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Sarah Connolly  
Heroes and Heroines  
Handel

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HARRY CHRISTOPHERS  
THE SYMPHONY OF  
HARMONY AND INVENTION

# Sarah Connolly Heroes and Heroines George Frideric Handel

HARRY CHRISTOPHERS  
THE SYMPHONY OF HARMONY AND INVENTION

This recording is dedicated to the loving  
memory of my mother, Jane Connolly.

SARAH CONNOLLY AND HARRY CHRISTOPHERS WOULD LIKE  
TO THANK ALL THOSE WHO MADE THIS RECORDING POSSIBLE:

Helen B. Casey  
The Zvi Meitar Family Fund  
Mark Loveday

Rodney and Sylvia Galpin  
Anthony Fry  
Jane Connolly

Photography by Peter Warren,  
[www.peterwarren.co.uk](http://www.peterwarren.co.uk)



I have to confess that this recording makes me feel very proud. Proud, in that every singer who has ever left The Sixteen to pursue a solo career, has been, and indeed is, very successful. Sarah Connolly, however, is more than that – she is exceptional.

She sang with the group in the late 1980s and early 1990s and her virtuosity, stunning performing ability and vivacious personality were very much apparent then; there was always an additional surge of electricity when she was around. Now, of course, Sarah is one of this country's finest singers and a great Handelian. I had the pleasure of conducting her in Handel's 'Ariodante' at English National Opera two seasons ago. For those of you who have not seen her on stage, you simply must; she is a consummate artist.

This is no run-of-the-mill Handel arias disc; Sarah and I had no desire just to pile together her favourite arias. We wanted to depict not only the close links between opera and oratorio in Handel's works but also equate the position of hero and heroine. While both 'Alcina' and 'Ariodante' are epic operas and 'Solomon' is a sacred oratorio, 'Hercules' falls into the gap (or perhaps it bridges that gap). It is a secular oratorio with an English libretto but conceived as an opera although Handel finally termed it a 'Musical Drama'.

We close the disc with one of the greatest mad scenes in baroque music, that of Dejanira's (Hercules' wife) vision of the furies. It was also the last piece we recorded and, quite frankly, none of us wanted these sessions to end. It has been a privilege for everybody concerned to be a part of this recording.

*Harry  
Christophers.*

# Sarah Connolly

Born in County Durham, Sarah Connolly studied piano and singing at the Royal College of Music.

Her U.S. debut in the title role of ‘Ariodante’ for the New York City Opera, during the 1999/2000 season, was hailed as an enormous success and was described in the New York Times as ‘Phenomenal... The voice is dark and true, remarkably flexible and filled with the required heat.’ Subsequent engagements in the U.S. include the San Francisco Opera singing Ino and Juno in ‘Semele’, returns to NYCO as Romeo (‘I Capuleti ed i Montecchi’) and in the title role of ‘Xerxes’, and her debut at the Metropolitan Opera as Annio (‘La Clemenza di Tito’). European appearances include Nerone (‘L’Incoronazione di Poppea’) at the Maggio Musicale in Florence, the title role in ‘The Rape of Lucretia’ at the Munich Festival and her debuts at the Paris Opera as Sesto (‘Giulio Cesare’) and the Theatre des Champs Elysées as Juno. At English National Opera her roles include Xerxes, Ariodante, Ruggiero (‘Alcina’), Dido (‘Dido and Aeneas’), Susie

“Connolly seals her reputation as our best Handel mezzo in many years. The voice is richly coloured, delicately used but incisively dramatic. She brings Handel to open-hearted expressive life... she knows the style through and through, and makes the maximum effort within it.”

FINANCIAL TIMES

(‘The Silver Tassie’), Dido (‘The Trojans’) and the title role in ‘The Rape of Lucretia’ which was televised for the BBC.

