

Les Arts Florissants/William Christie

Start time: 7.30pm

Approximate running time: 155 minutes including a 20 minute interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change

Programme

George Frideric Handel *L'Allegro, il Penseroso, ed il Moderato*

Part one

Concerto Grosso Op 6, No 10 in D Minor –
Overture

1. L'Allegro Tenor recitative accompany,d
'Hence! loathed Melancholy'
2. Il Penseroso Soprano recitative accompany,d
'Hence! vain deluding joys'
3. L'Allegro Treble air
'Come, thou goddess, fair and free'
4. Il Penseroso Soprano air
'Come rather, goddess, sage and holy'
5. L'Allegro Tenor air & chorus
'Haste thee, nymph, and bring with thee'
6. L'Allegro Tenor air & chorus
'Come and trip it as you go'
7. Il Penseroso Soprano recitative accompany,d
'Come, pensive nun, devout and pure'
8. Il Penseroso Soprano air & chorus
'Come, but keep thy wonted state'
9. L'Allegro Tenor & Treble recitative
'Hence loathed Melancholy'
10. L'Allegro Treble air
'Mirth, admit me of thy crew'
11. Il Penseroso Soprano recitative accompany,d
'First, and chief, on golden wing'
12. Il Penseroso Soprano air
'Sweet bird, that shuns't the noise of folly'
13. L'Allegro Bass recitative
'Mirth, admit me of thy crew'
14. Il Penseroso Soprano air
'Oft on a plat of rising ground'
15. L'Allegro Tenor recitative
'If I give thee honour due'
16. L'Allegro Tenor air
'Let me wander, not unseen'
- 19a. L'Allegro Treble air & chorus
'Or let the merry bells ring round'

Part two

- 20a. Il Penseroso Soprano recitative accompany,d
'Hence vain deluding joys'

30. Il 22. 22. Il Penseroso Soprano air
'But O! sad virgin, that thy power'
- Il Penseroso Soprano recitative
'Thus, Night, oft see me in thy pale career'
23. L'Allegro chorus (with Bass)
'Populous cities please me then'
24. L'Allegro Tenor air
'There let Hymen oft appear'
25. Il Penseroso Soprano recitative accompany,d
'Me, when the sun begins to fling'
26. Il Penseroso Soprano air
'Hide me from day's garish eye'
27. L'Allegro Tenor air
'I'll to the well-trod stage anon'
28. L'Allegro Treble air
'And ever against eating cares'
30. L'Allegro Tenor air & chorus
'These delights if thou canst give'
31. Il Penseroso chorus (with Soprano)
'There let the pealing organ blow'
33. Il Penseroso chorus (with Soprano)
'These pleasures, Melancholy, give'

Part three

34. Il Moderato Bass recitative accompany,d
'Hence! boast not, ye profane'
35. Il Moderato Bass air
Come, with native lustre shine
36. Il Moderato Bass recitative accompany,d
& chorus
'Sweet temp'rance in thy right hand bear'
37. Il Moderato Soprano air
'Come, with gentle hand restrain'
- Il Moderato Tenor recitate
'No more short life they then will spend'
38. Il Moderato Tenor air
'Each action will derive new grace'
39. L'Allegro & Il Penseroso Soprano & Tenor duet
'As steals the morn upon the night'
40. Il Moderato chorus
'Thy pleasure, Moderation, give'

barbican

It seems only appropriate for a work built around oppositions, contrasts and contraries that it's easier to define *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* by what it is not, rather than what it is, writes Alexandra Coghlan.

The piece isn't strictly an oratorio or an ode, neither is it a masque, a cantata, nor its more expansive cousin a serenata. The product of multiple creators, professional and amateur, including Milton and Handel as well as Messiah librettist Charles Jennens and politician-philosopher James Harris, it's a work in which form and content are uniquely entwined, a piece so endlessly adapted and reworked that no definitive score can exist. Perhaps this explains the work's comparative neglect: it's harder to love what we cannot grasp or name. It's certainly no fault of a score that finds Handel at his most bewitchingly inventive.

