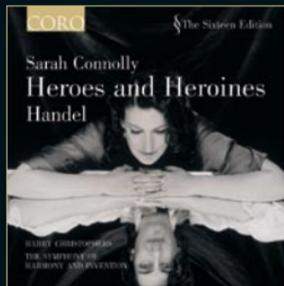


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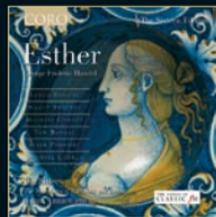


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§ The Sixteen Edition

Alexander's Feast Handel

NANCY ARGENTA

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The Sixteen
The Symphony Of
Harmony And Invention

HARRY CHRISTOPHERS



THE VOICES OF
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Although I had performed Alexander's Feast many times before we recorded it, I always felt that the work was lacking in substance, or rather that the listener felt unfulfilled. However, having pondered this for some time, I decided to look at the work not as a series of episodes where the chorus depicts Alexander's court and the soloists interpret the minstrel Timotheus and the King himself, but as what Handel pens as the subtitle to the work; *The Power of Music: An Ode, in Honour of St. Cecilia's Day*.

I think this was really Handel's perception of the piece; after all, in performance, Handel added the delightful harp concerto at the very point Dryden wrote *Timotheus...with flying fingers touch'd the lyre...*, and then inserted an organ concerto after Dryden's final chorus, prior to the duet and chorus *Your voices tune and raise them high*, which Handel added as a finale. When heard like this, in its entirety, it really does become a feast of music that is not only in praise of the great king, Alexander, but also in honour of the patron saint of music, blest Cecilia.

It is very unfair of me to single out one particular artist that encapsulates this recording but I do so with great affection and a sense of privilege; privileged that I was taught by him and privileged to conduct him. He is Ian Partridge. When I was a choral scholar at Oxford, I would take the train down to South London to have singing lessons with Ian; the lessons went well over the allotted hour, such is Ian's generosity, and I would return to Oxford inspired yet humbled!

Ian's mastery of language is second to none and in particular that of our native tongue. You need only listen to *Thus long ago* (track [6] on CD 2) to witness his inflections that colour and shape every word he sings. This is Ian at his best and a lesson to us all.

Harry
Christophers,

Alexander's Feast George Frideric Handel

Nancy Argenta, Ian Partridge, Michael George
The Sixteen
The Symphony of Harmony and Invention
Conductor HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

CD1

[1] <i>Overture</i>	6.23
[2] <i>'Twas at the Royal Feast</i>	0.58
[3] <i>Happy, Happy, Happy Pair</i>	4.45
[4] <i>Timotheus plac'd on high</i>	0.26

Harp Concerto Op.4, No.6 in B flat

[5] <i>Allegro</i>	6.23
[6] <i>Larghetto</i>	4.15
[7] <i>Allegro moderato</i>	2.43

[8] <i>The song began from Jove</i>	1.01
[9] <i>The list'ning Crowd</i>	2.09
[10] <i>With ravish'd Ears</i>	3.35
[11] <i>The praise of Bacchus</i>	0.36
[12] <i>Bacchus, ever fair and young</i>	5.09
[13] <i>Sooth'd with the sound</i>	0.46
[14] <i>He chose a mournful Muse</i>	1.25
[15] <i>He sung Darius Great and Good</i>	2.48
[16] <i>With downcast Looks</i>	0.55

[17] <i>Behold Darius Great and Good</i>	2.13
[18] <i>The Mighty Master smil'd to see</i>	0.31
[19] <i>Softly sweet</i>	3.35
[20] <i>War, he sung, is Toil and Trouble</i>	4.38
[21] <i>The Many rend the Skies</i>	3.58
[22] <i>The Prince, unable to conceal</i>	6.27
[23] <i>The Many rend the Skies</i>	4.03
Total Timing	69.42

CD2

[1] <i>Now strike the Golden Lyre</i>	2.40
[2] <i>Revenge, Revenge, Timotheus cries</i>	7.52
[3] <i>Give the Vengeance due</i>	1.25
[4] <i>The Princes applaud with a furious Joy</i>	2'23
[5] <i>Thais led the way</i>	5.13
[6] <i>Thus long ago</i>	2.21
[7] <i>At last Divine Cecilia came</i>	2.29
[8] <i>Let old Timotheus yield the Prize</i>	0.22
[9] <i>Let old Timotheus yield the Prize</i>	3.27

