



STANFORD  
LIVE

PhilharmoniaBaroque  
Orchestra&Chorale

MAR 5



The Marmor  
Peninsula  
Concerts

Handel's  
*Alceste*

# PHILHARMONIA BAROQUE ORCHESTRA & CHORALE

Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra & Chorale presents audiences throughout the world with performances that capture the spirit, style, and distinctive sound of early music history. Recognized as “America’s leading historically informed ensemble” (*The New York Times*), The ensemble performs on period-specific instruments, presenting repertoire ranging from early Baroque to late Romantic, as well as new works and major operatic productions. The ensemble engages audiences through its signature Bay Area series, national and international tours, recordings, commissions, and education programs. Philharmonia was founded by Laurette Goldberg, led by Music Director Laureate Nicholas McGegan for 35 years, and Richard Egarr for the last 4 years. The 2024/25 season introduces four candidates to be Philharmonia’s next Music Director.

Philharmonia’s musicians are leaders in historical performance and serve on the faculties of The Juilliard School, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and Stanford University. The organization regularly welcomes eminent guest artists including countertenors Tim Mead and Anthony Roth Costanzo, violoncellist Steven Isserlis, and maestros John Butt and Kristian Bezuidenhout. Philharmonia enjoys artistic collaborations with The Juilliard School, Dunedin

Consort, and the American Modern Opera Company (AMOC), and appears regularly at Lincoln Center, Norfolk Chamber Festival, and Tanglewood.

Among the most recorded orchestras in the world, Philharmonia boasts a discography of nearly 50 recordings, including a coveted archival performance of mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt Lieberson in Berlioz’s *Les Nuits D’été*, and a GRAMMY®-nominated recording of Haydn symphonies. In 2020, Philharmonia released three groundbreaking recordings: a full collection of commissioned works by Pulitzer Prize winner Caroline Shaw, a selection of arias sung by rising star contralto Avery Amereau, and Handel’s *Saul* with countertenor Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen.

Philharmonia’s Jews & Music series has taken audiences on journeys of discovery of Jewish themes that have emerged across music and visual art over time, curated by Jews & Music Scholar in Residence Francesco Spagnolo.

The organization also presents SESSIONS, an intimate and casual series that presents guided tours of music, social political history, and art. In the 2024/25 season, SESSIONS presents “Bach in Bengal,” a cross-genre performance that skillfully weaves Baroque themes with Indian classical music, hosted by Composer in Residence Tarik O’Regan.

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## STANFORD LIVE

Stanford Live presents a wide range of the finest performances from around the world, fostering a vibrant learning community and providing distinctive experiences through the performing arts. With its home at Bing Concert Hall and Frost Amphitheater, Stanford Live draws on the breadth and depth of Stanford University to connect performance to the significant issues,

ideas, and discoveries of our time.

Stanford Live includes a wealth of collaborators and partners, including Stanford academic departments and individual faculty members, Stanford students, off-campus arts institutions, and community organizations. Crucially, Stanford Live supports the university’s focus on placing the arts at the heart of a Stanford education.

# WELCOME

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & CEO AND BOARD PRESIDENT



Dear Friends,

As the world awakens from winter's embrace, we are reminded of Rainer Maria Rilke's words:  
"Spring has returned. The Earth is like a child that knows poems by heart."

With each blossoming note and each tender melody, we celebrate this season of renewal through the timeless beauty of Baroque music. Like nature itself, music has the power to rejuvenate the spirit, to lift the heart, and to bring light where there was silence.

It is hard to believe there are only two concert sets left in the 2024/25 season! Rest assured—there is so much more beautiful music to come as we prepare to announce our 2025/26 season soon.

This March, we're thrilled to have guest conductor **Peter Whelan** perform **Handel's *Alceste*** with the orchestra and chorale. In the entirety of Handel's oeuvre, *Alceste* is truly one-of-a-kind. While it never made it to the stage during his time, it is brimming with some of Handel's most beloved music which still captivates audiences today as it did when it was heard in his other works. A story of gods, heroes, and mythology is sure to delight you as much as the alluring and dramatic music.

Please be on the lookout for an announcement about our 2025/26 season. We have in store amazing artists and music, and can't wait for you to join us.

As always, we thank you, our audience, for your loyalty, support, and enthusiasm toward historically informed performance and our craft. Let us step into spring with open hearts and listening ears, ready to be moved, inspired, and renewed.

