

Sunday, November 19, 2023, 3pm
Zellerbach Hall

The English Concert

Harry Bicket, *artistic director and harpsichord*

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)
Rodelinda, HWV 19, an opera seria in three acts

Lucy Crowe (*Rodelinda*), *soprano*
Iestyn Davies (Bertarido), *countertenor*
Eric Ferring (Grimoaldo), *tenor*
Christine Rice (Eduige), *mezzo-soprano*
Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen (Unulfo), *countertenor*
Brandon Cedel (Garibaldo), *bass-baritone*

Lily Arbisser Shorr, *supertitles*

*This performance will include
a 20-minute intermission following Act I
and a 15-minute intermission following Act II.*

*The performance will last approximately
three hours and 30 minutes, including the two intermissions.*

*This performance is made possible, in part, by Bernice Greene,
The Estate of Ross E. Armstrong, and an anonymous Patron Sponsor.*

Upon his death, the King of Lombardy left his domains in equal portions to his three children: Bertarido, Eduige, and Gundeberto. Also aspiring to these lands is Grimoaldo, Duke of Benevento, who is wooing Eduige. The avaricious Gundeberto has now been killed, and it is believed that Bertarido has also died, leaving behind his wife, Rodelinda, as Queen of Milan.

ACT I: In the royal palace, Rodelinda mourns for her husband, along with their son, Flavio. Since Grimoaldo has seized power, she is now his prisoner. Grimoaldo offers the throne back to her if she will marry him. Despite her precarious situation, Rodelinda refuses him. Once pledged to Grimoaldo, the spurned Eduige now vows vengeance on Grimoaldo.

Unbeknownst to anyone except his faithful aide Unulfo, Bertarido is actually alive and in hiding nearby. Unseen, he watches the weeping Rodelinda as she and their son bring flowers to his memorial monument. Grimoaldo's ruthless councilor Garibaldo arrives with another offer of marriage from Grimoaldo; if she refuses again, her son will be killed. When she finally accepts, the eavesdropping Bertarido is consumed with jealous rage; Unulfo forcefully prevents him from revealing himself.

ACT II: Rodelinda announces her terms for marriage: she will only wed Grimoaldo if he personally kills Flavio before her eyes. Grimoaldo recoils at this, as Rodelinda

suspected he would. Garibaldo urges the wavering Grimoaldo to kill the boy, but Grimoaldo refuses. Unulfo rushes to Bertarido to reassure him of his wife's fidelity.

Eduige finds her brother Bertarido's hiding place and promises to help him win back his wife and son. Acting as go-between, Unulfo tells Rodelinda that Bertarido is alive and brings them together. Grimoaldo comes upon the happily reunited couple and threatens Bertarido with imprisonment. Rodelinda and Bertarido sing their anguished goodbys before he is led away.

ACT III: Eduige and Unulfo plot Bertarido's escape from prison. Garibaldo urges Grimoaldo to execute Bertarido. When Unulfo breaks into Bertarido's prison cell, Bertarido, thinking he is one of the guards, stabs him with his sword. Not seriously wounded, Unulfo leads Bertarido to the secret escape route Eduige has prepared. Finding her way to the empty cell, Rodelinda and Flavio discover Unulfo's blood on the floor and fear the worst. Rodelinda is overcome with despair.

Meanwhile, Grimoaldo, tormented by his conscience, seeks sleep in the palace gardens. Garibaldi discovers him there and, eager to usurp the throne for himself, is about to kill him. Bertarido leaps from his hiding place and strikes down Garibaldo. Chastened, Grimoaldo now reveals his change of heart and relinquishes the throne of Milan to Bertarido and Rodelinda. And he makes amends to Eduige by offering to wed her. All express their joy and hail a brighter future.