Organ Concerto Op.4, No.1 in G minor

[10] <i>Larghetto e staccato</i>	4.49
[11] <i>Allegro</i>	4.50
[12] <i>Adagio</i>	1.14
[13] <i>Andante</i>	3.59
[14] <i>Your Voices tune</i>	3.00
Total Timing	46.04

Handel's setting of Dryden's ode *Alexander's Feast* was composed in the first three weeks of January 1736 and first performed at Covent Garden Theatre on 19 February. It was the fourth wholly English choral work which Handel had presented to his London audiences by way of an alternative to Italian opera (the first being a revised version of the oratorio *Esther* in 1732) and it received great popular acclaim. The original soloists were the soprano Anna Strada del Po and the young tenor John Beard – both reliable singers – together with a bass named Erard who is otherwise unknown and seems to have made a poor impression. A second soprano, Cecilia Young (later to become the wife of Thomas Arne), sang the aria *War, he sung, is toil and trouble*. Handel gave four more performances in 1736 and another five in 1737. In March 1738 the London publisher John Walsh took the unusual step of issuing a full score of the work on Handel's behalf, with an engraved portrait of the composer and a lengthy subscription list headed by seven members of the royal family. The favourable reception of the ode helped to convince Handel that English choral works could gain a following in their own right, and thus paved the way to his eventual abandonment of Italian opera in favour of oratorios or other English works in similar style.

It seems to have been Handel's friend Newburgh Hamilton (later to be the librettist

of *Samson* and the *Occasional Oratorio*) who drew the composer's attention to Dryden's poem, his aim being (as he declared in a preface to the word-book issued for the first performance) "not to lose this favourable Opportunity of its being set to Musick by that great Master... who only is capable of doing it Justice". The poem was originally written for a particular occasion, as its full title reveals: *Alexander's Feast, or The Power of Music: An Ode, in Honour of St. Cecilia's Day*. Cecilia is the patron saint of music, and between 1683 and 1703 her name-day (22 November) was celebrated annually with a festival in the City of London. In most years the performances included an ode in honour of Cecilia and her art, newly written and set to music for the occasion. Dryden wrote the odes for the festivals of 1687 and 1697, the first (*A Song for St. Cecilia's Day*) being originally set by G. B. Draghi (whose music survives) and the second (*Alexander's Feast*) by Jeremiah Clarke (whose music is lost).

Handel eventually set both odes (his setting of *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day* was composed in 1739), but it is easy to see why *Alexander's Feast* would have had more immediate appeal for a composer with a strong dramatic instinct. It departs strikingly from the conventional formula of general praise of music coupled with descriptions of the qualities of the various musical instruments. Instead Dryden devotes most of the poem to a vivid account of a

banquet held by Alexander the Great to celebrate his conquest of Persia (the notional date is 331 or 330 BC). The conqueror appears with his mistress Thais and is entertained by the playing and singing of the musician Timotheus. Simply through the power of Timotheus's music – with some co-operation from Thais – Alexander is by turns charmed, intoxicated, saddened and made love-sick. At last he is roused to avenge the Greeks slain in earlier Persian wars by setting fire to Persepolis, the Persian capital. This seems to have little to do with St. Cecilia; but Dryden introduces her in a reflective conclusion, suggesting that her coming and her invention of the organ ("the Vocal Frame") brought a new dimension to music, adding "Length to solemn sounds, with Nature's Mother-Wit and Arts unknown before". What Dryden meant by this phrase is not quite clear, and the final lines of the ode are curiously equivocal; but we may notice that the effects of Timotheus's art on Alexander, though described with great eloquence, are almost wholly pernicious and consistently show the conqueror in a poor light. In pagan times, Dryden seems to be saying, music could only arouse the cruder emotions: Timotheus may have been able to "swell the Soul to rage, or kindle soft Desire", but only the "sacred" art of the Christian Cecilia can inspire noble deeds or spiritual well-being.