Sending you our warmest wishes the remainder of this season,

Emma Moon  
Executive Director & CEO

Anne Katz  
President of the Board

### WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Make sure to tell us your thoughts  
in our post-show survey.



[philharmonia.org/survey](https://philharmonia.org/survey)

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## PETER WHELAN, CONDUCTOR

Olivier Award winner Peter Whelan, an acclaimed solo artist with an extensive and award-winning discography as a solo bassoonist, is among the most dynamic and versatile exponents of historical performance of his generation. He is the Artistic Director of the Irish Baroque Orchestra and Curator for Early Music of Norwegian Wind Ensemble.

As a conductor, Peter has a particular passion for exploring and championing neglected music from the Baroque and Classical eras. Recent engagements have included appearances with San Francisco Opera, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Beethoven Orchester Bonn, Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, Meininger Hofkapelle, Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, and Lahti Symphony Orchestra.

The 2023/24 season included his critically acclaimed debut with Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists in their European tour. Other highlights included the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Dunedin Consort, la festa musicale, Meininger Hofkapelle, and Kristiansand Symphony Orchestra. He returned to conduct

and tour with Irish National Opera in their production of Vivaldi's *'l'Olimpiade'* across Ireland and at the Royal Opera House, London.



Highlights of the 2024/25 season include an appearance at the Edinburgh International Festival with the Irish Baroque Orchestra, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Lahti Symphony Orchestra, Kristiansand Symphony Orchestra, Tapiola Sinfonietta, and National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland.

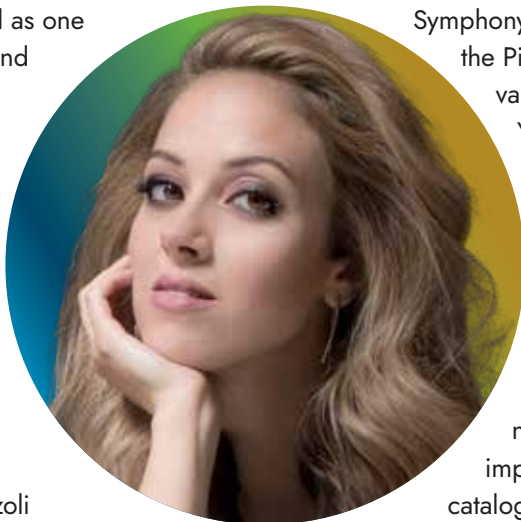
Peter makes his debut at Garsington Opera, conducting Handel's *Rodelinda* in July 2025.

Peter's artistic direction in live performance and the recording studio has been widely praised for its "rich insight, style and charisma" (*Guardian*), its "stylish verve" (*BBC Music Magazine*) and "phenomenally energetic direction" (*Artsdesk*). As a champion of early music, Peter represents "the very best of contemporary trends in bringing this music to life: flex and zest with tempi, lithe and vigorous ... an incredible alertness to colors and moods summoned by the cut-and-thrust harmonic footwork of this music" (*Operawire*).

## LAUREN SNOUFFER, SOPRANO

Recognized for her unique artistic curiosity in world-class performances spanning the music of Claudio Monteverdi and Georg Frideric Handel through to John Adams and Sir George Benjamin, Lauren Snouffer is celebrated as one of the most versatile and respected sopranos on the international stage.

Lauren Snouffer celebrates three high profile role debuts this season: the title role of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* at The Dallas Opera; Bess McNeil in Missy Mazzoli and Royce Vavrek's *Breaking the Waves* at Houston Grand Opera; and the title role of Handel's *Semele* at The Atlanta Opera. No less dynamic is the soprano's concert calendar, which includes performances at the Salzburg Mozartwoche and with the Bilbao Symphony Orchestra as well as with Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Ann Arbor Symphony, and concerts with the Telegraph Quartet under the auspices of DACAMERA of Houston.



Lauren Snouffer's concert profile has yielded marvelous results with Franz Welser-Möst and The Cleveland Orchestra, Rafaël Pichon and the Handel & Haydn Society, Maasaki Suzuki and the San Francisco Symphony, Manfred Honeck and the Pittsburgh Symphony, Jaap van Zweden and the New York Philharmonic, Alan Gilbert conducting the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester, and Marin Alsop and the Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo.

A Grammy Award-nominated artist, her impactful recording catalogue includes Hasse's *Siroe* and Handel's *Ottone* with George Petrou for Decca, Gottschalk's *Requiem for the Living* with Vladimir Lande on Novona Records, Grantham's *La canción desesperada* conducted by Craig Hella Johnson on Harmonia Mundi, and Feldman's *Rothko Chapel* with Steven Schick for ECM.

An alumna of the Houston Grand Opera Studio, Lauren Snouffer was graduated from Rice University and The Juilliard School.

## AARON SHEEHAN, TENOR

Grammy Award-winning tenor Aaron Sheehan, recognized internationally as a leading interpreter of baroque repertoire, is equally at home on the concert platform and the opera stage, from medieval monody to twentieth century masterworks.

