



Handel's World

The 35th London Handel Festival (15 March – 24 April) celebrates the wealth of Handel's work and the diverse influences that shaped the composer's music

Compelling programme includes rare performances of the original *Messiah* and *Riccardo Primo*, a snapshot of musical life in 18th-century India, the modern premiere of Hasse's *Cajo Fabricio* and a tercentenary revival of Handel's *Il pastor fido*.

Handel was the talk of all London when he moved to the bustling city three centuries ago. The German composer is set to make a bold mark on the capital's music scene again this year, thanks to the vibrant programme and artistic enterprise of the 35th London Handel Festival. The annual event offers a thick slice of London's past cultural glories and a suitably festive celebration of its present place at the heart of early music-making. Its highlights include rare outings for the original 1742 version of *Messiah* and Handel's spectacular opera *Riccardo Primo*, the modern premiere of Johann Adolf Hasse's *Cajo Fabricio*, an exploration of ragas from 18th-century India, and a tercentenary tribute to the first version of Handel's *Il pastor fido*. The London Handel Festival is sure to command attention amid the jubilees and global celebrations of 2012, reminding visitors and residents alike of London's enduring status as a world city.

Laurence Cummings, Musical Director of the London Handel Festival since 1999, has fashioned a programme outstanding in its variety and depth. The festival's 35th season opens in style on Thursday 15 March with the final of the Handel Singing Competition. "The Competition, founded a decade ago is now firmly established in the list of international competitions for young singers," notes Cummings. "It is judged on quality of sound and artistry, depth of the interpretation and the subtlety with which each singer applies the research that goes into making an outstanding Handel performance." He adds that London Handel Festival audiences and performers share a passion for discovering works by Handel and his contemporaries in buildings familiar to the composer. St George's, Hanover Square, Handel's parish church, provides the Festival's central performing hub; its other Handel-related venues include the Handel House Museum, the Foundling Museum and Grosvenor Chapel.

"Our festival programme catches the imaginations of performers and allows them to feel they are shaping London's musical scene," Laurence Cummings observes. "Working with fantastic young artists has been very important to the development of this spirit. Our audiences may hear a singer or instrumentalist for the first time at the London Handel Festival and then see their names appearing prominently elsewhere in future seasons. That sense of discovery is thrilling and helps give the Festival its identity. Because people are so passionate about hearing amazing young talent at work, we can make bold programming decisions and introduce our audiences to rarely heard and even unknown works from Handel's time."

In addition to celebrating its 35th season in 2012, the London Handel Festival will also herald two decades of presenting Handel operas in partnership with the Royal College of Music. Laurence Cummings has chosen *Riccardo Primo, re d'Inghilterra* as the ideal work for an anniversary production. The three-act opera, first staged at London's King's Theatre 285 years ago, tells of the conquest of Cyprus by Richard I 'Lionheart' in 1191 and embroiders a story of love and treachery with epic battle scenes and grand expressions of patriotism. "We wanted to celebrate our relationship with the Royal College in style," notes Cummings. "*Riccardo Primo* is a tremendous work, with a bold plot and suitably bold music and orchestration. It hasn't been performed in

London for over 20 years. I'm delighted to be working again with director James Robert Carson, who is going to stage the piece in period costume."

The London Handel Festival launched its Royal College of Music collaboration in 1992 with a performance of *Il pastor fido*. Laurence Cummings has invited David Bates and his ensemble La Nuova Musica to perform the work's first version at this year's Festival (Friday 13 April), recalling the tercentenary of its premiere at the Queen's Theatre in London in 1712. Nuova Musica's outstanding cast of young singers includes the sopranos Lucy Crowe, Katherine Manley and Anna Dennis, the mezzo-soprano Madeleine Shaw and the South African countertenor Clint van der Linde. Youth and experience join forces for the Festival's finale (Tuesday 24 April), when Sophie Bevan, Christine Rice, Stuart Jackson and Lisandro Abadie take the solos in the 'Dublin' version of *Messiah*. The work stands as the latest instalment in the London Handel Festival's ongoing series of oratorios set to librettos by Charles Jennens. "We will perform *Messiah* in its rarely heard first version, originally heard in Dublin in April 1742," explains Cummings. "It contains significant differences from the version usually performed today: the bass sings 'But who may abide?', for instance, and the soprano has a 12/8 jig for 'Rejoice greatly'. These are neat touches that offer fresh perspectives on such a familiar piece."