Handel's music inevitably pays little heed to Dryden's tacit reservations concerning the

nature of Timotheus's art. For him the poem presented the challenge of depicting in sound a dramatic scene from a classical legend and expressing the emotions described in the text; and he meets it with a prodigality of original effects. The vast assembly at Alexander's banquet is evoked in *The list'ning crowd* with an eight-part chorus accompanied by cascading string figures over an insistently rising bass. At the end of Part 1 the sense of grandeur is conveyed even more solidly in the opening section of *The many rend the skies*, a chaconne on 5-bar ground bass taken from one of the French songs Handel wrote in Italy in 1707 (it is a major-key version of the bass used by Purcell in his G minor Chacony). Between these choruses there are several well-contrasted episodes: the swaggering bass song and chorus in praise of Bacchus, with ringing horn solos; the great lament for Darius, skilfully mingling accompanied recitative, aria and chorus, and full noble pathos; the soothing soprano aria *Softly sweet in Lydian measures*, with its haunting cello solo. Part 2 begins with the most exciting of all the many accompanied recitatives, gradually gaining in power as each section of the orchestra is brought into play and culminating with the earth-shaking chorus *Break his bands of sleep asunder*, composed on a sullen 4-bar ostinato played by trumpets and drums. The famous aria *Revenge, Timotheus cries* follows: the brilliant opening section, with solo trumpet, gives way to eerie harmonies and

the dark tones of bassoons and low strings as Timotheus conjures up the ghosts of the slain Greek warriors.

In Handel's setting the final stanza becomes a fitting climax to the ode. The first lines (*Thus long ago, e'er heaving bellows Learnt to blow –* i.e. before the organ was invented) are set as fragments of recitative amid ritornellos played by recorders and violas: the veiled sound suggests a zone of timelessness in which the vision of Alexander, Timotheus and Thais fades into the mist of antiquity. St. Cecilia is introduced in a solemn chorus resembling a great organ voluntary: a thrilling chord of the ninth illustrates the enlargement of the "former narrow bounds" of music, and a formal fugue displays "Nature's Mother-Wit and Arts unknown before". (The fugue subject is taken from a Passion cantata by Graun, but the working is Handel's own.) Timotheus, we may infer, knew little counterpoint; and Handel presses this hint home by setting the final quatrain (*Let old Timotheus yield the prize*) as an extraordinarily fugal tour-de-force in which four independent musical subjects (three taken from the early vocal trio *Quel fior che alba ride*) are combined in every possible way; if this is the new art of "divine Cecilia", then Timotheus must indeed "yield the prize".

When Handel completed his setting of Dryden's text he found that he had not composed enough music to fill an evening. His audiences expected about three hours of music,

and he had written only half that amount. Handel dealt with this problem in different ways on different occasions, but for the first performances at Covent Garden he solved it by providing an additional chorus based on words which Newburgh Hamilton took from an earlier Cecilian ode of his own (*The Power of Music*, set by Galliard in 1720). One of the concertos (the C major *concerto grosso*, HWV 318) and the cantata (*Cecilia, volgi unsguardo*) were played between two parts of the ode by way of interludes, and are not integral to it; they are therefore omitted from this recording, which otherwise follows the version of the first performance. The other additions (included here) are more closely integrated. In Part 1 Handel inserted the harp concerto in B flat (published in 1738 as the organ concerto, op.4 no.6) to imitate Timotheus playing on his lyre, and after the chorus *Let old Timotheus* he added the organ concerto in G (published as op.4 no.1) to display the art of St. Cecilia's own instrument. The extra chorus on Hamilton's words follows the organ concerto: its second section (*Let's imitate her notes above*), based on the lilting tune of an aria in the early Italian cantata *Tu fedel? Tu costante?*, makes a graceful ending to the entertainment.

ANTHONY HICKS

THE SIXTEEN

SOPRANO
Fiona Clarke
Ruth Dean
Sally Dunkley
Nicola-Jane Kemp
Lynne Hirst
Carys Lane
ALTO
Robin Barda
Andrew Giles
Philip Newton
Christopher Royall
TENOR
Philip Daggett
Duncan MacKenzie
Mark Padmore
David Roy
BASS
Simon Birchall
Roger Cleverdon
Timothy Jones
Christopher Purves

THE SYMPHONY OF HARMONY AND INVENTION

VIOLIN
David Woodcock (leader)
William Thorp
Theresa Caudle
Marc Ashley Cooper
Stefanie Heichelheim
Stephen Jones
Helen Orsler
Pauline Smith
VIOLA
Jane Compton
David Brooker
CELLO
Jane Coe
Helen Verney
DOUBLE BASS
Amanda MacNamara
RECORDER
Rachel Beckett
Marion Scott