Aaron Sheehan made his professional operatic debut with the Boston Early Music Festival in the 2005 world premiere staging of Mattheson's *Boris Gudenow*, winning praise from Opera News for his "sinuous and supple" voice, and went on to further roles with BEMF in Lully's *Psyché*, Charpentier's *Actéon*, Monteverdi's *Orfeo, Il ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*, and *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Steffani's *Orlando*, Desmarest's *Circé*, and Handel's *Acis and Galatea*.

Sheehan appears on over 35 recordings, which include Handel's *Acis & Galatea* with Boston Early Music Festival, Rameau's *Le Temple de la Gloire* & Handel's *Saul* with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra & Chorale, and Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* with Boston Baroque. He sang the title role in BEMF's recording of Charpentier's *La Descente d'Orphée aux Enfers*, which won Best Opera Recording at the 2015 Grammy Awards.

Aaron's worldwide operatic and concert appearances include venues as diverse as the Royal Opera at Versailles, Tanglewood

Festival, New Zealand Festival of the Arts, Lincoln Center, Concertgebouw, Kennedy Center, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Gran Teatro Nacional del Perú, Beethoven Festival Warsaw, Boston Symphony Hall, Musikfestspiele Postdam's Sanssouci, Handel Halle Festival, and the early music festivals of Boston, San Francisco, and Vancouver.

Recent performances include Handel's *Messiah* with the San Francisco Symphony & National Symphony, Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* with the Armenian Philharmonic, *Winterreise* in recital at the Smithsonian Museum, Bach's *B minor Mass* with

American Bach Soloists. Solo performances with Handel & Haydn Society and Boston Baroque. The first Bach *St. Matthew Passion* in Peru with the National Symphony Orchestra of Peru. Featured performances and recordings with Pacific Music Works, Blue Heron Choir, Bach Collegium San Diego, and Paul Hillier's Theater of Voices.

Raised in Minnesota, Aaron received his bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance from Luther College and a master's degree in historical vocal performance from Indiana University. He currently is on the voice faculty of Boston University.



## JEFFREY FIELDS, BARITONE

Jeffrey Fields hails from St. Paul, MN, and sings regularly as soloist and ensemble member with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra (since 1999), American Bach Soloists (since 2002), Bach Collegium San Diego (since 2011), and Carmel Bach Festival (since 1998). Jeffrey made his Carnegie Hall solo debut in Handel's *Messiah* in 2007, under Andrew Megill. This past season he sang the Monteverdi *Vespers* with Madison Bach Musicians, and the role of Jesus in Arvo Pärt's *Passio* for the Carmel Bach Festival.

Other solo engagements include Handel's *Teseo* with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra at Lincoln Center (Mostly Mozart Festival) and Tanglewood, Rossini's *Petite Messe Solenne* and Haydn Masses at Stanford, Bach's

*St. John Passion* in Berkeley, Purcell's *Dioclesian* with Philharmonia Baroque, Handel's *Dixit Dominus* with Bach Collegium San Diego, Haydn's *Seasons* at UC Berkeley, Dvořák's *Stabat Mater*, Handel's *Alexander's Feast* under Jeffrey Thomas, Handel's *Samson* with Philharmonia Baroque, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, the title role in Mendelssohn's *Elijah* for Marin Oratorio, and Handel's *Acis and Galatea* with California Bach Society. Mr. Fields studied with Albert Gammon and taught voice and singers' diction at the University of Iowa, and was an artist fellow for three seasons at the Bach Aria Festival, Stony Brook, New York. He was a three-time winner of the NATS Central Region auditions.

## LEANDRA RAMM, MEZZO-SOPRANO

Leandra Ramm, mezzo-soprano, is praised for "beautiful and quite moving" performances (*Nordstjernen Newspaper*) and "brilliant" artistry (*San Francisco Classical Voice*). She has graced venues such as San Francisco Opera, Zellerbach Hall, and Carnegie Hall. This season, she is thrilled to return to Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra after performing as First Witch in *Dido's Ghost* and *Dido and Aeneas*.

Ms. Ramm has been a soloist with San Francisco Symphony, performing Bach's *Magnificat* under Jane Glover, Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* with Michael Tilson Thomas, and 'Ecstasy' at Soundbox. Highlights from her 2023–24 season include Third Lady in *The Magic Flute* (Livermore

Valley Opera), Lapak in *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Pocket Opera), Paggio in *Rigoletto* (Opera San Jose), and alto soloist in *Elijah* (San Francisco City Chorus). She is featured on the Grammy-nominated recording of Ligeti's *Lux Aeterna* and the cast album of *Lucinda y las Flores de la Nochebuena*. Renowned for her portrayals of pants roles, Ms. Ramm has been acclaimed for *Anybody's* (*West Side Story*) and Prince Orlofsky (*Die Fledermaus*), performing with West Edge Opera, Opera Cultura, and Pacific Symphony. Passionate about new works, she premiered Lisa Bielawa's *Centuries in the Hours* at John Zorn's The Stone and appeared in Bielawa's *Vireo*.

