



Brenda Rae

Handel Semele

concert performance

Friday 5 April 2019 6.30pm, Hall

The English Concert

Harry Bicket director/harpsichord

Brenda Rae Semele

Elizabeth DeShong Juno/Ino

Soloman Howard Somnus/Cadmus

Benjamin Hulett Jupiter

Ailish Tynan Iris

Christopher Lowrey Athamas

Brian Giebler Apollo

Joseph Beutel Priest

Clarion Choir (**Steven Fox** artistic director)

There will be two intervals of 20 minutes following Part 1 and Part 2

Part of Barbican Presents 2018–19

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Welcome

Tonight we welcome back Harry Bicket and The English Concert for *Semele*, the latest instalment in their Handel series. Last season we were treated to a memorable performance of *Rinaldo*, with a stellar cast led by Iestyn Davies.

Semele, though initially presented as an oratorio, is an opera in all but name. Handel vividly brings to life the tale of gods and mortals, giving his characters music that is by turns dramatic, witty and full of pathos.

An international cast is led by the American soprano Brenda Rae, who sings the self-regarding *Semele*; and The English Concert is joined by the New York-based Clarion Choir.

It promises to be a thrilling evening. Don't forget, if you enjoy this, there's *Rodelinda* to look forward to on 25 April 2020.

Huw Humphreys, Head of Music

Semele: synopsis

Part 1

At the temple of Juno, goddess of marriage, Semele, daughter of King Cadmus of Thebes, prepares to wed Athamas, Prince of Boeotia. The bride appears distraught, while her sister Ino nurses a barely suppressed passion for the bridegroom. Semele herself has a secret lover – the god Jupiter, on whom she calls for help. A distant thunderclap marks his wrath, flames on the altar are suddenly extinguished and the ceremony ends in confusion. As guests disperse, Ino declares her love to Athamas, who seems to reciprocate, but they are interrupted by Cadmus with news of Semele's abduction by Jupiter in the guise of an eagle. The Act concludes with her jubilant aria 'Endless pleasure, endless love'.

interval 20 minutes

Part 2

In 'a pleasant country' evoked by a cheerful sinfonia, Juno, anything but cheerful, awaits her messenger Iris, whom she has sent to spy out Semele's abode. When Iris describes the princess 'in sweet retreat' among Cupids and Graces, Juno's rage is kindled in an eloquent accompanied recitative, as she resolves to seek help from Somnus, god of Sleep, in pursuing her revenge.

Semele, alone in her palace, awaits a visit from Jupiter. When he arrives, in human form, it is to reassure her of his constancy, but she still seems discontented. Alarmed lest she aims to become a goddess herself, Jupiter distracts her with a change of scene, conjuring up a vision of Arcadia and promising a meeting with her sister Ino. The latter appears, rejoicing in the wonderful sounds she now hears around her, and the Act ends with a duet and chorus in praise of this celestial music.

interval 20 minutes

Part 3

'A soft symphony' of divided cellos and bassoons leads us to the cave of Sleep. Somnus, awoken by Juno and Iris, is at first reluctant to help, until the goddess utters the name of his beloved nymph Pasithea. Borrowing his magic rod to charm the dragons guarding Semele, she will send Ino to sleep and assume the latter's identity.

In this disguise, Juno finds Semele restless and alone. She tricks her, with the aid of a magic mirror, into believing herself almost a goddess and urges her to resist Jupiter's advances unless he agrees to appear in his true godlike form. On his approach, Juno hurriedly leaves, exulting in her rival's imminent fate. Semele's apparent coldness prompts Jupiter to swear an oath granting whatever she desires. Following Juno's instructions, she demands his compliance. He cannot refuse and the resulting epiphany, with its thunder and lightning, burns Semele to death.

A final scene, however, turns disaster to happiness. Though the chorus moralises on the heroine's destruction, Ino gains her Athamas at last and Apollo, descending on a cloud, announces the birth of Bacchus, god of wine, from Semele's ashes.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

Semele, HWV58 (1744)

An oratorio in three parts, after a libretto by William Congreve

The edition of 'Semele' used in these performances is published by Bärenreiter-Verlag, Kassel. By arrangement with Faber Music Ltd, London.

What exactly is Handel's *Semele*? That question puzzled some of the audience at its earliest performances in 1744 and has generated controversy ever since. The composer presented it as part of a Lenten oratorio season which also featured the newly written sacred drama *Joseph and His Brethren*. Both works were given, according to approved custom, without scenery or costumes, though the actual setting for each was the theatre in Covent Garden opened 10 years earlier by the impresario John Rich. The previous season the same house had witnessed the premiere of *Samson* and the first London performances of *Messiah*, which Handel had originally presented in Dublin.