It is best, then, to take *L'Allegro* on its own terms: an 'entertainment', as Jennens simply described it, that pairs Milton's lyrical, pastoral verse with some of Handel's most ravishing music, an endlessly attractive and varied sequence of words and music – a string of pearls linked less by narrative or drama than by theme and tone. To understand the piece is to see it in context: the product of the changing milieu and mood of London's concert and opera-going public in the first half of the 18th century.

Composed in 1740, *L'Allegro's* story really begins in 1732 and the London premieres of two very different works. Both *Acis and Galatea* and *Esther* had their origins in Handel's time at Cannons over a decade earlier – works produced for private performances for the composer's patron, the Duke of Chandos. Since those early days in England, Handel had established himself during the 1720s as London's leading opera composer and impresario with hits including *Rinaldo*, *Giulio Cesare* and *Alcina*.

But competition and a market rapidly becoming saturated, rendered unstable not only by audience weariness but scheming cabals and singers' volatile egos, led Handel – the eternal entrepreneur – to explore new musical territory. An unauthorised performance of *Esther* by a rival in April 1732 seems to have spurred the composer to reclaim ownership with his own series of performances of a new and expanded version of the score at the King's Theatre in May. Success was immediate. Audiences who had tired of Italian exoticism were delighted to hear Handel setting English words, and the sacred oratorio in English was born. It was a similar story with the masque *Acis*, expanded by the composer in 1732 into a full-length serenata.

The two works represent a sea-change in Handel's focus, a shift away from Italian opera towards the English works – predominately sacred oratorios – that would dominate the latter part of the composer's career. The secular text of *L'Allegro* (which, despite its Italian title, is in English) sets it apart, and while both this and the libretto's gentle subject-matter – a debate between a cheerful man and a serious one, each represented not by a character but a series of self-contained vignettes and episodes – might suggest a lightweight, disposable sort of 'entertainment', the result is rather an exercise in lightly worn philosophy and musical sophistication.

The challenge of an extended work with neither narrative nor characters is immense, as 19th-century Handel biographer Victor Schoelcher makes clear. 'It required,' he writes, 'all the boldness of genius to attempt a subject so eminently undramatic. Never had music to depend upon herself so entirely'. This last comment rather grandly dismisses both Milton's two short pastoral poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, the original source of the piece, and their elegant interweaving by Charles Jennens, who also supplied a third voice – *Il Moderato* – a position of moderation and middle-ground that fulfilled the composer's desire for a final resolution that would unite both contraries in 'one Moral Design'.

While the synopsis may indeed be 'eminently undramatic', the contrasts that animate Milton's verse and the vividness of their supporting imagery, context and language seems to have fired Handel to unusual creativity. This is no black and white opposition: just as *L'Allegro* can be gentle, melancholy and contemplative as well as exuberant, so *Il Penseroso* can be rapturously, ecstatically passionate.

The argument unfolds on several levels; not only is *L'Allegro's* progression from dawn to dusk set against *Il Penseroso's* dusk to dawn, with the lively lark answered by the melancholy beauty of the nightingale, but scenes from town are juxtaposed with country idylls, scenes of courtly aristocracy with peasant lives, while the individual meditations of the arias are framed by collective society in the work's many choruses. No sooner do we settle into one mood, mode or setting than we are plunged headlong into another.

Filling the gap where characters would normally be with musical colour, Handel uses a large and varied orchestra to support his vocal soloists. There are obbligato cameos for flute, horn, organ, cello, bassoon and trumpet, as well as a carillon that brings the words of chorus 'Or let the merry bells' to jangling life. Hunts, jousts, masques and dances give an abstract debate a richly human face that laughs ('Haste thee nymph') and yearns ('Hide me from day's garish eye'), broods ('Sometimes let gorgeous tragedy') and finally (in the exquisite duet 'As steals the morn') finds peaceful resolution.

The effect of so many vivid, short episodes, each crowding swiftly in on the one before, is cinematic. Unfettered by restrictions of staging and conventional drama, Handel creates a freewheeling musical fantasy – a musical kaleidoscope of sound, image and sensation.