Her concert engagements include appearances at the Salzburg Festival, Vienna Konzerthaus, Berlin Philharmonie and the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, with such conductors as Sir Simon Rattle, Sir Colin Davis, Daniel Harding, Edo de Waart and Philippe Herreweghe. She is also a regular guest artist at the BBC Promenade Concerts at the Royal Albert Hall. Committed to promoting new music, her world premiere performances include Mark-Anthony Turnage’s ‘Twice through the heart’ with The Schoenberg Ensemble conducted by Oliver Knussen and Jonathan Harvey’s ‘Songs of Li Po’ at the Aldeburgh Festival.

She has recorded Rameau’s ‘Les Fêtes d’Hebe’ with Les Arts Florissants under William Christie (winner of the 1998 Gramophone Early Opera Award and nominated for a Grammy Award), Bach Cantatas with Collegium Vocale and Philippe Herreweghe, Vivaldi’s ‘Juditha Triumphans’ with the King’s Consort, and a recital disc of Schönberg songs with Iain Burnside.

## ALCINA (Ruggiero)

①	<i>Sinfonia</i> (Act 3)	0.50
②	<i>Sta nell’ Ircana</i>	5.50
③	<i>Mi lusingha il dolce affetto</i>	7.10

## SOLOMON (Queen of Sheba)

④	<i>Sinfonia – Arrival of the Queen of Sheba</i>	3.00
⑤	<i>Recit &amp; Aria: Will the sun forget to streak</i>	6.00

## ARIODANTE (Ariodante)

⑥	<i>Sinfonia to Act 2</i>	0.30
⑦	<i>Recit &amp; Aria: Scherza infida</i>	8.20
⑧	<i>Dopo notte</i>	7.00

## ALCINA (Ruggiero)

⑨	<i>Entrée des songes agréables</i>	2.00
⑩	<i>Verdi prati</i>	4.20

## HERCULES (Dejanira)

⑪	<i>Sinfonia</i> (Act 2)	3.00
⑫	<i>Recit &amp; Aria: Cease, ruler of the day</i>	3.30
⑬	<i>Where shall I fly</i>	7.00

Total timing 65.00

## THE SYMPHONY OF HARMONY AND INVENTION

VIOLIN  
Walter Reiter (leader),  
Theresa Caudle, Elen O’Dell,  
Hannah Tibell, Jane Gordon,  
Miles Golding, Claire Mera Nelson,  
Claire Sansom, Sarah Moffatt,  
Rebecca Rule

VIOLA  
Stefanie Heichelheim, Emma Alter

CELLO  
Jane Coe, Helen Gough

DOUBLE BASS  
Jan Spencer

FLUTE  
Christine Garratt

OBOE  
Mark Baigent, Catherine Latham

BASSOON  
Sally Jackson

HORN  
Anneke Scott, Robin Cane

HARPSICHORD  
Matthew Hall, Alastair Ross

THEORBO  
David Miller, Eligio Quinteiro

HARP  
Siobhan Armstrong

## Heroes and Heroines

Heroes in Handel's world were in short supply. The early 18th century was an era which, like any other, admired bravery and courage, looking back nostalgically to the fearless warriors and doughty deeds of the past, yet found it difficult to create a heroic dimension around their modern equivalents. One of the period's most famous marching songs, 'The British Grenadiers', makes an explicit parallel between the contemporary soldier of the Duke of Marlborough's army during the Spanish Succession War (1703 – 1713) and the great military men of antiquity such as Alexander the Great and Hector of Troy. Yet few people who knew the mythological and historical background from which such characters sprang would honestly have accepted the analogy at face value. Marlborough himself, for all his victories and the honours heaped on him by Queen Anne, never became a hero figure, and there was a distinct feeling that the modern world was somehow unable to produce the type of superhuman apparently standard-issue in ancient Greece and Rome.

Opera has always depended for some measure of its success on wish-fulfilment, and if heroes were unavailable in the everyday world of 18th century London, Handel and his librettists could at least bring them to life in the theatre. At its finest, Italian opera seria, the dramatic genre in which the composer specialized for over 30 years of his creative life,

sprang a powerful tension between idealized moral values and credible human situations. Family quarrels, thwarted ambition, professional rivalry and love in all its aspects were no less genuine for 18th century men and women than they are for us, but the Baroque era liked to filter these through plots derived mostly (though not exclusively) from the classical past. The characters, seldom more than half a dozen, were exclusively royal and noble, and the hero was frequently presented as a warrior, wearing a Roman-style plumed helmet and breastplate, and set within the context of his prowess on the battlefield, equalled, implicitly or explicitly, by his attractiveness to women.