Londoners were less welcoming than the Irish, 'that kind and generous nation' as Handel called them, to what would ultimately prove his best-loved work. The 18th century was obsessed with appropriateness and correct form, so that *Messiah*, as a scripture collection centred on Christian theology's essential truths, would have seemed difficult to categorise and, from several aspects, almost blasphemous. Likewise with a work such as *Semele*, the vexed question was where it actually belonged. Is it an oratorio, as offered to the original subscribers to the 1744 season? Or is this drama, whose grander episodes anticipate the monumental Classicism of Gluck and Cherubini, a pioneering attempt by Handel to launch English vernacular opera among listeners for whom the Italian variety no longer seemed commercially viable in London?

The composer himself stayed silent on the issue. Nobody knows who supplied him with the libretto, an adaptation of a text originally written by the dramatist and poet William Congreve in 1705, though it was probably his friend Newburgh Hamilton, who had earlier fashioned *Samson* from Milton's *Samson Agonistes*. In both cases Hamilton had skilfully inserted passages from

other works by the respective authors and his addition of lines by Alexander Pope to *Semele* inspired its most popular number, 'Where'er you walk'.

The Greek myth on which the plot is based fascinatingly foreshadows the Christian story of the Virgin Mary. A mortal woman made pregnant by a god gives birth to a son who himself assumes divine status. In the earlier of these two narratives, Zeus takes a human shape so as to conduct an affair with Semele, daughter of King Cadmus of Thebes. Hera, Queen of Olympus, always suspicious of her philandering husband, disguises herself as an old woman, who convinces Semele that her lover is behaving too mysteriously and urges her to make him reveal his true identity. When he refuses, she denies him access to her bed, whereupon he manifests himself as a thunderbolt, reducing the hapless woman to ashes. The six-month-old child she carries, however, is rescued by the god Hermes, who sews him into Zeus's thigh to bring the pregnancy to term, from which he emerges as the god Dionysus, 'the twice-born', patron of wine and pleasure.

Congreve's recasting of this story as a lyric drama relies on a version by the Roman poet Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*. To this is added the forlorn figure of Prince Athamas, whom Semele is meant to be marrying, and a love interest is developed between him and her sister Ino. Zeus and Hera appear under their Roman names Jupiter and Juno, but the latter, instead of turning herself, as in Ovid's poem, into the gossipy old nurse Beroe, borrows Ino's identity so as to lure Semele to self-destruction.

The libretto had initially been written in around 1706 for the versatile Restoration theatre composer John Eccles, a younger contemporary of Henry Purcell. Subtitled 'An Opera', the spectacle was intended to inaugurate the new

Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket (where most of Handel's Italian operas were later premiered). Things did not go well on this occasion. Eccles, crotchety and eccentric, dawdled over the assignment, the glamorous actress Anne Bracegirdle gave up the title-role and Congreve himself eventually forsook the enterprise altogether. Eccles, while retaining his post as Master of the Queen's Musick, retreated in a huff to spend his old age fishing at Hampton Wick and this original *Semele* remained unperformed until 1972.

Not surprisingly, given Congreve's mastery of witty banter in plays such as *The Way of the World* and *The Double Dealer*, the essentially tragic tale of *Semele* in his hands becomes nuanced with humour, whether in the realism of her exchanges with Jupiter or in the hilarious scene where Juno prods Somnus, god of Sleep, into unwilling action. Handel and his anonymous adaptor kept as much of this comic element as they could, while applying a judicious nip-and-tuck to other features of the libretto. The role of Ino was developed so that her arrival on Olympus, originally presented in dumb show, became a fully fledged musical episode consisting of an air, duet and chorus. Juno's 'Hence, Iris, hence away' was transmuted from a recitative into a powerfully doom-laden aria, while 'Cease, cease your vows', sung by a priest, re-emerged as a chorus, heightening the tensions of the opening act. *Semele*, on the other hand, saw several of her solo numbers excised; and the character of Cupid was discarded altogether, though Handel wrote music for him.

Since *The Story of Semele*, as Handel called it, was composed for his oratorio season, the choral element needed a more emphatic presence than Congreve had allotted to it. Handel's treatment is superb throughout, using these massed voices not simply as commentators in the traditional style of classical

tragedy but as active participants at the start and finish of the piece. In between, they generate a whole range of different moods and reactions, frolicking with the giddy young *Semele*, shuddering in alarm at Jupiter's thunderbolts, celebrating music's potency in the rapturous 'Bless the glad earth' and drawing a sombre moral in 'O terror and astonishment!', surely one of the finest choral movements in the whole of musical drama.