Performers

William Christie director
Rachel Redmond soprano
Leo Jemison* boy soprano
James Way tenor
Sreten Manojlović bass baritone

Thibaut Lenaerts chorus master
Sophie Daneman language coach

Les Arts Florissants Orchestra

Emmanuel Resche violin
Myriam Gevers
Patrick Oliva
Roxana Rastegar
Christophe Robert

Catherine Girard
Sophie Gevers-Demoures
Liv Anna Heym
Michèle Sauvé

Galina Zinchenko viola
Simon Heyerick
Samantha Montgomery

David Simpson cello
Elena Andreyev
Damien Launay
Cyril Poulet

Jonathan Cable double bass
Hugo Abraham

Serge Saitta flute

Pier Luigi Fabretti oboe
Yanina Yacubsohn

Claude Wassmer bassoon
Robin Billet

Rupprecht Drees trumpet
Aline Théry

Glen Borling french horn

Hervé Trovel percussion

Béatrice Martin harpsichord, organ & celesta

Les Arts Florissants Choir

Eugénie de Padirac soprano
Cécile Granger
Juliette Perret
Virginie Thomas
Leila Zlassi

Christophe Baska countertenor
Alice Gregorio mezzo-soprano
Alice Habellion contralto
Violaine Lucas mezzo-soprano
Yann Rolland countertenor

Edouard Hazebrouck tenor
François Olivier Jean
Thibaut Lenaerts
Jean-Yves Ravoux
Michael Loughlin Smith

Anicet Castel bass
Laurent Collobert
Simon Dubois
Christophe Gautier
Marduk Serrano Lopez

* Leo Jemison is a soloist in the Trinity Boys Choir

Produced by the Barbican

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The artistic season is sponsored by Aline Foriel-Destezet. The Selz Foundation and American Friends of Les Arts Florissants are Principal Sponsors.

Part one

Concerto Grosso Op 6, No 10 in D Minor –
Overture

1. L'Allegro Tenor recitative accompany,d

Hence! loathed Melancholy!
Of Cerberus, and blackest midnight born,
in Stygian cave forlorn,
'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights
unholy!
Find out some uncouth cell,
Where brooding darkness spreads his jealous
wings,
And the night-raven sings:
There, under ebon shades, and low-brow'd rocks,
As ragged as thy locks,
in dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell.

2. Il Penseroso Soprano recitative accompany,d

Hence! vain deluding joys,
Dwell in some idle brain,
And fancies fond with gaudy shapes possess,
As thick and numberless
As the gay motes that people the sun-beams;
Or likest hovering dreams,
The fickle pensioners of Morpheus' train.

3. L'Allegro Treble air

Come, thou goddess, fair and free,
in heav'n yclep'd Euphrosyne;
And by men heart-easing Mirth;
Whom lovely Venus at a birth,
With two sister-graces more,
To ivy-crowned Bacchus bore.

4. Il Penseroso Soprano air

Come rather, goddess, sage and holy;
Hail, divinest Melancholy!
Whose saintly visage is too bright
To hit the sense of human sight;
Thee bright-hair'd Vesta, long of yore,
To solitary Saturn bore.

5. L'Allegro Tenor air & chorus

Haste thee, nymph, and bring with thee
Jest, and youthful jollity;
Quips, and cranks, and wanton wiles,
Nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles,
Such as hang in Hebe's cheek,
And love to live in dimple sleek;
Sport, that wrinkled care derides;
And laughter, holding both his sides.

6. L'Allegro Tenor air & chorus

Come and trip it as you go,
On the light fantastick toe.

7. Il Penseroso Soprano recitative accompany,d

Come, pensive Nun, devout and pure,
Sober, steadfast, and demure;

All in a robe of darkest grain
Flowing with majestic train.

8. Il Penseroso Soprano air & chorus

Come, but keep thy wonted state
With even step, and musing gait;
And looks commercing with the skies,
Thy wrapt soul sitting in thine eyes.
Join with thee calm peace and quiet,
Spare fast, that oft with gods doth diet.