# THE PLAYERS AND THEIR INSTRUMENTS

Philharmonia's musicians perform on historically accurate instruments.  
Below each player's name is information about their instrument's maker and origin.

**cm** Concertmaster

**\*** Principal

**†** Principal 2nd Violin

**bc** Basso Continuo

## VIOLIN

**Manami Mizumoto, cm**

Joan Carol Klotz,  
Mittenwald, Germany, 1761

*Egon & Joan von Kaschnitz  
Concertmaster Chair*

**Isabelle Seula Lee, †**

Jason Viseltear, New York, 2018

**Katherine Kyme**

Carlo Antonio Testore,  
Milan, Italy, 1720

**Carla Moore**

Johann Georg Thir,  
Vienna, Austria, 1754

**Lisa Grodin**

Giovanni Rota, Cremona c. 1803

**Noah Strick**

Celia Bridges,  
Cologne, Germany, 1988

**Jolianne Einem**

Mathias Knilling,  
1835 Mittenwald School

**Anthony Martin**

Thomas Oliver Croen,  
Walnut Creek, California, 2005,  
after Francesco Gobetti,  
Venice, Italy, c. 1717

**Maxine Nemerovski**

David Tecchler, Rome, Italy, 1733

**Anna Washburn**

Anonymous, Tyrol, Italy, c. 1760

## VIOLA

**Jessica Troy\***

Timothy Johnson, Hewitt, Texas,  
2006; after Andrea Guarneri,  
Cremona, Italy c. 1676

**Ellie Nishi**

Anonymous, Germany, 18th Century

**Maria Caswell**

Anonymous,  
Mittenwald, Germany, c. 1800

## VIOLONCELLO

**William Skeen, bc**

Anonymous,  
Northern Italy, ca. 1680

*Osher Cello Chair Endowment*

**Clara Abel**

Gaspar Bourbon,  
Brussels, Belgium, late 17th century  
Zheng Cau Memorial Cello Chair

**Eva Lymenstull**

Labeled Peter Wamsley, London,  
England, c. 1730s

## DOUBLE BASS

**Kristin Zoernig, bc**

Joseph Wrent, Rotterdam, The  
Netherlands, 1648

## THEORBO

**David Tayler, bc**

Andreas von Holst, Munich,  
Germany, 2004; after Magno  
Tiefenbrucker, Venice, Italy, 1610

## OBOE

**Gonzalo X. Ruiz\***

Joel Robinson, New York, 1990;  
after Saxon models, c. 1720

*Principal Oboe Chair in Memory of  
Clare Frieman Kivelson and Irene  
Valente Angstadt*

**David Dickey**

Randy Cook;  
Basel, Switzerland; 2008;  
after Jonathan Bradbury,  
London, circa 1720

## BASSOON

**Andrew Schwartz, bc**

Paul Hailperin, Zel, Germany;  
after M. Deper

## TRUMPET

**John Thiessen\***

Stephen Keavy, Oxonford, UK, 1987,  
copy of Ehe 1748

**Dominic Favia**

Aron Vajna, Basel, Switzerland,  
2020; after Johann Wilhelm Haas,  
Nuremberg, Germany, c.1700

## ORGAN

**Hanneke van Proosdij, bc**

Noorlander Orgels, Barneveld,  
Netherlands, 2020

## HARPSICHORD

**Peter Whelan**

John Phillips, Berkeley, 2010;  
after Johann Heinrich Gräbner,  
Dresden, 1722  
Generously lent by  
Peter & Cynthia Hibbard

## VALÉRIE SAINTE-AGATHE, CHORALE DIRECTOR

Valérie Sainte-Agathe, a native of Martinique, is the Chorale Director of Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra & Chorale.

She has served as the Artistic Director of the San Francisco Girls Chorus since 2013, and developed projects with Chanticleer, The King's Singers, Roomful of Teeth, Tenet and Voices of Music. She toured with Kronos Quartet to conduct the world premiere of *At War With Ourselves* by Michael Abels throughout the U.S. and was recently invited as a guest conductor with the San Francisco Symphony for a program featuring works of Brahms conducted by Nathalie Stutzmann. Later this fall, she will be the Guest Conductor for new music ensemble Volti, creating pieces by Caroline Shaw and Pamela Z.