Intrinsically, however, *Semele*'s story explores the ancient trope of two women pursuing the same man with fatal consequences. Handel brilliantly exploits and heightens the contrasts within Congreve's central trio. If Jupiter at first seems the standard-issue amorous rake, we are soon touched by his sensitivity in 'Where'er you walk' and his genuine anguish in 'Ah, whither is she gone?', created by an obligation to fulfil the oath he knows will utterly destroy *Semele*. Juno, whatever her divine status, is all too human as the jealous wife bent on crushing that 'vain, wretched fool', her rival. As for the heroine herself, Handel uses the singer's bravura in arias such as 'Endless pleasure, endless love' and 'Myself I shall adore' to emphasise her fatal hubris. In each of them an exuberant vocal line maps out the road to ruin.

These three roles were designed for artists of varied and exceptional gifts. *Semele* was given to Elisabeth Duparc, known as 'La Francesina', a Frenchwoman trained in Italy whose 'natural warble and agility of voice' had been shown to advantage in Handel's last Italian operas. Discerning and accomplished, she was a composer herself, as well as a talented dancer and painter. Jupiter was sung by the tenor John Beard, one of the composer's most valued and successful performers, with whom a long association linked works as different from one another as *Alcina* and *Jephtha*. For the dual

role of Juno and Ino Handel engaged Esther Young, a singing actress with sufficient versatility to project two very different characters within the same drama.

His orchestra was chosen, as ever, from among London's finest players. As if to underline the score's theatrical affinities, instrumentation is kept to the simplest, limited to the kind of band deployed in Italian opera of the previous decades. Finely wrought string accompaniment for the arias is reinforced by oboes and bassoons in the choruses and the use, at various points, of horns, trumpets and timpani. Despite crucial contributions by the chorus, the overall stress, as in Handel's stage works, is on intimate exchanges among a small, tightly knit cast. A number such as the quartet 'Why dost thou thus untimely grieve?', for example, focuses on personal relationships and private desires, as opposed to the grand public ceremonial which provides its broader context.

Audience reaction to *Semele* was decidedly mixed. Some appear to have resented the insertion of a secular English-language musical

drama into a Lenten oratorio season, suspecting the composer of trying to spike his rivals' guns. 'All the opera people are enraged at Handel', wrote his friend Mary Delany, noting 'a strong party against it, viz the fine ladies, petits-maitres and ignoramuses', though she herself was captivated by the whole score. Others were made uneasy by the eroticism and the humorous element, survivals of that Restoration era which the Georgians, in terms of refinement and propriety, piqued themselves on having surpassed. Such aspects were decidedly unwelcome to Charles Jennens, librettist of Handel's *Saul* and compiler of the text for *Messiah*. Refined and hypersensitive, he damned *Semele* as being nothing but 'a bawdy opera' and was notably absent – whatever his passion for the composer's music – when the piece was revived the following season, following which it was never heard again during Handel's lifetime. London failed Handel through its dim reception of this remarkable achievement. Nowadays, however, its creative resourcefulness, dazzling variety of moods and compelling theatricality have made *Semele* one of the best-loved of all his dramatic works.

Programme note and synopsis © Jonathan Keates

About the performers

Richard Haughton



Harry Bicket

Harry Bicket director/harpsichord

Internationally renowned as an opera and concert conductor, Harry Bicket is especially noted for his interpretation of Baroque and Classical repertoire and in 2007 became Artistic Director of The English Concert, one of the UK's finest period orchestras. He became Chief Conductor of Santa Fe Opera in 2013 and from 2018 assumed the Music Directorship. Productions at Santa Fe in recent seasons have included *Fidelio*, *La finta giardiniera*, *Roméo et Juliette*, *Alcina* and *Candide*. Born in Liverpool, he studied at the Royal College of Music and Oxford University.

Highlights this season include return visits to the Metropolitan Opera (*The Magic Flute*), Lyric Opera of Chicago (*Ariodante*), Cleveland Orchestra, Santa Fe Opera (*Così fan tutte* and Strauss's *Four Last Songs*) and Prague Philharmonia. Plans with The English Concert include his own arrangements of Mozart's works for mechanical clockwork organ, Bach cantatas for Advent and Wayne Eagling's ballet *Remembrance*, set to Handel's *Ode to St Cecilia's Day*. The orchestra continues its Handel opera series with the work we hear tonight, *Semele*, which it also performs in the USA and Europe.

