she blushing turns her eyes;  
See, with sighs her bosom panting!  
If from love those sighs arise,  
Nothing to my bliss is wanting.

##### *Recitative*

##### *Ino*

- 7 Alas! she yields,  
And has undone me!  
I cannot longer hide my passion;

It must have vent,  
Or inward burning

Will consume me.  
O Athamas,  
I cannot utter it!

##### *Athamas*

On me fair Ino calls  
With mournful accent,  
Her colour fading,  
And her eyes o'erflowing!

##### *Ino*

O Semele!

##### *Semele*

On me she calls,  
Yet seems to shun me!  
What would my sister?  
Speak!

##### *Ino*

Thou hast undone me!

##### *Quartet*

##### *Cadmus*

- 8 Why dost thou thus untimely grieve,  
And all our solemn rites profane?  
Can he, or she thy woes relieve,  
Or I? Of whom dost thou complain?

##### *Ino*

Of all! but all, I fear, in vain.

##### *Athamas*

Can I thy woes relieve?

##### *Semele*

Can I assuage thy pain?

##### *Cadmus, Athamas, Semele*

Of whom dost thou complain?

##### *Ino*

Of all! but all, I fear, in vain.

##### *Chorus of Priests*

- 9 Avert these omens, all ye pow'rs!  
Some god averse our holy rites controls;  
O'erwhelm'd with sudden night the day expires,  
Ill-boding thunder on the right hand rolls,  
And Jove himself descends in show'rs  
To quench our late propitious fires.

##### *Accompagnato*

##### *Priest*

- 10 Again auspicious flashes rise,  
Juno accepts our sacrifice.  
Again the sickly flame decaying dies:  
Juno assents, but angry Jove denies.

##### *Recitative*

##### *Athamas*

- 11 Thy aid, pronubial Juno, Athamas implores!

##### *Semele (apart)*

Thee, Jove, and thee alone, thy Semele adores!

*Chorus of Priests*

- [12] Cease, cease your vows, 'tis impious to proceed,  
Begone, and fly this holy place with speed!  
This dreadful conflict is of dire presage,  
Begone, and fly from Jove's impending rage!

Scene 2

*Recitative*

*Athamas*

- [13] O Athamas, what torture hast thou borne!  
And oh, what hast thou yet to bear!  
From love, from hope, from near possession torn,  
And plung'd at once in deep despair!

*Air*

*Ino*

- [14] Turn, hopeless lover, turn thy eyes,  
And see a maid bemoan.

*Recitative*

*Athamas*

- [15] She weeps!  
The gentle maid, in tender pity,  
Weeps to behold my misery!  
So Semele would melt  
To see another mourn.

*Air*

*Athamas*

- [16] Your tuneful voice my tale would tell,  
In pity of my sad despair;  
And with sweet melody compel

Attention from the flying fair.  
Your tuneful voice ... *da capo*

*Recitative*

*Ino*

- [17] Too well I see,  
Thou wilt not understand me.  
Whence could proceed such tenderness?  
Whence such compassion?  
Insensible, ingrate,  
Ah no, I cannot blame thee!  
For by effects, unknown before,  
Who could the hidden cause explore,  
Or think that love could act so strange a part,  
To plead for pity in a rival's heart?

*Athamas*

Ah me, what have I heard,  
She does her passion own!

*Duet*

*Ino*

- [18] You've undone me,  
Look not on me!  
Guilt upbraiding,  
Shame invading,  
You've undone me,  
Look not on me!

*Athamas*

With my life I would atone  
Pains you've borne,  
To me unknown.  
Cease to shun me.

*Both*

Love alone  
Has both undone!

Scene 3

*Recitative*

*Cadmus*

- [19] Ah, wretched prince, doom'd to disastrous love!  
Ah me, of parents most forlorn!  
Prepare, O Athamas, to prove  
The sharpest pangs that e'er were borne,  
Prepare with me our common loss to mourn!

*Athamas*

Can fate, or Semele, invent  
Another, yet another punishment?