In 2018, Ms. Sainte-Agathe made her Carnegie Hall debut with the Philip Glass Ensemble, conducting with Michael Riesman in Glass's *Music with Changing Parts*. She also conducted the Philip Glass Ensemble in another performance of this work making her debut at London's prestigious Barbican Center in 2019. Between 2014 and 2016, she prepared choruses for Lisa Bielawa's made-for-TV opera, *Vireo* and for Taylor Mac's "Holiday Sauce" production.

She released two recordings: *Final Answer*, on Orange Mountain Music, and *My Outstretched Hand*, featuring composer Aaron Jay Kernis and The Knights conducted by Eric Jacobsen.



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acknowledges the following Season Sponsors  
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Noah Strick  
Elizabeth Williams



# Handel's *Alceste*

**MARCH 5-8, 2025**

**Peter Whelan**, conductor and harpsichord

**Lauren Snouffer**, soprano

**Aaron Sheehan**, tenor

**Philharmonia Chorale, Valérie Sainte-Agathe**, chorale director

Soprano

**Tonia d'Amelio**

**Kayla Bojkovsky**

**Victoria Fraser**

**Julia Grizzell**

**Helene Zindarsian**

**Angelique Zuluaga**

Tenor

**Will Betts**

**Mickey Butts**

**Corey Head**

**Benjamin Liupaogo**

**David Kurtenbach Rivera**

**Jonathan Smucker**

Alto

**Shauna Fallihee**

**Michelle Pavlova**

**Leandra Ramm** (soloist)

**Nathan Stroud**

**Jacque Wilson**

**Celeste Winant**

Bass

**Joel Chapman**

**Jeffrey Fields** (soloist)

**Sepp Hammer**

**Jim Monios**

**Ari Nieh**

**Chung-Wai Soong**

**GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL** (1685–1759)

**Concerto Grosso in G major, Op. 6, No. 1, HWV 319**

A tempo giusto

Allegro

Adagio

Allegro

Allegro

## ***Alceste*, HWV 45**

Incidental music to the play by Tobias Smollett (1721–1771)

Music texts probably by Thomas Morell (1703–1784)

Overture

Grand Entrée

Accompagnato (Tenor) *Ye happy people*

Soli and Chorus *Triumph, Hymen, in the pair*

**Leandra Ramm**, mezzo-soprano

Solo (Soprano) and Chorus *Still caressing and caress'd*

Air (Tenor) *Ye swift minutes as ye fly*

Chorus *O bless, ye pow'rs above*

Air (Soprano) *Gentle Morpheus, son of night*

## **INTERMISSION**

Sinfonia from *Admeto, re di Tessaglia*, HWV 22

Air (Bass) *Ye fleeting shades, I come*

**Jeffrey Fields**, baritone

Chorus *Thrice happy, who in life excel*

Air (Tenor) *Enjoy the sweet Elysian grove*

Passacaille from *Radamisto*, HWV 12a

Chorus *Thrice happy, who in life excel* (Reprise)

Air (Soprano) *Come, Fancy, empress of the brain*

Symphony and Accompagnato (Tenor) *He comes, he rises from below*

Chorus *All hail, thou mighty son of Jove!*

Symphony

Recitative (Tenor) *From high Olympus' top, the seat of God*

Air (Tenor) *Tune your harps, all ye Nine*

Ballo primo

L'ultimo Ballo

Chorus *Triumph, glorious son of Jove*

*Length of performance is approximately 100 minutes including one 20 minute intermission.*

*The use of cameras or recording devices of any kind is strictly prohibited.*

*Please silence or turn off noise making devices before the performance begins.*

**The March 5 performance is co-presented with Stanford Live as part of its 2024-25 season.**

## 1. Overture

## 2. Grand Entrée

## 3. Accompagnato-**Ye happy people**

Ye happy people, with loud accents speak  
Your grateful joy in Hymenean verse;  
Admetus and Alceste claim the song

## 4. **Soli and Chorus-Triumph, Hymen, in the pair**

Triumph, Hymen, in the pair;  
thus united, thus delighted,  
brave the one, the other fair.

## 5. **Solo Chorus-Still caressing, and caress'd**

Still caressing, and caress'd,  
ever blessing, ever blest,  
live the royal happy pair.  
This is, valour, thy reward,  
this, oh beauty, the regard  
kind Heaven pays the virtuous fair.

## 6. **Air-Ye swift minutes as ye fly**

Ye swift minutes as ye fly,  
crown them with harmonious joy!  
Let soft quiet, peace and love  
still each happier hour improve.

While as day each day succeeds,  
lovely and heroic deeds  
in fair virtue's path alone  
add a lustre to the throne.  
Ye swift minutes as ye fly,  
crown them with harmonious joy!