Highlights of recent seasons include acclaimed productions in the United States and Canada with Lyric Opera of Chicago (*Orphée et Eurydice*, *Carmen* and *Rinaldo*); Santa Fe Opera (*Candide*, *Fidelio* and *Alcina*); Houston Grand Opera (*The Marriage of Figaro* and *Rusalka*); Canadian Opera Company (*Maometto II* and *Hercules*); and the Metropolitan Opera (*The Marriage of Figaro*, *Rodelinda*, *La clemenza di Tito* and *Giulio Cesare*). In the concert hall, he has conducted the Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles and New York Philharmonic orchestras, Los Angeles and Saint Paul Chamber orchestras, the Boston, Cincinnati, Detroit, Houston, Indianapolis, San Francisco and Seattle Symphony orchestras, NACO Ottawa and the Minnesota Orchestra. He has also led masterclasses at the Juilliard School.

Within Europe he has conducted performances at the Liceu Barcelona (*Agrippina*, *Lucio Silla* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Bordeaux Opera (*Alcina*) and Theater an der Wien (*Iphigénie en Tauride* and *Mitridate, re di Ponto*) and appeared with the Monte-Carlo, Oslo, Rotterdam, Royal Liverpool and Royal Stockholm Philharmonic orchestras, Royal Northern Sinfonia, the Bavarian Radio and BBC Scottish Symphony orchestras, Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France.

Recent highlights with The English Concert include UK, European and American performances of *Rinaldo* and *Ariodante* (featuring Joyce DiDonato); tours to the Far East; regular Wigmore Hall and Barbican projects; and appearances at the BBC Proms.

He made his Glyndebourne Festival debut in 1996 with Peter Sellars's production of *Theodora* and returned in 1999 and 2003. He is now a regular guest at the Metropolitan Opera, following his debut there in 2004 with an acclaimed *Rodelinda* featuring Renée Fleming and David Daniels.

Recordings to date with The English Concert include releases on a range of labels featuring Elizabeth Watts, David Daniels, Lucy Crowe, Dame Sarah Connolly and Rosemary Joshua; their most recent release is a concerto disc on Signum. Harry Bicket's discography also includes five recordings with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. His *Gramophone Award*-nominated CDs include *Sento amor*, a disc of arias by Gluck, Handel and Mozart with David Daniels, and *Il tenero momento* with Susan Graham, featuring arias by Mozart and Gluck.



Dario Acosta

Brenda Rae

Brenda Rae Semele

Brenda Rae is a regular guest at the world's leading opera houses in a range of demanding principal roles.

Last season she returned to the Bavarian State Opera as Aminta (*Die schweigsame Frau*) under Stefan Soltesz in Barrie Kosky's production, Queen of the Night (*The Magic Flute*) under Asher Fisch on tour to Japan and Zerbinetta (*Ariadne auf Naxos*) under Lothar Koenigs in Robert Carsen's production, a role she sang at the Berlin State Opera under Eun Sun Kim. She also reprised Gilda (*Rigoletto*) and works with Kim again as Amina (*La sonnambula*). In the USA she returned to Santa Fe Opera as Cunegonde (*Candide*) in Laurent Pelly's production conducted

by Harry Bicket, following her acclaimed performance there in the title-role of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. She recently made her debut with the Lyric Opera of Chicago and next year makes her Metropolitan Opera debut.

She made her American operatic stage debut at the 2013 Santa Fe Opera Festival as Violetta (*La traviata*) and has since returned as Norina (*Don Pasquale*) as well as both Mme Vladimirescu and Mme Herz (*Der Schauspieldirektor*). She went on to make her house and role debut as Handel's Semele at Seattle Opera, and in 2017 added Amenaide (*Tancredi*) to her repertoire at Opera Philadelphia.

Brenda Rae is a former ensemble member of Frankfurt Opera, where she sang a wide range of repertoire, most notably Zerbinetta, leading to house debuts at the Berlin and Hamburg State operas and further performances in Munich. She made debuts at English National Opera in the title-role of Berg's *Lulu*, Opéra national de Paris as Anne Trulove (*The Rake's Progress*), the Vienna State Opera as Lucia, and the 2011 Glyndebourne Festival as Armida (*Rinaldo*), which was also released on DVD.

On the concert platform she has sung the role of Polissena (*Radamisto*) with The English Concert and Harry Bicket here at the Barbican, and at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and Carnegie Hall. Her recital appearances include the celebrated Schubertiade in both Hohenems and Schwarzenberg, and her debut at Weill Hall in a programme of Richard Strauss, Liszt, Debussy and Schubert. In December 2017 she made her debut at La Scala, singing Mozart's Mass in C minor and *Exsultate, jubilate* under Giovanni Antonini.