*Accompagnato*

*Cadmus*

Wing'd with our fears and pious haste,  
From Juno's fane we fled.  
Scarce we the brazen gates had pass'd,  
When Semele around her head  
With azure flames was grac'd,  
Whose lambent glories in her tresses play'd.  
While this we saw with dread surprise,  
Swifter than lightning downward tending,

An eagle stoop'd, of mighty size,  
On purple wings descending,  
Like gold his beak, like stars shone forth his eyes,  
His silver plumy breast with snow contending.

Sudden he snatch'd the trembling maid,  
And soaring from our sight convey'd,  
Diffusing ever as he less'ning flew  
Celestial odour and ambrosial dew.

*Recitative*

*Athamas*

Oh prodigy, to me of dire portent!

*Ino*

To me, I hope, of fortunate event!

Scene 4

*Air and Chorus*

*Semele*

- [20] Endless pleasure, endless love,  
Semele enjoys above!  
On her bosom Jove reclining,  
Useless now his thunder lies;  
To her arms his bolts resigning,  
And his lightning to her eyes.

*Priests and Augurs*

Endless pleasure, endless love  
Semele enjoys above!

## ACT TWO

### 1 *Sinfonia*

#### Scene 1

##### *Recitative*

##### *Juno*

- 2 Iris, impatient of thy stay,  
From Samos have I wing'd my way  
To meet thy slow return.

##### *Iris*

With all his speed not yet the sun  
Through half his race has run,  
Since I, to execute thy dread command,  
Have thrice encompass'd sea and land.

##### *Juno*

Say, where is Semele's abode?

##### *Iris*

Look, where Cithaeron proudly stands,  
Bœotia parting from Cecropian lands.  
High on the summit of that hill,  
Beyond the reach of mortal eyes,  
By Jove's command and Vulcan's skill,  
Behold a new-erected palace rise!

##### *Air*

##### *Iris*

- 3 There, from mortal cares retiring,  
She resides in sweet retreat.  
On her pleasure, Jove requiring,

All the Loves and Graces wait.  
There, from mortal cares ... *da capo*

##### *Recitative*

##### *Juno*

- 4 No more! I'll hear no more!

##### *Accompagnato*

##### *Juno*

Awake, Saturnia, from thy lethargy!  
Seize, destroy the cursed Semele!  
Scale proud Cithaeron's top,  
Snatch her, tear her in thy fury,  
And down to the flood of Acheron  
Let her fall,  
Rolling down the depths of night,  
Never more to behold the light.  
If I th'imperial sceptre sway, I swear  
By hell!  
(Tremble, thou universe, this oath to hear!)  
Not one of curst Agenor's race to spare.

##### *Recitative*

##### *Iris*

Hear, mighty queen, while I recount  
What obstacles you must surmount.

##### *Accompagnato*

##### *Iris*

With adamant the gates are barr'd,  
Whose entrance two fierce dragons guard.  
At each approach they lash their forked stings

And clap their brazen wings;  
And as their scaly horrors rise,  
They all at once disclose  
A thousand fiery eyes  
Which never know repose.

##### *Air*

##### *Juno*

- 5 Hence, Iris, hence away,  
Far from the realms of day!  
O'er Scythian hills to the Mæotian lake  
A speedy flight we'll take!  
There Somnus I'll compel  
His downy bed to leave, and silent cell;  
With noise and light I will his peace molest,  
Nor shall he sink again to pleasing rest,  
Till to my vow'd revenge he grants supplies,  
And seals with sleep the wakeful dragons' eyes.  
Hence, Iris, hence ... *da capo*

#### Scene 2

##### *Air*

##### *A Deity*

- 6 Come, Zephyrs, come, while Cupid sings,  
Fan her with your silky wings.  
New desire I'll inspire,  
And revive the dying flames.  
Dance around her  
While I wound her,  
And with pleasure  
Fill her dreams.  
Come, Zephyrs, come ... *da capo*

##### *Air*

##### *Semele*

- 7 O sleep, why dost thou leave me?  
Why thy visionary joys remove?  
O sleep, again deceive me,  
To my arms restore my wand'ring love!