9. L'Allegro Tenor & Treble recitative

Hence loathed Melancholy!
in dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell.
But haste thee, mirth, and bring with thee
The mountain nymph, sweet liberty.
And if i give thee honour due,
Mirth, admit me of thy crew!

10. L'Allegro Treble air

Mirth, admit me of thy crew;
To live with her, and live with thee,
in unproved pleasures free:
To hear the lark begin his flight,
And singing, startle the dull night:
Then to come, in spite of sorrow,
And at my window bid good morrow.
Mirth, admit me of thy crew!

11. Il Penseroso Soprano recitative accompany,d

First, and chief, on golden wing,
The cherub contemplation bring;
And the mute silence hist along,
'Less Philomel will deign a song;
in her sweetest, saddest plight,
Smoothing the rugged brow of night.

12. Il Penseroso Soprano air

Sweet bird, that shun'st the noise of folly,
Most musical, most melancholy!
Thee, chauntress, oft' the woods among,
I woo, to hear thy even-song.
Or, missing thee, i walk unseen,
On the dry smooth-shaven green,
To behold the wand'ring moon
Riding near her highest noon.

L'Allegro Bass recitative

If I give thee honour due,
Mirth, admit me of thy crew!

13. L'Allegro Bass air

Mirth, admit me of thy crew,
To listen how the hounds and horn
Chearly rouse the slumb'ring morn,
From the side of some hoar hill,
Thro' the high wood echoing shrill.

14. Il Penseroso Soprano air

Off' on a plat of rising ground,
I hear the far-off Curfew sound,
O'er some wide water'd shore,

Swinging slow, with sullen roar:
Or if the air will not permit,
Some still removed place will fit,
Where glowing embers, through the room,
Teach light to counterfeit a gloom.

L'Allegro Tenor recitative

If I give thee honour due,
Mirth, admit me of thy crew!

16. L'Allegro Tenor air

Let me wander, not unseen,
By hedge-row elms, on hillocks green,
There the plowman near at hand,
Whistles o'er the furrow'd land;
And the milkmaid singeth blithe;
And the mower whets his scythe;
And every shepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorn, in the dale.

19a. L'Allegro Treble air & chorus

Or let the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebecks sound,
To many a youth, and many a maid,
Dancing in the chequer'd shade;
And young and old come forth to play,
On a sunshine holiday,
'Till the live-long day-light fail.
Thus pass'd the day, to bed they creep,
By whisp'ring winds soon lull'd asleep.

Part two

20a. Il Penseroso Soprano recitative accompany,d

Hence, vain deluding joys,
The brood of folly, without father bred;
How little you bested,
Or fill the fix'd mind with all your toys!
O! let my lamp, at midnight hour,
Be seen in some high lonely tow'r,
Where i may oft' outwatch the bear,
With thrice-great Hermes, or unsphere
The spirit of Plato, to unfold
What worlds, or what vast regions hold
Th'immortal mind, that hath forsook
Her mansion in this fleshly nook.

22. Il Penseroso Soprano air

But O! sad virgin, that thy power
Might raise Musæus from his bower;
Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing
Such notes, as, warbled to the string,
Drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek,
And made hell grant what Love did seek.

Il Penseroso Soprano recitative

Thus, Night, off' see me in the pale career,
'Till unwelcome morn appear

23. L'Allegro chorus (with Bass)

Populous cities please me then,
And the busy hum of men;

Populous cities please us then,
And the busy hum of men;
Where throngs of knights, and barons bold,
In weeds of peace high triumphs hold;
With store of ladies, whose bright eyes
Rain influence, and judge the prize
Of wit, or arms, while both contend
To win her grace, whom all commend.

24. L'Allegro Tenor air

There let Hymen oft' appear
In saffron robe, with taper clear,
And pomp, and feast, and revelry,
With masque, and antique pageantry;
Such sights as youthful poets dream
On summer-eves, by haunted stream.