Brenda Rae's recordings include *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Wagner's *Die Feen*, Milhaud's *The Oresteia of Aeschylus*, Lowell Liebermann's *Little Heaven* and Offenbach's *Fantasio*.



Elizabeth DeShong

Elizabeth DeShong Juno/Ino

Recent highlights for the American mezzo-soprano Elizabeth DeShong include returns to Washington National Opera to sing Ruggiero (*Alcina*), followed by Arsace (*Semiramide*) at the Metropolitan Opera. In concert she performed Mendelssohn's *Elijah* with Music of the Baroque, and made her debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in Schubert's Mass No 6, as well as giving the world premiere of *Three Lisel Mueller Settings* by Maxwell Raimi, both conducted by Riccardo Muti. In Europe she returned to Glyndebourne to sing Suzuki (*Madama Butterfly*) and made her debut with the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Bernstein's 'Jeremiah' Symphony, under Sir Antonio Pappano.

In 2016–17 she returned to the Lyric Opera of Chicago to sing Adalgisa (*Norma*) and made her debuts at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and Bavarian State Opera as Suzuki. In concert she performed Beethoven's Symphony

No 9 with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Verdi's *Requiem* with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Mahler's Symphony No 2 with the Oregon Symphony Orchestra.

She has appeared at leading opera houses worldwide, including the Metropolitan Opera, New York, San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Los Angeles Opera, Canadian Opera Company, English National Opera, Vienna State Opera, Opéra National de Bordeaux and the Glyndebourne Festival.

Orchestras with which she has worked include the Cleveland Orchestra, the Baltimore, Cincinnati, Dallas, Pittsburgh and Toronto Symphony orchestras, Orchestra of St Luke's, National Symphony Orchestra, Washington DC, and the Royal Flemish Philharmonic Orchestra.

Her wide-ranging operatic roles include Angelina (*La Cenerentola*), Calbo (*Maometto II*), Arsace (*Semiramide*), Rosina (*The Barber of Seville*), Hermia (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and the pastiche opera *The Enchanted Island*, Hansel (*Hansel and Gretel*), Maffio Orsini (*Lucrezia Borgia*), Fenena (*Nabucco*) and the Dresser, Schoolboy and Page (*Lulu*).

Elizabeth DeShong was the recipient of Washington National Opera's 'Artist of the Year' award in 2010. On DVD she can be seen in the Metropolitan Opera's *The Enchanted Island* and San Francisco Opera's production of *Lucrezia Borgia*. Her recording of *Messiah* with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra under Sir Andrew Davis has been warmly acclaimed.



Soloman Howard

Soloman Howard Somnus/Cadmus

Soloman Howard is a recent graduate of Washington National Opera's Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program and he has already received praise for his vivid performances in the opera house and on the concert stage.

Highlights this season include returns to the Metropolitan Opera as the King (*Aida*), Los Angeles Opera as the Monk (*Don Carlo*), Santa Fe Opera as Colline (*La bohème*) and to Washington National Opera to reprise the title-role he created for the company in *The Lion, The Unicorn, and Me* by Jeanine Tesori and J D McClatchy. He also makes his Canadian operatic debut with Opéra de Montréal as Fafner in *Das Rheingold*, undertakes the current international tour of *Semele* with Harry Bicket leading The English Concert and makes his debut with the Handel & Haydn Society in Mozart's Requiem.

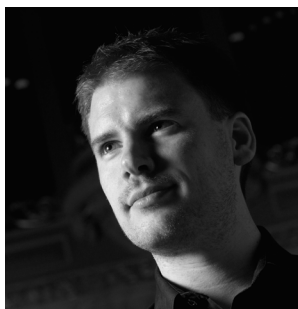
Last season he made opera house debuts on three continents – with San Francisco Opera, Madrid's Teatro Real and at the Teatro Municipal de Santiago in Chile. In concert he gave his first performances of Hunding (*Die Walküre*) at the Miami Music Festival; he also sang Beethoven's Ninth Symphony under both Gustavo Dudamel and Christian Arming.

Recent highlights include performances of *Aida* at the Metropolitan Opera; *Simon Boccanegra* at the Opéra national de Bordeaux; *Don Giovanni* at Santa Fe Opera; *La traviata* at Los Angeles Opera; *The Magic Flute* and *Macbeth* at the Glimmerglass Festival; and the title-role in D J Sparr's *Approaching Ali* at North Carolina Opera and Washington National Opera. For the latter he has also sung Fafner in Wagner's *Ring* and leading roles in *The Magic Flute*, *Show Boat*, *Don Giovanni* and *Nabucco*; as well as creating the roles of Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King, Jr in the world premiere of the revised edition of Philip Glass's *Appomattox*.