#### Scene 3

##### *Recitative*

##### *Semele*

- 8 Let me not another moment  
Bear the pangs of absence;  
Since you have form'd my soul for loving,  
No more afflict me  
With doubts and fears and cruel jealousy!

##### *Air*

##### *Jupiter*

- 9 Lay your doubts and fears aside,  
And for joys alone provide.  
Though this human form I wear,  
Think not I man's falsehood bear.  
Lay your doubts ... *da capo*

##### *Recitative*

##### *Jupiter*

- 10 You are mortal and require  
Time to rest and to repose.  
I was not absent;  
While Love was with thee,  
I was present:  
Love and I are one.

*Air*

*Semele*

- [11] With fond desiring,  
With bliss expiring,  
Panting,  
Fainting:  
If this be Love, not you alone,  
But Love and I are one.  
Causeless doubting,  
Or despairing,  
Rashly trusting,  
Idly fearing:  
If this be Love, not you alone,  
But Love and I are one.  
With fond desiring ... *da capo*

*Chorus of Loves and Zephyrs*

- [12] How engaging, how endearing,  
Is a lover's pain and care!

*Recitative*

*Semele*

- [13] Ah me!

*Jupiter*

Why sighs my Semele?  
What gentle sorrow  
Swells thy soft bosom?  
Why tremble those fair eyes  
With interrupted light?  
Where hov'ring for a vent,  
Amidst their humid fires,  
Some new-form'd wish appears:  
Speak, and obtain!

*Semele*

At my own happiness  
I sigh and tremble;  
For I am mortal,  
Still a woman;  
And ever when you leave me,  
Though compass'd round with deities  
Of Loves and Graces,  
A fear invades me;  
And conscious of a nature  
Far inferior,  
I seek for solitude  
And shun society.

*Jupiter (apart)*

Too well I read her meaning,  
But must not understand her:  
Aiming at immortality  
With dangerous ambition.

*Air*

*Jupiter*

- [14] I must with speed amuse her,  
Lest she too much explain.  
It gives the lover double pain,  
Who hears his nymph complain,  
And hearing, must refuse her.  
I must with speed ... *da capo*

*Chorus of Loves and Zephyrs*

- [15] Now Love that everlasting boy invites,  
To revel while you may in soft delights.

*Recitative*

*Jupiter*

- [16] By my command  
Now at this instant  
Two winged Zephyrs  
From her downy bed  
Thy much lov'd Ino bear,  
And both together  
Waft her hither,  
Through the balmy air.

*Semele*

Shall I my sister see!  
The dear companion  
Of my tender years?

*Jupiter*

See, she appears,  
But sees not me;  
For I am visible  
Alone to thee.  
While I retire, rise and meet her,  
And with welcomes greet her.  
Now all this scene shall to Arcadia turn,  
The seat of happy nymphs and swains;  
There without the rage of jealousy they burn,  
And taste the sweets of love without its pains.

*Air*

*Jupiter*

- [17] Where'er you walk, cool gales shall fan the glade,  
Trees, where you sit, shall crowd into a shade.

Where'er you tread, the blushing flow'rs shall rise,  
And all things flourish, where'er you turn your eyes.  
Where'er you walk ... *da capo*

Scene 4

*Recitative*

*Semele*

- [18] Dear sister, how was your passage hither?

*Ino*

O'er many states and peopled towns we pass'd,  
O'er hills and valleys, and o'er deserts waste:  
O'er barren moors, and o'er unwholesome fens,  
And woods, where beasts inhabit dreadful dens:  
Through all which pathless way our speed  
was such,  
We stopp'd not once the face of earth to touch.  
Meantime they told me, while through  
air we fled,  
That Jove did thus ordain.