PROGRAM NOTES

The Making of a Masterpiece

In the mid 1720s, George Frideric Handel, now in his late thirties, was at the peak of his career in London. As noted conductor Jane Glover summarizes in her engaging new biography *Handel in London*, "There were many positive elements in his life: financial and domestic freedom, court approbation,

the Royal Academy of Music, the best singers and musicians in Europe, a supportive team in his workshop, and, for the most part, trusted and invigorating colleagues." In 1723, Handel moved into a new five-story townhouse at 25 Brook Street in London's fashionable Grosvenor neighborhood; there he would live, compose prolifically, and

work with his creative team until his death in 1759. The stars were now perfectly aligned for him, and the result was the “Miracle Year” of 1724 and 1725 when he created a trio of his greatest operas: *Giulio Cesare* (premiered February 24, 1724), *Tamerlano* (October 31, 1724), and *Rodelinda* (February 13, 1725).

Not to be confused with today’s British conservatory of the same name, the early 18th Royal Academy was a consortium of prominent Londoners—including King George I, a devoted opera lover—who combined their considerable financial resources to sponsor Italian opera in London. In 1719,

brother Ptolomy. By contrast, *Tamerlano* is pure tragedy and one of Handel’s darkest works: a story about the Tartar conqueror Tamburlaine and his abuse of his noble Turkish captive Bajazet. Though it also has strong tragic elements, *Rodelinda*, *Regina de’ Longobardi* (“*Rodelinda*, Queen of the Lombards,” to give its full title) is a domestic drama about the power of conjugal love (a theme Beethoven would take up nearly a century later in *Fidelio*).

Vital to the success of these operas was Handel’s trusty right hand, librettist Nicola Haym, who took unwieldy stories from cen-



they hired Handel as their music director and chief composer and established their new company at the King’s Theatre in the Haymarket.

In writing three operas within such a short period, Handel was not leaning on a formulaic blueprint, for each of these operas is radically different from the others. Set in ancient Egypt, *Giulio Cesare* is a tragic-comedy—with considerable emphasis on the comic element—of Julius Caesar’s early years as he aids the young Cleopatra in reclaiming the Egyptian throne from her

turies past and shaped them into compelling dramas. *Rodelinda*’s plot was derived from the eighth-century’s Paul the Deacon, who chronicled the travails of the Lombardian kings of the seventh century. In 1652, the classical French dramatist Pierre Corneille turned this story into the play *Pertharite, roi de Lombards*—unfortunately so unsuccessful that it caused him to cease writing plays for seven years! In 1710, Antonio Salvi salvaged this for an opera libretto that was subsequently used by a number of composers. Not satisfied with its ponderous

succession of recitatives and arias, Handel directed Haym to drastically overhaul it; the result was an exceptionally swift-moving plot that keeps audiences involved for its duration.

Rodelinda's Richly Drawn Characters

As biographer Jonathan Keates wrote, “If Handel’s operas, like those of almost every other 18th-century composer, are primarily focused on the singer as vocal artist, they are also concerned with the credible presentation of human feeling.” Handel’s genius for creating multifaceted, fully rounded

dignified resistance in a male-dominated society comes across as unexpectedly modern,” says Harry Bicket.

The composer wrote this magnificent role for his current leading *prima donna* Francesca Cuzzoni, who had also created Cleopatra. The Italian soprano was peerless in her technique and in the beauty of her sound. A contemporary musician remembered her thus: “It was difficult for the hearer to determine whether she most excelled in slow or rapid airs. ...so grateful and touching was the natural tone of her voice that she rendered pathetic whatever she sang ...”



characters through music far exceeded his many competitors. And this lifelong bachelor also delighted in producing memorable female characters—like Agrippina, Alcina, and Cleopatra—who effortlessly dominate their operas. Though she is more virtuous than those three, *Rodelinda* is as strong as any of them. She is the courageous heroine in a story that lacks truly heroic men, and she fights fiercely for her son, for the unblemished memory of her supposedly deceased husband, Bertarido, and for her own honor and integrity. “*Rodelinda's*