## 7. **Chorus-O bless, ye powers above**

O bless, ye powers above,  
the bridegroom and the bride,  
whose willing hands hath Hymen tied  
in love's eternal bands.  
Ye little gods of Love,  
with roses strew the ground,  
and all around  
in sportive play  
proclaim the happy day.

## 8. **Air-Gentle Morpheus, son of light/ That when bright Aurora's beams**

Gentle Morpheus, son of night,  
hither speed thy airy flight!  
and his weary senses steep  
in the balmy dew of sleep.

That when bright Aurora's beams  
glad the world with golden streams,  
he, like Phoebus, blithe and gay  
may retaste the healthful day.

## **Sinfonia from *Admeto, re di Tessaglia*, HWV 22**

## 9. **Air-Ye fleeting shades, I come**

Ye fleeting shades, I come  
to fix your final doom!  
Step in both bad and good,  
and tilt it o'er the flood;  
in Pluto's dreary shore  
I'll waft you safely o'er  
with this my ebon pole  
though high the waters roll.  
The monarch and the slave  
alike admission have,  
nor can I brook delay;  
haste, haste, ye shades, away!

## 10. Chorus-Thrice happy who in life excel

Thrice happy who in life excel,  
hence doom'd in Pluto's courts to dwell,  
where ye immortal mortals reign,  
now free from sorrow, free from pain.

11. Air-Enjoy the sweet Elysian grove  
Enjoy the sweet Elysian grove,  
seat of pleasure, seat of love;  
pleasure that can never cloy,  
love the source of endless joy.  
Thus, thou unpolluted shade,  
be thy royal virtues paid.

## Passacaille from *Radamisto*, HWV 12a

### Repeated Chorus - Thrice happy who in life excel

## 12. Air-Come Fancy, empress of the brain

Come Fancy, empress of the brain,  
and bring the choicest of thy train  
to soothe the widow'd monarch's pain!  
Close by his side  
in mimic pride  
let fair Alceste still display  
her charms, as on the bridal day.

## 13. Symphony and Accompanato- He comes, he rises from below

He comes, he rises from below,  
with glorious conquest on his brow.

## 14. Chorus-All hail, thou mighty son of Jove!

All hail, thou mighty son of Jove!  
How great thy pow'r! How great thy love!

Fiends, Furies, Gods, all yield to thee,  
and Death hath set his captive free.  
All hail, thou mighty son of Jove!  
How great thy pow'r! How great thy love!

## 15. Symphony

## 16. Recitative-From high Olympus' top

From high Olympus' top, the seat of God,  
descend Apollo and his tuneful choir,  
with all their sportive train, to celebrate  
thy great and gen'rous triumph, son of Jove,  
and hail Admetus with his happy bride.  
Sing ye, ye shepherds, sing, and tread the  
ground.

In mazy dances, and let shouts of joy  
return in echo from the vaulted sky.

## 17. Air-Tune your harps

Tune your harps, all ye Nine,  
to the loud-sounding lays,  
while the glad nations join  
in the great victor's praise!  
Sing his praise, sing his pow'r,  
that in this joyful hour  
bless'd our monarch's arms  
with the fair in all her charms.

## 18. Ballo Primo

## 19. L'Ultimo Ballo

## 20. Chorus-Triumph, thou son of Jove

Triumph, thou glorious son of Jove,  
triumph, happy pair, in love!  
Valour's prize, virtue's claim,  
endless love, eternal fame!

## FINE

# PROGRAM NOTES

## GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

(1685–1759)

### Concerto Grosso in G major Opus 6 No.1

A decade before *Alceste*, in the Autumn of 1739, Handel was kept on his toes organizing an imminent new season of performances at Lincoln's Inn Fields in London. The

burst of energy this administrative challenge drew from Handel also fed into his compositional life and produced one of his instrumental crown jewels: his Twelve Grand Concertos



Opus 6 (also known as 'Concerti Grossi').

The concerto grosso was pioneered in Italy as an orchestral work in which soloists emerge from within the orchestra. Listening to a concerto grosso, our ears are often struck by a strong sense of musical conversation and sharing, characteristics that are given equal importance as the demonstration of individual skill (as in a standard instrumental concerto). It was Arcangelo Corelli who most notably pioneered the concerto grosso form, writing a celebrated set published in 1714 with the label Opus 6.

Handel's publisher, John Walsh, knew how popular Corelli's set remained in England (there was another set labeled Opus 6, by the composer Francesco Geminiani, that was also popular). It was Walsh who suggested Handel write his own concerto grosso set, knowing the composer would be able to use the works to entertain audiences during the intervals and scene-changes that interrupted performances of his oratorios. After the first printing of

the concertos sold out, Walsh added the label 'Opus 6' to the second, hoping the association with Corelli and Geminiani would prove a marketing pull.