*Air*

*Ino*

- [19] But hark, the heav'nly sphere turns round,  
And silence now is drown'd  
In ecstasy of sound!  
How on a sudden the still air is charm'd,  
As if all harmony were just alarm'd!  
And ev'ry soul with transport fill'd,  
Alternately is thaw'd and chill'd.

*Duet*

*Semele and Ino*

- [20] Prepare then, ye immortal choir!  
Each sacred minstrel tune his lyre,  
And all in chorus join!

*Chorus of Nymphs and Swains*

- [21] Bless the glad earth with heav'nly lays,  
And to that pitch th'eternal accents raise,  
That all appear divine!

### ACT THREE

- [1] [*Sinfonia*] *Larghetto e piano per tutto*

Scene 1

*Accompagnato*

*Juno*

- [2] Somnus, awake!  
Raise thy reclining head!

*Iris*

Thyself forsake,  
And lift up thy heavy lids of lead!

*Air*

*Somnus*

- [3] Leave me, loathsome light,  
Receive me, silent night!  
Lethe, why does thy ling'ring current cease?  
Oh, murmur me again to peace!

*Recitative*

*Iris*

- [4] Dull God, canst thou attend the water's fall,  
And not hear Saturnia call?

*Juno*

Peace, Iris, peace! I know how to charm him:  
Pasithea's name alone can warm him.

*(To Somnus)*

Somnus, arise!  
Disclose thy tender eyes;  
For Pasithea's sight  
Endure the light.  
Somnus, arise!

*Air*

*Somnus*

- [5] More sweet is that name  
Than a soft purling stream.  
With pleasure repose I'll forsake,  
If you'll grant me but her to soothe me awake.  
More sweet is that name ... *da capo*

*Recitative*

*Juno*

- [6] My will obey,  
She shall be thine.  
Thou, with thy softer pow'rs,  
First Jove shalt captivate;  
To Morpheus then give order,  
Thy various minister,

That with a dream in shape of Semele,  
But far more beautiful,  
And more alluring,  
He may invade the sleeping deity;  
And more to agitate his kindling fire,  
Still let the phantom seem to fly before him,  
That he may wake impetuous, furious in desire,  
Unable to refuse whatever boon  
Her coyness shall require.

*Somnus*

I tremble to comply.

*Juno*

To me thy leaden rod resign,  
To charm the sentinels  
On Mount Cithaeron;  
Then cast a sleep on mortal Ino,  
That I may seem her form to wear,  
When I to Semele appear.

*Duet*

*Juno*

- [7] Obey my will, thy rod resign,  
And Pasithea shall be thine.

*Somnus*

All I must grant, for all is due  
To Pasithea, love and you.

Scene 2

*Air*

*Semele*

- [8] My racking thoughts by no kind slumbers freed,  
But painful nights do joyful days succeed.

Scene 3

*Recitative*

*Juno (apart)*

- [9] Thus shap'd like Ino,  
With ease I shall deceive her;  
And in this mirror she shall see  
Herself as much transform'd as me.  
Do I some goddess see!  
Or is it Semele?

*Semele*

Dear sister, speak,  
Whence this astonishment?

*Juno*

Your charms improving  
To divine perfection,  
Show you were late admitted  
Amongst celestial beauties.  
Has Jove consented,  
And are you made immortal?

*Semele*

Ah no! I still am mortal;  
Nor am I sensible  
Of any change or new perfection.

*Juno*

Behold in this mirror,  
Whence comes my surprise;  
Such lustre and terror  
Unite in your eyes,  
That mine cannot fix on a radiance so bright,  
’Tis unsafe for the sense and too slipp’ry  
for sight.

*Semele*

O ecstasy of happiness!  
Celestial graces  
I discover in each feature!

*Air*

*Semele*

[10] Myself I shall adore,  
If I persist in gazing,  
No object sure before  
Was ever half so pleasing.  
Myself I shall adore ... *da capo*

*Recitative*

*Juno*

[11] Be wise, as you are beautiful,  
Nor lose this opportunity:  
When Jove appears,  
All ardent with desire,  
Refuse his proffer’d flame  
Till you obtain a boon without a name.