In his arias for *Rodelinda*, Handel capitalized on all these qualities. When we first meet her, imprisoned with her son in a dank apartment, her doleful minor-mode aria “*Ho perduto il caro sposo*” shows her weighed down by grief for Bertarido and by the apparent hopelessness of her situation. But moments later, when the usurper Grimoaldo arrives with a proposal of marriage, the pride and steel in her character comes to the fore as she rejects him in “*L'empio rigor del fato*,” an aria lashed by furious violins. Later as she takes her son, Flavio, to visit Ber-

tarido's memorial monuments, she reveals her vulnerable side in the exquisitely beautiful "Ombre, piante, urne funeste," an echo aria in which her drooping phrases are imitated by solo flute. To compliment his female protagonist, Handel chose an orchestra that omitted the brass instruments and drums of war, focusing instead on the gentler colors of flutes, recorders, and oboes with strings.

In Act II, Rodelinda is caught in a vise as Grimoaldo forces her to choose between marrying him or letting her son die. Expertly reading the weakness of his resolve, she turns the tables on him by agreeing to his proposal, but stipulating he must first kill Flavio before her very eyes. We know that Handel wrote the text himself for "Spietati," her extraordinary aria condemning Grimoaldo and his counselor, the more ruthless Garibaldo. Dissatisfied with Haym's words for this ultimate confrontation between good and evil, he penned a briefer, sharper denunciation. And instead of composing a customary Baroque rage aria bristling with coloratura, he created spare phrases that make each word sting.

When Unulfo tells Rodelinda that her husband is actually alive, the enchanting aria "Ritorna, o caro" shows her softer side and how deeply she loves Bertarido. Set to a lilting *siciliano* rhythm, it is one of those elegantly simple Handelian melodies that cling in the memory. But in Act III, when the plot to free Bertarido from prison seems to have failed and that he has died in the attempt,

Rodelinda is finally reduced to her lowest ebb, no longer wishing to live. Handel portrays her emotional collapse in one of his greatest *Largo*-tempo laments "Se'l mio duol." In the orchestra, bassoons and recorders mourn with her.

Balancing Rodelinda is the *primo uomo* role of her husband, Bertarido, the rightful ruler of the Lombards. Handel wrote this part for the most popular singer of the day in London, the castrato alto Francesco

Bernardi who was known professionally as Il Senesino for his birthplace of Siena. The composer and flautist Johann Quantz described him: "He had a powerful, clear, equal, and sweet contralto voice, with a perfect intonation and an excellent shake [trill]. His manner of singing was masterly and his elocution unrivaled."

As a character, Bertarido is impulsive and driven by his emotions, especially his passion for

his wife. He tends to alternate between passive self-pity and ill-considered action as when he stabs his true friend, the wise counselor Unulfo, who is always trying to save Bertarido from his worst instincts. Though he is the rightful ruler of a country, he seems little interested in recovering his throne.

If these qualities do not make him a genuinely heroic figure, they do provide Handel with varied opportunities for marvelous arias. The most famous of them—indeed one of Handel's best-loved arias—is his introductory song in Act I: the meltingly tender "Dove sei?". Emergin



First edition of *Rodelinda*, 1725

smoothly from the preceding recitative, this is a sublime *Largo* love song expressing Bertarido's longing for reunion with his wife. However, at the end of Act I, when he falsely believes she has betrayed him with Grimoaldo, he reveals an uglier side with the furious "*Confusa si miri*," an aria of explosive starts and stops in which his jealousy runs wild.

In Act II, Bertarido, known only by Unulfo to be alive, is still morosely skulking in

moaldo, kills the evil Garibaldo, and assumes at last his kingly dignity in a burst of energetic coloratura.