He has appeared on the concert stages of many prominent venues, including the Palau de la Música Catalana in Barcelona, Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, the Vienna Musikverein and Carnegie Hall, among others.

The Anti-Defamation League presented Soloman Howard with their 'Making a Difference Award' in 2016 for raising awareness of voting rights through his performances of *Appomattox* at the Kennedy Center, and for bringing opera into the larger community. He is a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music and Morgan State University.

Hans Lebbe



Benjamin Hulett

Benjamin Hulett Jupiter

Benjamin Hulett trained as a choral scholar at New College, Oxford, and studied with David Pollard at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. He has a growing reputation in the opera house, concert hall and recording studio.

He was a member of the Hamburg State Opera from 2005 to 2009, where his successes included Tamino (*The Magic Flute*), Ferrando (*Così fan tutte*), Novice (*Billy Budd*) and Steersman (*The Flying Dutchman*) and he returned as a guest in the roles of Tamino and Narraboth (*Salome*). He made his debuts at the Bavarian State Opera (*Alcina*), Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin (Henze's *Phaedra*), Theater an der Wien (the world premiere of Johannes Kalitzke's *Die Besessenen*), Salzburg Festival (*Elektra*), the Baden-Baden Festspielhaus (*Salome*) and for Opera di Roma as Madwoman (*Curlew River*), returning for Gonzalve (*L'heure espagnole*).

In the UK he made his role debut as Peter Quint (*The Turn of the Screw*) for Opera North, Ferrando for Grange Park Opera, Fenton (*Falstaff*) for Opera Holland Park

and he appeared in Sir Jonathan Miller's staging of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* at the National Theatre. He made his debut with the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, as Edmondo (*Manon Lescaut*), returning as Beppe (*Pagliacci*). For the Glyndebourne Festival Opera he has sung in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Handel's *Saul* and Cavalli's *Hipermestra*. He has also sung the role of Tom Rakewell (*The Rake's Progress*) in Caen, Limoges, Reims, Rouen and Luxembourg.

In concert he has worked with many leading conductors, including Fabio Biondi, Ivor Bolton, Frans Brüggen, Colin Davies, Charles Dutoit, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Christopher Hogwood, Juanjo Mena, Kent Nagano, Sir Roger Norrington, Trevor Pinnock and Sir Simon Rattle. He has appeared at the BBC Proms and the Edinburgh Festival.

He is also increasingly in demand as an interpreter of song and has given recitals at the Wigmore Hall, Aldeburgh Festival, Buxton Festival, Oxford Lieder, Leeds Lieder, National Portrait Gallery, Henley Festival, Freie Akademie des Kunstes in Hamburg and Hamburg State Opera, collaborating with pianists including Sir András Schiff, Graham Johnson, Malcolm Martineau, Christopher Glynn, Joseph Middleton, Simone Young and Alexander Soddy. His recordings range from the early Baroque to new commissions and have received a number of awards.

Benjamin Hulett's recent and current highlights include returns to Welsh National Opera, Garsington Opera and the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, and debuts with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra under Dutoit, Opéra de Lille and Madrid's Teatro Real.



Ailish Tynan

Ailish Tynan Iris

Irish soprano Ailish Tynan won the 2003 Rosenblatt Recital Song Prize at BBC Cardiff Singer of the World. She was a member of the Vilar Young Artist Programme at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist.

She established herself with operatic roles, including Gretel (*Hansel and Gretel*) at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Welsh National Opera and Scottish Opera; Madame Cortese (*Il viaggio a Reims*) Marzelline (*Fidelio*) and Madame Podtoshina's Daughter (Shostakovich's *The Nose*) for the Royal Opera; the title-role in *The Cunning Little Vixen* for Grange Park Opera; Tigrane (*Radamisto*) for English National Opera; Papagena (*The Magic Flute*) for La Scala and the Royal Opera; Despina (*Così fan tutte*) at the Théâtre du Capitole de Toulouse; Héro (*Béatrice et Bénédicte*) for Houston Grand Opera, Opéra Comique and Grand Théâtre de la Ville de Luxembourg; Sophie (*Der Rosenkavalier*), Nannetta (*Falstaff*) and Atalanta (*Xerxes*) for Royal Swedish Opera;

and Miss Wordsworth (*Albert Herring*) for Opéra Comique and Opéra de Rouen.