Walsh was right. But the link was more than superficial. Handel followed Corelli's model, writing for an orchestra in which two solo violins and a cello emerge as the solo group. In accordance with his refashioning of the music for *Alceste* a decade later, Handel also used the set to demonstrate his fearlessness when it came to reusing music by himself—and by others. The stately introduction to the bright, gregarious first concerto borrows music Handel had already written as the Overture to his opera *Imeneo*, but which is improved 'beyond recognition' according to the musicologist Donald Burrows. That movement segues into the linked first Allegro.

The third and fourth movements are also linked, the Adagio also picking up on the idea of a dialogue between high and low strings, with the second Allegro borrowing material from the Sonata in G major from Domenico Scarlatti's *Essercizi* for keyboard. The final Allegro includes echo effects in the violins that were almost certainly influenced by Handel's English predecessor Henry Purcell. The set's genius, for the musicologist Jonathan Keates, lies in Handel's ability to absorb ideas from all those composers without simply copying them; writing fresh, spontaneous and virtuosic music in the process.

### *Alceste*, HWV 45

*Incidental music to the play by Tobias Smollett*

In the whole of Handel's life and work, nothing quite resembles *Alceste*. This was the composer's only attempt to write a

complete suite of incidental music for a spoken play. And while Handel was no stranger to professional disappointment in the cutthroat environment of the London stage, the failure of *Alceste* to even make it on to a stage—despite the quality of the music Handel wrote for it—must stand as one of the most extraordinary false starts of the composer's career.

It is also one of the most mysterious, and one of the most entertaining to recount. The story begins with a man named Tobias Smollett, a character of unusually broad life experience who was born in Scotland and died in Tuscany, Italy. Along the way the medically-trained Smollett's career took him into the British Royal Navy, where he worked as a surgeon aboard the ship HMS Chichester, participated in the campaign to capture Cartagena (he ended up living for a time in Jamaica). More significantly for us, Smollett developed a literary career and his novels, including *The Adventures of Roderick Random* published in 1748, exercised a significant influence on Charles Dickens.

In 1749, partly off the back of *Roderick Random*'s success, Smollett was offered an advance of £100 by John Rich, who owned and managed the Covent Garden Theatre, to write an elaborate 'masque' based on the story of Admetis and Alcestis as told by Euripides. A masque was a play incorporating singing, dancing and stage effects as well as acting but Smollett was determined this enterprise would go one better. In a letter to a colleague, he wrote that his *Alceste* would include 'such magnificence of scenery as was never exhibited in Britain before.'

Responsible for that scenery was the Italian architect, painter and interior decorator Giovanni Niccolò Servandoni, who that same year had built an elaborate structure in London's Green Park on which Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks* had been performed. Also involved was John Rich, the librettist Thomas Morell (who was probably enlisted to write words for Handel's arias, choruses and recitatives, though we can't be sure) and the entire company of actors, dancers and singers associated with the Covent Garden Theatre.

Handel was enlisted as composer, apparently to cover a debt he owed to Rich. It's unlikely Handel would have thrown himself at a project that, even on paper, looked worryingly complicated and dangerously reliant on Smollett, a man whose temperamental reputation went before him. Still, Handel's professionalism saw him enter into the spirit of the commission and write some of his most majestic and charming music, including the unusually touching aria 'Gentle Morpheus, Son of Night.'

Sure enough, the entire project soon derailed. With the music and script written, the set being built and the rehearsals underway, *Alceste* was suddenly and unequivocally aborted. Why? Nobody quite knows. Morell claimed Rich believed his singers incapable of performing Handel's music, but as the Handel specialist David Vickers has argued, that seems unlikely given those very singers had proven themselves already in the composer's oratorios. More likely is that Rich got cold feet in the face of such an expensive undertaking, especially given that masques had fallen out of fashion. But it's just as likely he and Smollett fell

# PROGRAM NOTES

out, with Rich pulling the production as an assertion of his authority.

Either way, all that survives of *Alceste* is Handel's incidental music. None of it was written for the three principal characters of *Alceste*, Admetus and Hercules, who were assigned speaking roles in the piece. Rather, the music consists of introductions to each scene, dances, set-piece arias (from secondary characters or observing spirits) and mood-establishing or commenting choruses, often notably majestic in character (the large orchestra also included two trumpets).