Perhaps a more fascinating figure is Grimoaldo, the would-be king and putative villain who torments Rodelinda, but, confronted by her blazing integrity, cannot carry out his dreams of absolute power. Handel created this role for his new tenor discovery Francesco Borosini, who was an exceptionally strong and versatile actor; Bo-



Left: Francesca Cuzzoni who played the role of Rodelinda in the first performance. **Right:** Known as Senesino, Francesco Bernardi, a celebrated Italian contralto castrato, played the role of Bertarido.

the shadows. And as we hear in "*Con rauco momorio*," he is indulging in the pathetic fallacy: Nature's brooks, caves, and mountains are mourning with him. In the B section of this beautiful aria in pastoral *siciliano* tempo, recorders and flutes as well as other instruments sympathetically echo his words. However, Handel apparently became concerned about making his leading man too flaccidly passive, and for the opera's first revival he added the brilliant Act III aria "*Vivi, tiranno*," as Bertarido rescues Gri-

rosini just months earlier had created the tragic role of Bajazet in *Tamerlano*. Unlike Garibaldo, Grimoaldo possesses a conscience, that is finally his undoing. In Act III, Handel charts his emotional unraveling in a superb *scena* of accompanied recitative and aria. The recitative "*Fatto inferno è il mio petto*" is actually the more musically potent, as driven by a hounding orchestra he wrestles with the furies that torment him. Longing to sleep in peace once more, he then sings a charmingly innocent aria,

“Pastorello,” in which he longs to be nothing more than a poor shepherd with no worldly cares.

Of all the extraordinary musical riches in *Rodelinda*, the one that lingers in the mind longest afterwards is Rodelinda and Bertarido’s heartbreaking *da capo* love duet “*Io t’abbraccio*,” which brings down the curtain on Act II. Finally out of hiding, Bertarido has been captured by Grimoaldo, who threatens to put him to death. Having so recently been reunited, husband and wife are torn apart

again. In Handel’s favorite key for portraying anguish, F-sharp minor, their voices blend gorgeously above an implacable walking bass line symbolizing the imprisonment and possibly death now awaiting Bertarido.

—Janet E. Bedell © 2023

Janet E. Bedell is a program annotator and feature writer who writes for Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Caramoor Festival of the Arts, and other musical organizations.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The English Concert is an outstanding orchestra: exceptional, in the world-renowned quality, ambition, and variety of its live and recorded output; unique, in the zeal of its players for working and performing together; unwavering, in its desire to connect with its audience throughout the world.

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

The orchestra’s artistic partners reflect and enhance its pursuit of new ways to bring music to life. Joyce DiDonato, Dame Sarah Connolly, Iestyn Davies, Alison Balsom, Trevor Pinnock, Dominic Dromgoole, Tom Morris and many others have not only brought their extraordinary skills to individual projects but continue to help The English Concert shape the way it performs.

One cornerstone of the orchestra’s annual cycle is its international Handel Opera tour. Blossoming from an ongoing relationship with Carnegie Hall, and now including seasonal visits to UC Berkeley, the itinerary regularly takes in the Theater an der Wien, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, the Elbphilharmonie, and Barbican Hall, and the roster of great halls continues to grow. Meanwhile, the orchestra’s regular London series allows

it to explore a radically different path, presenting challenging and inspiring programs to its home audience.

In 2023, The English Concert launched its ambitious Handel for All project, which aims to film and make freely available all of Handel’s works online.



Internationally renowned as an opera and concert conductor of distinction, **Harry Bicket** is especially noted for his interpretation of Baroque and Classical repertoire and since

2007 has been Artistic Director of The English Concert, one of Europe’s finest period orchestras. In 2013, following regular guest appearances for Santa Fe Opera, he became that organization’s Chief Conductor; in 2018, he assumed the music directorship. In Santa Fe, he has led productions of *Carmen*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Fidelio*, *La Finta Giardiniera*, *Roméo et Juliette*, *Alcina*, *Candide*, and *Così fan tutte*. During the 2019 season, he also performed Strauss’ *Four Last Songs* with Renée Fleming. Born in Liverpool, he studied at the Royal College of Music and Oxford University.