The singers of such roles were castrati, male eunuchs whose powerful soprano or mezzo-soprano voices were entirely acceptable to 18th century audiences as the medium through which orthodox (uncastrated) masculinity could be portrayed. On Handel's stages, whether at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket or at Covent Garden, there was no credibility gap between a gelded male singing in the treble clef and the virile ardours he was called upon to express. The convention was too powerfully established on the operatic stage for Handel to dispense with it, and even in 'Theodora', one of his last oratorios, he was prepared to return to the castrato as hero in order to accommodate the talents of Gaetano Guadagni, one of the finest of the whole breed.

Though their theatrical gifts varied considerably, Handel was keen to give the

singers portraying his operatic heroes as much variety as possible in the arias they were given to sing. Ruggiero in 'Alcina' is a case in point. Doubtless he interested the composer rather more for being essentially a flawed character, one whose male energy is currently misused (according to the severe ethical system operated in Baroque opera) in the service of Alcina, the sorceress who has imposed a species of erotic slavery on him. Hence Handel's insistence on giving the role's creator Giovanni Carestini the dreamy rondo 'Verdi prati', whose apparent simplicity is shadowed with melancholy as Ruggiero anticipates the destruction of the delightful magic surrounding him. When Carestini at first refused to sing this aria, Handel exclaimed "You dog! Don't I know better as yourself what is best for you to sing? If you will not sing all the song what I give you, I will not pay you one stiver!" As so often, the composer was right, and it was through the aria's sheer artless beauty that Carestini made his biggest impact on the audience.

Ruggiero's 'Mi lusinga il dolce affetto' offers a more complex portrayal of his heroic uncertainties. Its rhythms are essentially those of a minuet, the most popular courtly dance form of the period, but within this stylised framework we can sense his growing confusion, following an encounter with his former lover Bradamante, an early indication that Alcina's magic is starting to lose its force. If Carestini felt cheated of the chance for heroic posturing, he would be more than compensated with the

boisterous 'Sta nell'Ircana', in which the singer's vocal display is given additional sheen by Handel's inclusion of a prominent brace of horns in the score.

Carestini had already made his mark on London audiences in 'Ariodante', premiered at Covent Garden in 1735. Here too Handel had sought to vary the style of hero's arias, and in this case the libretto made his task easier. The drama, based on the same story which inspired Shakespeare's 'Much Ado About Nothing', involves a malicious attempt by the evil duke Polinesso to thwart the happiness of Prince Ariodante on the threshold of marriage by denouncing his fiancée Ginevra as an adulteress. Tricked into believing the worst, Ariodante, in the aria 'Scherza infida', prepares to embrace death, and in its second section threatens his apparently faithless loved one that he will return as a ghost to haunt her. Once again the orchestra plays its part. Under the starkness of the vocal line, a bassoon, as elsewhere in Handel's work, represents the idea of a spirit rising ominously from the shades.

Polinesso's dastardly plot is foiled and Ginevra, after languishing in gaol, is about to be set free. No air could offer a more obvious contrast with 'Scherza infida' than Ariodante's jubilant 'Dopo notte', the perfect example of Handel's uncanny sensitivity to the dramatic nuance of an aria text. The music's buoyancy doesn't just mirror the hero's relief as 'after a black and gloomy night the sun shines more brightly in the heavens', but suggests that

Ariodante has finally regained that youthful verve and optimism which made him such an attractive figure at the start of the opera.

For Handel, the female characters in an opera or oratorio were often more interesting than their male counterparts. The word 'Shakespearean' is often used to describe his musical portrayal of women, and he seems to have had a special interest in the relationship between an individual dramatic role and the particular vocal quality of the female soloist creating it. Figures as diverse as Semele, Cleopatra, Galatea, Alcina or Athalia bear witness to the ways in which this astonishing empathy with both the character and the interpreter continued to inspire Handel.