25. Il Penseroso Soprano recitative accompany,d

Me, when the sun begins to fling
His flaring beams, me, goddess, bring
To arched walks of twilight groves,
And shadows brown, that Sylvan loves:
There, in close covert, by some brook,
Where no profaner eye may look,

26. Il Penseroso Soprano air

Hide me from day's garish eye,
While the bee, with honey'd thigh,
Which at her flow'ry work doth sing,
And the waters murmuring,
With such concert as they keep
Entice the dewy-feather'd sleep:
And let some strange mysterious dream
Wave at his wings, in airy stream
Of lively portraiture display'd,
Softly on my eyelids laid.
Then, as i wake, sweet music breathe
Above, about, or underneath,
Sent by some spirit to mortal's good,
Or th'unseen genius of the wood.

27. L'Allegro Tenor air

I'll to the well-trod stage anon,
If Johnson's learned sock be on;
Or sweetest Shakespeare, fancy's child,
Warble his native wood-notes wild.

28. L'Allegro Treble air

And ever against eating cares,
Lap me in soft Lydian airs:
Sooth me with immortal verse,
Such as the meeting soul may pierce
In notes, with many a winding bout
Of linked sweetness long drawn out;
With wanton heed, and giddy cunning,
The melting voice through mazes running,
Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony.

30. L'Allegro Tenor air & chorus

These delights if thou canst give,
Mirth, with thee I mean to live.

II Penseroso Soprano recitative

But let my due feet never fail
 To walk the studious cloister's pale;
 And love the high embowed roof,
 With antic pillar's massy proof;
 And story'd windows richly dight,
 Casting a dim religious light.

31. II Penseroso chorus (with Soprano)

There let the pealing organ blow
 To the full-voic'd quire below, in service high, and
 anthem clear;
 And let their sweetness through mine ear,
 Dissolve me into extasies,
 And bring all Heav'n before mine eyes.

33. II Penseroso chorus (with Soprano)

These pleasures, Melancholy, give,
 And I with thee will chuse to live.

Part three**34. II Moderato Bass recitative accompany,d**

Hence! boast not, ye profane,
 Of vainly fancy'd, little tasted pleasure,
 Pursu'd beyond all measure,
 And by its own excess transform'd to pain.

35. II Moderato Bass air

Come, with native lustre shine,
 Moderation, grace divine;
 Whom the wise God of nature gave,
 Mad mortals from themselves to save.
 Keep, as of old, the middle-way,
 Nor deeply sad, nor idly gay;
 But still the same in look and gait,
 Easy, cheerful, and sedate.

**36. II Moderato Bass recitative accompany,d
& chorus**

Sweet temp'rance in thy right-hand bear,
 With her let rosy health appear;
 And in thy left contentment true,
 Whom headlong passion never knew.
 Frugality by bounty's side,
 Fast friends, though oft as foes belied;
 Chaste love, by reason led secure,
 With joy sincere, and pleasure pure;
 Happy life from Heav'n descending,
 Crowds of smiling years attending:
 All this company serene,
 Join, to fill thy beauteous train.

37. II Moderato Soprano air

Come, with gentle hand restrain
 Those who fondly court their bane;
 One extreme with caution shunning,
 To another blindly running.
 Kindly teach, how blest are they
 Who Nature's equal rules obey;
 Who safely steer two rocks between,
 And prudent keep the golden mean.

II Moderato Tenor recitative

No more short life they then will spend,
 In straying farther from its end;
 In frantick mirth, and childish play,
 In dance and revels night and day;
 Or else like lifeless statues seeming,
 Ever musing, moping, dreaming.

38. II Moderato Tenor air

Each action will derive new grace
 From order, measure, time and place;
 'Till life, the goodly structure, rise
 in due proportion to the skies.

**39. L'Allegro & II Penseroso Soprano &
Tenor duet**

As steals the morn upon the night,
 And melts the shades away,
 So truth does fancy's charm dissolve,
 And rising reason puts to flight
 The fumes that did the mind involve,
 Restoring intellectual day.

40. II Moderato chorus

Thy pleasures, Moderation, give;
 in them alone we truly live.



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