*Semele*

Can that avail me? But how shall I attain  
To immortality?

*Accompagnato*

*Juno*

Conjure him by his oath  
Not to approach your bed  
In likeness of a mortal,  
But like himself, the mighty thunderer,  
In pomp of majesty  
And heav’nly attire:  
As when he proud Saturnia charms,  
And with ineffable delights  
Fills her encircling arms  
And pays the nuptial rites.  
You shall partake then of immortality,  
And thenceforth leave this mortal state,  
To reign above,  
Ador’d by Jove,  
In spite of jealous Juno’s hate.

*Air*

*Semele*

[12] Thus let my thanks be pay’d,  
Thus let my arms embrace thee!  
And when I’m a goddess made,  
With charms like mine I’ll grace thee.

*Recitative*

*Juno*

[13] Rich odours fill the fragrant air  
And Jove’s approach declare.  
I must retire ...

*Semele*

Adieu ... your counsel I’ll pursue.

*Juno (apart)*

And sure destruction will ensue,  
Vain wretched fool ... adieu!

Scene 4

*Air*

*Jupiter*

[14] Come to my arms, my lovely fair,  
Soothe my uneasy care!  
In my dream late I woo’d thee,  
And in vain I pursued thee,  
For you fled from my prayer,  
And bid me despair.  
Come to my arms, my lovely fair!

*Recitative*

*Jupiter*

[15] O Semele!  
Why art thou thus insensible?

*Air*

*Semele*

[16] I ever am granting,  
You always complain.  
I always am wanting,  
Yet never obtain.  
I ever am granting,  
You always complain.

*Recitative*

*Jupiter*

[17] Speak, speak your desire;  
Say what you require:  
I’ll grant it!

*Semele*

Swear by the Stygian lake!

*Accompagnato*

*Jupiter*

By that tremendous flood, I swear;  
Ye Stygian waters, hear!  
And thou, Olympus, shake,  
In witness to the oath I take!

*Recitative*

*Semele*

[18] You’ll grant what I require?

*Jupiter*

I’ll grant what you require.

*Accompagnato*

*Semele*

- [19] Then cast off this human shape which you wear,  
And Jove since you are, like Jove too appear!

*Air*

*Jupiter*

- [20] Ah! take heed what you press!  
For, beyond all redress,  
Should I grant your request, I shall harm you.

*Air*

*Semele*

- [21] No, no, I'll take no less,  
Than all in full excess!  
Your oath it may alarm you.  
Yet haste and prepare,  
For I'll know what you are,  
With all your powers arm you.  
No, no, I'll take no less ... *da capo*

*Scene 5*

*Accompagnato*

*Jupiter*

- [22] Ah, whither is she gone! unhappy fair!  
Why did she wish! why did I rashly swear!  
'Tis past, 'tis past recall,  
She must a victim fall!  
Anon when I appear,  
The mighty thunderer,  
Arm'd with inevitable fire,

She needs must instantly expire.  
'Tis past, 'tis past recall,  
She must a victim fall!  
My softest lightning yet I'll try,  
And mildest melting bolt apply;  
In vain! for she was fram'd to prove  
None but the lambent flames of love.  
'Tis past, 'tis past recall,  
She must a victim fall!

*Scene 6*

*Air*

*Juno*

- [23] Above measure  
Is the pleasure,  
Which my revenge supplies!  
Love's a bubble,  
Gain'd with trouble,  
And in possessing dies.  
With what joy shall I mount to my heav'n again,  
At once from my rival and jealousy freed!  
The sweets of revenge make it worth while to reign,  
And heav'n will hereafter be heav'n indeed.  
Above measure ... *da capo*

*Scene 7*

*Accompagnato*

*Semele*

- [24] Ah me! too late I now repent  
My pride and impious vanity.