Highlights on the concert platform have included Mahler's Second, Fourth and Eighth Symphonies, Verdi's Requiem, Haydn's *The Creation*, Handel's *Messiah* and Vaughan Williams's *Hodie*. She has also appeared at both the First and the Last Night of the BBC Proms. Conductors with whom she has worked include Myung-whun Chung, Sir Andrew Davis, Richard Egarr, Sir Mark Elder, Valery Gergiev, Michael Hofstetter, Paavo Järvi, Kirill Karabits, Lorin Maazel, Andris Nelsons, Sir Antonio Pappano and Jac van Steen.

She is also in demand as a recitalist and works regularly with pianists including Iain Burnside, James Baillieu, Graham Johnson and Simon Lepper, giving recitals at venues and festivals including the Wigmore Hall (where she gave the premiere of Judith Weir's *Nuit d'Afrique*) and at the Edinburgh, City of London, Gregynog, St Magnus, Brighton and West Cork festivals and the Vinterfestsspill in Norway.

Her recordings include Fauré *mélodies*, *Nacht und Träume*, *An Irish Songbook*, *Messiah* and Mahler's Eighth Symphony. She has also presented several episodes of *Saturday Classics* for the BBC and has been a jury member for the Song Prize at BBC Cardiff Singer of the World and the Wigmore Hall Song Competition.

Recent and forthcoming highlights include Mahler's Eighth Symphony under Marc Albrecht in her debut with the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, recitals at the Wigmore Hall, her Carnegie Hall debut with The English Concert, Verdi's Requiem at King's College, Cambridge, and a return to Grange Park Opera.



Christopher Lowrey

Christopher Lowrey Athamas

Christopher Lowrey is emerging into the front rank of young countertenors on both the opera stage and concert platform. He has worked with leading opera companies and orchestras around the world. Conductors with whom he has appeared include Roberto Abbado, David Bates, William Christie, Laurence Cummings, Christian Curnyn, Richard Egarr, Leonardo García Alarcón, Erin Helyard, Vladimir Jurowski, Stephen Layton, Martin Pearlman, Christophe Rousset and Masaaki Suzuki.

Recent engagements include his English National Opera debut in Handel's *Rodelinda* (Unulfo) and Nico Muhly's *Marnie*; *Messiah* with the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, at London's Union Chapel; Bach cantatas at the Philharmonie de Paris with Ensemble Pygmalion; Handel's *Orlando* with La Nuova Musica at St John's Smith Square; Brett Dean's *Hamlet*

for the Adelaide Festival; Bach's B minor Mass at Winchester College; Handel's *Il trionfo del tempo e del disinganno* at the London Handel Festival; Handel's *Arminio* at the Göttingen Handel Festival; Handel's *Rinaldo* with Les Talens Lyriques in Basle; and a concert tour of Pergolesi's *Stabat mater* with Sandrine Piau and Les Talens Lyriques.

His recent roles include Guildenstern (*Hamlet*) for the Glyndebourne Festival; David (*Saul*) for the Adelaide Festival; Didymus (*Theodora*) and Tamerlano (Vivaldi's *Bajazet*) with Pinchgut Opera; Oberon (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) in Geneva and Valencia; the title-roles in *The Choice of Hercules* and *Solomon* with The English Concert; Gernando (Handel's *Faramondo*) at the Brisbane Baroque Festival and the Göttingen Handel Festival; and *Discordia/Euripilo/Polluce* in the modern premiere of Cavalli's *Elena* at the Aix-en-Provence Festival.

His discography includes works by Handel, Monteverdi and Vivaldi, among others.

Christopher Lowrey is originally from the USA and holds degrees from Brown University, the University of Cambridge (where he was a member of the Choir of Trinity College) and the Royal College of Music. He studied with Russell Smythe, Derek Lee Ragin, Ashley Stafford and Pierre Massé. He has received a Helpmann Award, Sullivan Foundation Award, the Michael Oliver Prize at the London Handel Singing Competition and the Keasbey Award.



The English Concert

The English Concert

The English Concert is an outstanding orchestra: renowned for its musical quality, its ambition and the variety of its live and recorded output, it's also unique in terms of the zeal of its players for working and performing together, and unwavering in its desire to connect with audiences throughout the world.

Under the artistic direction of Harry Bicket and principal guest director Kristian Bezuidenhout, The English Concert has earned a reputation for combining urgency, passion and fire with precision, delicacy and beauty.

The artistic partners with whom it collaborates reflect and enhance its pursuit for new ways to bring music to life. Joyce DiDonato, Dame Sarah Connolly, Iestyn Davies, Alison Balsom, Trevor Pinnock, Dominic Dromgoole, Tom Morris and many more have not only brought their

extraordinary skills to individual projects but continue to help The English Concert to shape the way it performs.