That story would have been well-known at the time from its telling by Euripides. Handel, indeed, had set it before: in his spicy 1727 opera *Admeto, re di Tessaglia* ('Admeto, King of Thessaly'). But Smollett's version was different: more like that set by the French composer Jean-Baptiste Lully in 1674 as *Alceste, ou Le Triomphe d'Alcide* (to a libretto by Philippe Quinault) and as such, a little closer in content and tone to the original found in Euripides.

It tells of the King of Thessaly, Admetus, who is terminally ill but offered the chance of a reprieve by the god Apollo—on the condition that he can find someone willing to die in his place. Admetus's wife Alceste offers herself in sacrifice so that her husband may live. When Hercules hears of these events later on from the grieving King, he insists on travelling to the underworld, overwhelming Pluto and returning Alceste to Admetus's side in the land of the living. As in Lully's setting, Handel's opens with the celebration of Alceste and Admetus's wedding and includes a song for Charon, the boatman at the River Styx who ferries souls to the underworld.

Listening to Handel's music alone, we are obliged to fill in the narrative and dramatic blanks ourselves; the music for Smollett's play gives us what one contemporary critic has described as 'a musical side-view of the story'. After an overture in the French style—stately introduction, rapid fugue, alternation of the two—we are straight into the 'Grand Entrée' music in celebration of the wedding of Admetus and Alceste. The jubilant chorus bookends individual tributes from the soprano and tenor soloists. The latter's 'Ye swift minutes as ye fly, crown them with harmonious joy!' is notable for Handel's literal treatment of the word 'fly'.

Next we hear from Calliope, Greek mythology's Muse of Poetry, who comforts the sick King Admetus in music Handel apparently strove to get just right, jettisoning a first version before re-writing it entirely with a more focused dramatic atmosphere. From there, it's a jump to the music depicting Charon at the River Styx, again brimming with dramatic evocation (the steady rhythm of the oars) despite its sobriety.

A chorus then introduces us to the languorous domain of Pluto's palace where Alceste resides, a single tenor emerging from the massed voices to encourage her to enjoy her Elysian grove. From this pleasant atmosphere we are returned to the plight of Admetus, now grieving for his wife but with Calliope on hand to encourage him with the florid vocals and ebullient violins of 'Come, Fancy, empress of the brain'.

Suddenly, all is well again: triumph is declared with more grand orchestral music, a 'symphony' in the French style which heralds the arrival of Hercules with the rescued

Alceste, the tenor explaining events in an recitative ('He comes, he rises from below, with glorious conquest on his brow') and the chorus capping the scene with triumph ('All hail, thou mighty son of Jove!').

For the masque's final scene, Handel conjured up a sequence of music unlike anything else in his output and with another nod to the French tradition—this time, apparently, in homage to the 'transformation scenes' that were a feature of the composer Jean-Philippe Rameau's operatic settings of classical stories. On stage—had it ever got to that point—audiences would have seen Apollo descending with his nine muses, after another 'grand symphony' in the French style. The character announces himself in a simple recitative ('From high Olympus' top') and offers an equally thrifty aria ('Tune your harps, all ye muses') before the orchestra plays two dances by Handel, the second of which leads into the final chorus ('Triumph, thou son of Jove, triumph, happy pair, in love!').

That Handel was ambivalent about the cancellation of *Alceste* is possibly connected to his knowledge that in writing the score, he had voided his debt to Rich. But it probably hinged more on his knowledge that unused music was always capable of solving unforeseen problems. With a little help from Morell, the composer 'up-cycled' the vast majority of score for *Alceste* into the brief drama *The Choice of Hercules*, first performed at the Covent Garden Theatre in March 1751 and revived twice thereafter.

*Program notes by Andrew Mellor © 2025*

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A portrait of Avi Stein, a man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a dark suit jacket over a light-colored shirt. The background of the portrait is a gradient of blue and purple.

Avi  
Stein

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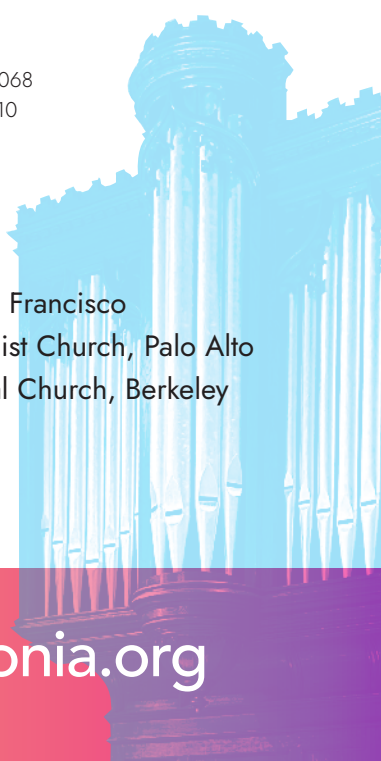
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