He comes! far off his lightnings scorch me,  
Ah! I feel my life consuming:  
I burn, I faint, for pity I implore,  
Oh help, oh help! I can no more!

*Scene 8*

*Recitative*

*Ino*

- [25] Of my ill-boding dream  
Behold the dire event!

*Chorus of Priests*

- [26] Oh terror and astonishment!  
Nature to each allots his proper sphere,  
But that forsaken we like meteors err,  
Toss'd through the void,  
By some rude shock we're broke,  
And all our boasted fire is lost in smoke.

*Recitative*

*Ino*

- [27] How I was hence remov'd,  
Or hither how return'd, I know not:  
So long a trance withheld me  
But Hermes in a vision told me  
(As I have now related)  
The fate of Semele:  
And added, as from me he fled,  
That Jove ordain'd I Athamas should wed.

*Cadmus*

Be Jove in ev'rything obey'd.

*Athamas*

Unworthy of your charms myself I yield,  
Be Jove's commands and yours fulfill'd.

*Recitative*

*Cadmus*

- [28] See from above the bellying clouds descend  
And big with some new wonder this way tend.

*Scene the Last*

[29] *Sinfonia*

*Accompagnato*

*Apollo*

- [30] Apollo comes, to relieve your care,  
And future happiness declare.  
From Semele's ashes a phoenix shall rise,  
The joy of this earth, and delight of the skies:  
A God he shall prove  
More mighty than Love,  
And sighing and sorrow for ever prevent.

*Chorus of Priests*

- [31] Happy, happy shall we be,  
And free from care, from sorrow free;  
Guiltless pleasures we'll enjoy,  
Virtuous love will never cloy;  
All that's good and just we'll prove,  
And Bacchus crown the joys of love!

**Cantillation**

Antony Walker *Music Director*

Alison Johnston *Manager*

**Soprano**

Miriam Allan

Shelli Gilhome

Belinda Montgomery

Alison Morgan

Josie Ryan

**Alto**

Timothy Chung

Jenny Duck-Chong

Marianne Powles

Natalie Shea

**Tenor**

Ben Loomes

Paul McMahan

Brett Weymark

Raff Wilson

**Bass**

Corin Bone

Craig Everingham

Goran Jordanov

Simon Lobelson

**Sirius Ensemble**

*on period instruments*

Erin Helyard, Anna McDonald

*Directors*

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Anna McDonald

Rachael Beesley

Matthew Bruce

Stephen Freeman

Dominic Glynn

Leigh Middenway

Elizabeth Pogson

Bianca Porcheddu

Lisa Stewart

Hannah Sless

**Viola**

Nicole Forsyth

Valmai Coggins

Stefan Duwe

**Violoncello**

Daniel Yeadon

Rosemary Quinn

**Double Bass**

Matthew McDonald

**Oboe**

Kirsten Barry

Owen Watkins

**Bassoon**

Simon Rickard

**Horn**

Darryl Poulsen

Lisa Wynne-Allen

**Trumpet**

John Foster

Andrew Evans

**Timpani**

Leigh Giles

**Keyboard**

Erin Helyard

Neal Peres da Costa

Darryl Poulsen & Lisa Wynne-Allen appear  
courtesy of the University of Western Australia

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**Lighting Designer** Bernie Tan

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**Stage Manager** Anna Kosky

**Production Assistant** Andrew Johnston

**Harpichord Technician** Terry Harper

**Chamber Organ Technician** Manuel da Costa

Chamber organ (Bernhard Fleig, Basel, 1996)

provided by Sydney Grammar School

**For Pinchgut Opera**

**Artistic Directors** Erin Helyard, Anna McDonald,

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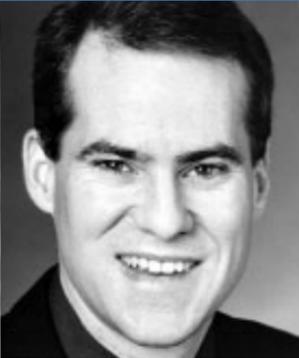
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