One cornerstone of the orchestra's annual cycle is its international Handel Opera tour. This has grown from an ongoing relationship with Carnegie Hall and the itinerary now regularly takes in the Theater an der Wien, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Elbphilharmonie and Barbican, and the roster of great halls continues to grow. Meanwhile, the ensemble's regular London series allows them to explore a radically different path, presenting programmes to a home audience that challenge and inspire the musicians. It launches its partnership with Garsington Opera this year with performances of Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610*.

www.englishconcert.co.uk

Clarion Choir

The Clarion Choir is based in New York and has appeared on some of the great stages of North America and Europe. The group was featured on PBS's NYC-Arts programme in 2014, and its debut recording, released in 2016, was nominated for a Grammy and a *BBC Music Magazine* Choral Award. The choir made an acclaimed Lincoln Center debut, performing Bach chorales, at the 2011 White Light Festival. In 2014 it gave the New York premiere of *Passion Week* by Maximilian Steinberg, reprising the piece in 2016 in Moscow, St Petersburg and London.

The Clarion Choir performs regularly as part of the Met Live Arts programme in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Last May it also performed Gregorian chant with Madonna at the Met Gala in a three-song set that included the world premiere of her new song 'Beautiful Game'.

Highlights this season include a tour with the Orchestra of St Luke's under Leonard Slatkin and the current tour with Harry Bicket. The choir has recently released its second recording, *Memory Eternal*, which received an Editor's Choice in *Gramophone* magazine and a Grammy nomination.

Steven Fox artistic director

Steven Fox is Artistic Director of the Clarion Choir and the Clarion Orchestra, and is in his first season as Music Director of the Cathedral

Choral Society at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC.

He founded Musica Antiqua St Petersburg – Russia's first period-instrument orchestra – at the age of 21, and from 2008 to 2013 was an Associate Conductor at New York City Opera. He served as Assistant Conductor for the Metropolitan Opera Lindemann Young Artist Program's and Juilliard Opera's production of Gluck's *Armide* in 2012. Since then he has appeared as a guest conductor with renowned orchestras and opera companies such as the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Handel & Haydn Society, Juilliard415, the Charleston, Quebec and Tucson Symphony orchestras, Quebec Opera and Music of the Baroque in Chicago.

His performances have also taken him to some of the most prestigious halls internationally, such as the Grand Philharmonic Hall and Hermitage Theatre in St Petersburg, the Rachmaninov Hall in Moscow, the Duke's Hall in the Royal Academy of Music and the Vatican. In 2017 he conducted Clarion's first fully staged opera production, *The Magic Flute*. He was named an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in 2010 and received a Grammy nomination for both his recordings with the Clarion Choir. He has given masterclasses and music clinics at Dartmouth College, the Juilliard School and Yale University, where he served for two years as preparatory conductor of the Yale Schola Cantorum.

The English Concert

**Artistic Director/
Harpsichord**
Harry Bicket

Violin 1
Nadja Zwiener *leader*
Alice Evans
Julia Kuhn
Thérèse Timoney
Silvia Schweinberger

Violin 2
Tuomo Suni
Kinga Ujszászi
Jacek Kurzydło
Diana Lee

Viola
Alfonso Leal del Ojo
Oliver Wilson

Cello
Joseph Crouch
Jonathan Byers
Gavin Kibble

Double Bass
Christine Sticher

Oboe
Marta Bławat
Hilary Stock

Bassoon
Alberto Grazi
Zoe Shevlin

Horn
Ursula Paludan
Monberg
Martin Lawrence

Trumpet
Mark Bennett
Stian Aareskjold

Timpani
Stephen Burke

Theorbo
William Carter

Harpsichord/Organ
Tom Foster

*Keyboards supplied
and tuned by
Keith McGowan*

Chief Executive
Alfonso Leal del Ojo

Orchestra Manager
Sarah Fenn

**Production
Coordinator**
Nick Hardisty

Financial Controller
Gill Rees

Clarion Choir

Artistic Director
Steven Fox

Soprano
Jessica Beebe
Madeline Healey
Linda Jones
Molly Netter
Nacole Palmer
Molly Quinn
Nola Richardson
Melanie Russell

Alto
Luthien Brackett
Kristen Dubenion-
Smith

Roger Isaacs
Tim Keeler
Timothy Parsons
Mikki Sodergren

Tenor
Steven Fox
Andrew Fuchs
Brian Giebler
Tim Hodges
Lawrence Jones
Jonathan Ramseyer

Bass
Joseph Beutel
Kelvin Chan
Michael Hawes
Tim Krol
Neil Netherly
Jonathan Woody