OBOE

Sophia McKenna
Cherry Forbes
BASSOON
Sally Jackson
Andrew Watts
Michael Brain
HORN
David Cox
Roger Montgomery
TRUMPET
Crispian Steele-Perkins
TIMPANI
Benedict Hoffnung
THEORBO
Robin Jeffrey
HARPSICHORD
Paul Nicholson
ORGAN
Nicholas Parle

Concertino in
Harp Concerto Op.4, No.6 in B flat

TRIPLE HARP
Andrew Lawrence-King
ARCHLUTE
Stephen Stubbs

LIRONE
Erin Headley

Organ Concerto Op.4, No.1
in G minor
ORGAN
Paul Nicholson

Alexander's Feast or The Power of Musick

Wrote in honour of
St. Cecilia by Mr Dryden
Set to Musick by Mr. Handel

CD 1 – PART ONE

1 *Overture*

Allegro - Andante

2 *Recitative* (Tenor)

'Twas at the Royal Feast, for Persia won
By Philip's warlike son:
Aloft, in awful State,
The God-like Hero sate
On his Imperial Throne:
His valiant Peers were plac'd around;
Their brows with Roses and with Myrtles
bound:
So shou'd Desert in Arms be crown'd.
The lovely Thais by his side
State like a blooming Eastern Bride,
In Flow'r of Youth, and Beauty's Pride.

3 *Air, Duet* (Tenor, Soprano) & *Chorus*

Happy, Happy, Happy Pair!
None but the Brave,
None but the Brave,
None but the Brave deserves the Fair.

4 *Recitative* (Tenor)

Timotheus plac'd on high,
Amid the tuneful Quire,
With flying Fingers touch'd the Lyre:
The trembling Notes ascend the Sky,
And heav'nly Joys inspire

Harp Concerto Op.4, No.6 in B flat

5 *Allegro*

6 *Larghetto*

7 *Allegro moderato*

8 *Recitative* (Soprano)

The song began from Jove,
Who left his blissful seat above;
(such is the Pow'r of mighty Love)
A Dragon's fiery Form bely'd the God;
Sublime, on radiant Spires he rode,
When he to fair Olympia press'd,
And while he sought her snowy Breast
Then, round her slender waist he curl'd,
And stamp'd an image of Himself,
A sov'reign of the World.

9 *Chorus*

The list'ning Crowd admire the lofty sound,
A present Deity! they shout around;
A present Deity! the vaulted roofs rebound.

10 *Air* (Soprano)

With ravish'd Ears
the Monarch hears;
Assumes the God,
Affects to nod:
And seems to shake the Spheres.

11 *Recitative* (Tenor)

The praise of Bacchus, then, the sweet
Musician sung;
Of Bacchus, ever fair, and ever young:
The jolly God in triumph comes;
Sound the Trumpets, beat the Drums:
Flush'd with a purple Grace,
He shews his honest Face;
Now give the Hautboys breath;
He comes ! he comes !

12 *Air* (Bass) & *Chorus*

Bacchus, ever fair and Young,
Drinking Joys did first ordain;
Bacchus' blessings are a Treasure,
Drinking is the soldier's Pleasure:
Rich the Treasure,
Sweet the Pleasure,
Sweet is the pleasure after Pain.

13 *Recitative* (Tenor)

Sooth'd with the sound, the King grew vain;
Fought all his Battles o'er again;
And thrice he routed all his Foes,
And Thrice he slew the Slain!
The Master saw the Madness rise,
His glowing Cheeks, his ardent Eyes;
and while he Heav'n and Earth defy'd,
Chang'd his Hand and check'd his Pride.

14 *Recitative* (Soprano)

He chose a mournful Muse,
Soft Pity to infuse.

15 *Air* (Soprano)

He sung Darius Great and Good,
By too severe a Fate,
Fall'n, Fall'n, Fall'n, Fall'n,
Fall'n from his high Estate,
and welt'ring in his Blood:
Deserted at his utmost Need,
By those his former Bounty fed,
On the bare Earth expos'd he lies,
With not a Friend to close his Eyes.

16 *Recitative* (Soprano)

With downcast Looks the joyless Victor sate,
Revolving in his alter'd Soul,
The various Turn of Chance below,
And, now and then, a Sigh he stole,
And Tears began to flow

17 *Chorus*

Behold Darius Great and Good,
By too severe a Fate,
Fall'n, Fall'n, Fall'n, Fall'n,
Fall'n from his high Estate,
and welt'ring in his Blood:
On the bare Earth expos'd he lies,
With not a Friend to close his Eyes.