Fresh perspectives are guaranteed to appear throughout the 2012 London Handel Festival. Cummings' programme choices underline Handel's status as a great citizen of London and leader of the musical world of his day. The Festival spotlights the diversity of musical styles at play in 18th-century London, embracing the capital's connections with everything from Italian opera, German instrumental music and French ballet to sounds from more distant shores. The latter echo strongly in two programmes, the first devised by London Handel Festival Orchestra violinist Stephen Bull, the second compiled for the Croatian Collegium florum by its director Dada Ruža. Bull's concert (Tuesday 27 March) explores the work of singer and composer Niyamat Khan (1670-1748), popularly known as Sadarang, and links Handel's London to the Mughal court of emperor Muhammad Shah. "We hear much about world music today and think of it in terms of its recent presence, as if it were something that has only just arrived," notes Laurence Cummings. "But we can easily overlook the long history of the great traditions that make up Indian classical music. It will be fascinating for our audience to join Stephen, the tabla player Udit Pankhania and the tanpura player Anupa Sahdev for an evening of musical time travel."

Collegium florum's concert (Wednesday 21 March) promises to chart the range of styles to be found in 18th-century Croatian music and trace its lasting influence on the nation's composers. The programme spans almost four centuries of Croatian creativity, from the work of Francesco Usper, born in Parenzo (now Poreč) around 1560 to music by Zoltán Kodály's pupil Josip Slavenski, who died in Belgrade in 1955. Johann Baptist Vanhal, famous for playing chamber music with Haydn and Mozart, also features in Collegium florum's concert thanks to his association with the town of Varaždin, which briefly served as capital of all Croatia until its destruction by fire in the 1770s. "Although much of the programme reflects the prevailing Italian style," Cummings observes, "it also contains a rich local flavour and shows how baroque composers were always open to influences from folk music."

The matters of influence and context are common to many of this year's London Handel Festival concerts. Carole Cerasi's harpsichord recital at the Foundling Museum (Tuesday 3 April), includes works by Handel's teacher Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow and by Thomas Roseingrave, organist of St George's Hanover Square from the time of its consecration in 1725 to 1737. The striking musical diversity of London in Handel's day, meanwhile, is brought to life by the London Handel Orchestra at Wigmore Hall (Saturday 21 April) with an eclectic programme informed by the work of 'Il Furibondo', or the 'Madman', as Francesco Geminiani's Italian pupils called him. Handel's royal connections are evoked at the Foundling Museum when Laurence Cummings directs a 'come and sing' day devoted to Handel's Coronation Anthems (Saturday 17 March). The event also pays tribute to the HM Queen Elizabeth II's diamond jubilee.

Hasse's *Cajo Fabricio*, first performed in Rome in January 1732 and subsequently adapted by Handel for the London stage, takes its place in the Festival's Fringe Series. The opera's modern revival will be presented in Grosvenor Chapel (Friday 20 April), which first opened its South Audley

Street doors in 1731. Other LHF fringe events include a concert inspired by Vauxhall Gardens and narrated by David E. Coke, critically acclaimed co-author of Vauxhall Gardens: A History, and a programme of chamber cantatas by Handel, Alessandro Scarlatti and Caldara.

“Denys Darlow, who was organist at St George’s, established the London Handel Festival in 1978 to champion works that had long been neglected,” Laurence Cummings recalls. “He explored Handel’s late oratorios when nobody else was performing them. Those pieces are now part of the repertoire. And yet there are many other magnificent works by Handel, not least among his operas, that remain overlooked. It remains for the London Handel Festival to revisit those pieces, set Handel’s compositions in a wider artistic context and introduce audiences to a remarkable wealth of great music.”

For full programme details and booking information visit www.london-handel-festival.com

Catherine Hodgson Festival Director

For any press enquiries, please contact:

Valerie Barber PR

Suite 2

9a St John’s Wood High Street

London NW8 7NG

Tel: +44 (0)20 7586 8560

philippa@vbpr.co.uk

www.vbpr.co.uk