Whereas the dramatic hero in 18th century Italian opera was expected to represent certain key values and manly qualities, life was made easier for the heroine through a contemporary view of women in general as being changeable and capricious creatures ruled entirely by their passions. The only burden of expectation laid on them, whether in opera, spoken drama or the novel, was that of sexual propriety. Several Handel heroines come close to losing their reputations, but few of them actually take the final and irrevocable step.

In 'Solomon' the Queen of Sheba, her arrival heralded by the bustling sinfonia which has become one of the most popular Handelian orchestral items, remains chastely admiring of the great king's wisdom and wealth. Yet her

song of farewell to him, 'Will the sun forget to streak', has what Shakespeare calls 'a dying fall' to the melody suspended over the gently rocking string accompaniment, which suggests rather more than mere polite leavetaking. Is Handel implying that she has left her heart behind?

The subtle understatement suffusing this enchanting air is completely foreign to Dejanira, the tragic heroine of 'Hercules', presented as 'a New Musical Drama' in 1745. From the opening of the work, based on a Greek play by Sophocles and telling the story of Hercules's death at the hands of his jealous wife, she is completely enslaved by the negative emotions which will ultimately push her over the edge of reason.

Fearful for the fate of Hercules in battle, Dejanira becomes suspicious, on his safe return, as to his interest in the captive princess Iole, and the aria 'Cease, ruler of the day' reveals the sombre depths of her vulnerability. When she finally loses her sanity, the great mad scene Handel designed for her alternates snarling rage and moments of eerie calm, matched by a freedom in the shifts of tempo and key within the piece. This whole fearsome evocation of 'the pursuing furies of the mind', rewarding the gifts of both singer and actress, is one of the most original moments in Handel's late dramatic works, looking beyond the Baroque to the operatic world of Gluck, Mozart and even the early Romantics.

JONATHAN KEATES

## FROM ALCINA (Ruggiero)

### ① *Sinfonia* (Act 3)

### ② *Aria Stà nell' Ircana*

*Stà nell' Ircana pietrosa tana  
tigre sdegnosa, e incerta pende,  
se parte, o attende  
il cacciatore.*

*Stà nell' Ircana...*

*Dal teso strale  
guarder si vuole;  
ma poi la prole  
lascia in periglio.  
Freme e l'assale  
desio di sangue,  
pietà di figlio;  
poi vince amor.  
Stà nell' Ircana...*

An angry Hyrcanian tigress lurks in her stony lair, hesitating, uncertain whether to flee or await the hunter.

The angry Hyrcanian tigress lurks...

She wants to save herself from the strung arrow; but then she would leave her young in danger. She shudders, assailed by the lust for blood, but also by pity for her offspring; finally love wins.

An angry Hyrcanian tigress lurks ...

### 3 *Aria* Mi lusinga il dolce affetto

*Mi lusinga il dolce affetto  
con l'aspetto  
del mio bene.  
Pur chi sà?  
temer conviene,  
che m'inganni  
amando ancor.  
Mi lusinga...*

*Ma se quella fosse mai  
che adorai,  
e l'abbandono;  
infidele, ingrato io sono,  
son crudele e traditor.  
Mi lusinga...*

She deceives my sweet affection  
with the aspect  
of my dearest.  
Yet who knows?  
It is as well to fear  
that, in loving, I may  
again be deceived.  
Sweet affection flatters me...

But were this really she  
whom I adored,  
and I now forsook her,  
then would I be unfaithful, ungrateful,  
and a cruel traitor.  
Sweet affection flatters me...

FROM SOLOMON (Queen of Sheba)

### 4 *Sinfonia – Arrival of the Queen of Sheba*

#### 5 *Recitative*

May peace in Salem ever dwell!  
Illustrious Solomon, farewell:  
Thy wise instructions be my future care,

Soft as the show'rs that cheer the vernal air;  
Whose warmth bids ev'ry plant her sweets disclose,  
The lily wakes, and paints the op'ning rose.