18 *Recitative* (Tenor)

The Mighty Master smil'd to see
that Love was in the next Degree;
't was but a kindred sound to move,
For Pity melts the Mind to Love.

19 *Air* (Soprano)

Softly sweet, in Lydian Measures,
Soon he sooth'd the soul to Pleasures.

20 *Air* (Soprano)

War, he sung, is Toil and Trouble,
Honour but an empty Bubble:
Never ending, still beginning,
Fighting still, and still destroying;
If the World be worth thy winning,
Think, O think it worth enjoying:
Lovely Thais sits beside thee,
Take the Good the Gods provide thee.
War, he sung... (da capo)

21 *Chorus*

The Many rend the Skies with loud Applause;
So Love was crown'd, but Musick won the
Cause.

22 *Air* (Soprano)

The Prince, unable to conceal his Pain,
Gaz'd on the Fair,
Who caused his Care;
And sigh'd and look'd, sigh'd and look'd,
sigh'd and look'd and sigh'd again:
At length with Love and Wine at once
oppress'd,
the vanquish'd Victor sunk upon her Breast.
The Prince unable... (da capo)

23 *Chorus*

The Many rend the Skies with loud Applause;
So Love was crown'd, but Musick won the
Cause.

CD 2 – PART TWO

1 *Recitative* (Tenor)

Now strike the Golden Lyre again;
A louder yet - and yet a louder Strain:
Break his Bands of Sleep asunder,
And rouze him, like a rattling Peal of
Thunder.

Chorus

Break his Bands of Sleep asunder,
And rouze him, like a rattling Peal of
Thunder.

Recitative (Tenor)

Hark, Hark, - the horrid Sound
Has rais'd up his Head,
As awak'd from the Dead:
And amaz'd he stares around.

2 *Air* (Bass)

Revenge, Revenge, Timotheus cries,
See the Furies arise,
See the Snakes that they rear,
How they hiss in their Hair,
And the Sparkles that flash from their Eyes!
Behold a ghastly Band,
Each a Torch in his Hand!
Those are Grecian Ghosts, that in Battle were
slain,
And unbury'd, remain,
Inglorious on the Plain.
Revenge, Revenge... (da capo)

3 *Recitative* (Tenor)

Give the Vengeance due
To the valiant Crew:
Behold how they toss their Torches on high,
How they point to the Persian Abodes,
And glitt'ring Temples of their hostile Gods!

4 *Air* (Tenor)

The Princes applaud with a furious Joy;
And the King seiz'd a Flambeau, with Zeal to
destroy.

5 *Air* (Soprano)

Thais led the way,
To light him to his Prey;
And like another Helen, fir'd another Troy.

Chorus

The Princes applaud with a furious Joy;
And the King seiz'd a Flambeau, with Zeal to
destroy.
Thais led the way,
To light him to his Prey;
And like another Helen, fir'd another Troy.

6 *Recitative* (Tenor)

Thus long ago,
Ere heaving Bellows learn'd to blow,
While Organs yet were mute,
Timotheus to his breathing Flute,
And sounding Lyre,
Cou'd swell the Soul to Rage,
Or kindle soft Desire

7 *Grand Chorus*

At last Divine Cecilia came,
Inventress of the Vocal Frame;
The sweet Enthusiast from her sacred Store,
Enlarg'd the former narrow Bounds,
And added Length to solemn Sounds,
With Nature's Mother-Wit
And Arts unknown before.

8 *Recitative* (Tenor and Bass)

Let old Timotheus yield the Prize,
Or both divide the Crown;
He rais'd a Mortal to the Skies,
She drew an Angel down.

9 *Chorus*

Let old Timotheus yield the Prize,
Or both divide the Crown;
He rais'd a Mortal to the Skies,
She drew an Angel down.

Organ Concerto Op.4,
No.1 in G minor

10 *Larghetto e staccato*

11 *Allegro*

12 *Adagio*

13 *Andante*

14 *Additional Chorus*

Your Voices tune, and raise them high,
Till th'echo from the vaulted Sky
The blest Cecilia's Name;
Musick to Heav'n and Her we owe,
The greatest Blessing that's below;
Sound loudly then her Fame:
Let's imitate her Notes above,
And may this Evening ever prove,
Sacred to Harmony and Love.

§ **The Sixteen**
HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

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