### *Air* Will the sun forget to streak

Will the sun forget to streak eastern  
skies with amber ray,  
when the dusky shades to break  
he unbars the gates of day?

then demand if Sheba's queen  
e'er can banish from her thought  
all the splendour she has seen,  
all the knowledge thou hast taught.



FROM ARIODANTE (Ariodante)

6 *Sinfonia to Act 2*

7 *Recitative*

*E vivo ancora? E senza il ferro, oh! Dei!  
Che farò? che mi dite, o affanni miei?*

*Aria Scherza infida*

*Scherza infida in grembo al drudo.  
Io tradito a morte in braccio  
per tua colpa ora men vo.*

*Ma a spezzar l'indegno laccio,  
ombra mesta, e spirto ignudo,  
per tua pena io tornerò.*

*Scherza infida...*

8 *Aria Dopo notte*

*Dopo notte, atra e funesta,  
splende in ciel più vago il sole,  
e di gioia empie la terra.*

*Mentre in orrida tempesta  
il mio legno è quasi assorto,  
giunge in porto,  
e 'l lido afferra.*

*Dopo notte...*

Do I still live? And without my sword?  
Oh God, what shall I do, in my trepidation?

Be merry, faithless one, in your lover's embrace.  
Because of your betrayal I now go forth  
into the arms of death.

But to break this undeserved bondage,  
as a mournful shadow, a manifest spirit,  
I will return to haunt you.

Be merry, faithless one...

After night, dark and funereal,  
the sun shines more radiantly in the sky  
and fills the earth with joy.

Whereas in the dreadful tempest  
my ship was almost engulfed,  
now it has reached the harbour  
and obtained the shore.

After night...

FROM ALCINA (Ruggiero)

9 *Entrée des songes agréables*

10 *Aria Verdi prati*

*Verdi prati, selve amene,  
perderete la beltà.  
Verdi prati, selve amene,  
perderete la beltà.*

*Vaghi fior, correnti rivi,  
la vaghezza, la bellezza  
presto in voi si cangerà.  
Verdi prati, selve amene,  
perderete la beltà.*

*E cangiato il vago oggetto  
all' orror del primo aspetto  
tutto in voi ritornerà.  
Verdi prati, selve amene,  
perderete la beltà.*

Verdant meadows, pleasant woodlands,  
you will lose your loveliness.  
Verdant meadows, pleasant woodlands,  
you will lose your loveliness.

Pretty flowers, purling streamlets,  
your gracefulness, your comeliness,  
soon will all be changed.  
Verdant meadows, pleasant woodlands,  
you will lose your loveliness.

And changed will be this beguiling vista;  
to the horror of its former aspect  
will all return again.  
Verdant meadows, pleasant woodlands,  
you will lose your loveliness.

FROM HERCULES (Dejanira)

11 *Sinfonia* (Act 2)

12 *Recitative*

Dissembling, false, perfidious Hercules!  
Did he not swear, when first he woo'd my love,

*Air* Cease, ruler of the day

Cease, ruler of the day, to rise,  
nor, Cynthia, gild the ev'ning skies.

13 *Accompagnato* Where shall I fly

Where shall I fly, where hide this guilty head?  
Oh fatal error of misguided love!  
Oh, cruel Nessus, how art thou reveng'd!  
Wretch that I am, by me Alcides dies!  
These impious hands have sent my injur'd lord  
untimely to the shades! Let me be mad!  
Chain me, ye Furies, to your iron beds,  
and lash my guilty ghost with whips of scorpions!  
See, see, they come! Alecto with her snakes!

The sun should cease to dawn, the silver moon  
Be blotted from her orb, ere he prov'd false?

To your bright beams he made appeal,  
with endless night his falsehood seal!

Megaera fell, and black Tisiphone!  
See the dreadful sisters rise!  
Their baneful presence taints the skies!  
See the snaky whips they bear!  
What yellings rend my tortur'd ear!  
Hide me from their hated sight,  
friendly shades of blackest night!  
Alas! No rest the guilty find  
from the pursuing furies of the mind!



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