Projects with The English Concert last season, in addition to the orchestra's London season and recording projects, included tours to Europe and the United States with Handel's *Solomon* and performances of *Ariodante* at the Palais Garnier. This season, Bicket will also return to Chicago Symphony for a special collaboration with the Joffrey Ballet, Orchestra of St Luke's, Canadian Opera Company (*Le nozze di Figaro*), and Santa Fe Opera.

Following the success in earlier seasons of *Rinaldo* and *Ariodante* featuring Joyce DiDonato, in Spring 2022, The English Concert continued its Handel opera series with critically acclaimed performances of *Seise* in Europe and the United States, including at St Martin in the Fields and Carnegie Hall. Other highlights with The English Concert have included Bicket's own arrangements of Mozart works for mechanical clockwork organ, Bach *Cantatas for Advent*, and Wayne Eagling's *Remembrance* ballet, set to Handel's *Ode to St Cecilia's Day*, for English National Ballet Theatre.

In addition to his regular Santa Fe productions, recent North American seasons have included the Metropolitan Opera (most recently *Rodelinda*, *The Magic Flute*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *La clemenza di Tito*, *Giulio Cesare*, *Agrippina*, and *Così fan tutte*); Lyric Opera of Chicago (*Ariodante*, *Orphée et Eurydice*, *Carmen*, *Rinaldo*); Houston Grand Opera (*Le nozze di Figaro*, *Rusalka*); and Canadian Opera Company (*Maometto II*, *Hercules*). Symphonic guest conducting has included the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra (including Cincinnati May Festival), New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Houston Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, NACO Ottawa, Indianapolis Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, and Boston Symphony Orchestra. He has also led master classes with the Juilliard School.

European conducting has ranged from opera for Liceu Barcelona (including *Agrippina*, *Lucio Silla*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Opéra de Bordeaux (*Alcina*), and Theater an der Wien (*Iphigenie en Tauride*, *Mitridate*), to concert projects with Prague Philharmonia, RTE National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, Oslo Philharmonic, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte Carlo, Bayerische Rundfunk, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, and Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. Earlier work outside of Europe included his Japanese debut with Ian Bostridge and the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra and Israel Philharmonic.

Opera has also included Royal Opera House (*Theodora*, *Orlando*), Minnesota Opera (*Croesus*), Opera Australia (*Giulio Cesare*), Scottish Opera (*Orfeo*), New York City Opera (*Le nozze di Figaro*, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, *Clemenza di Tito*, *Rinaldo*), Royal Danish Opera (*Orfeo*), Glimmerglass Festival (*Partenope*, *Agrippina*), New Israeli Opera (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*), Aldeburgh Festival (*Faerie Queen*), Edinburgh Festival (*Clemenza di Tito*), Spoleto Festival (*Giasone*, *Tamerlano*, *L'île de Merlin*), English National Opera (*Orfeo*, *Ariodante*, *Semele*, *Xerxes*, *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*), Bayerische Staatsoper (*Rinaldo*, *Ariodante*, *Seise*, *Orlando*, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and *Die Zauberflöte*), Welsh National Opera (*Clemenza di Tito*), and Opera North (*Radamisto*, *Return of Ulysses*, *The Magic Flute*, *Croesus*), and Los Angeles Opera (*Giulio Cesare*, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*).

Bicket made his Glyndebourne Festival debut in 1996 with Peter Sellars' landmark production of *Theodora* and returned in 1999 and 2003. In 2004, his first Metropol-

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itan Opera production (an acclaimed new production of *Rodelinda* with Renée Fleming and David Daniels) was quickly followed by *Giulio Cesare* (2006–07) and *Clemenza di Tito* (2008) and he is now a regular guest. In 2001, his first Barcelona production, *Giulio Cesare*, earned him the Opera Critics' Prize for best conductor and in 2003 his debut production for the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden (Handel's *Orlando*) received an Olivier Award nomination for Best New Opera Production. In the same year he conducted Lyric Opera of Chicago for the first time and he has since returned regularly.

Recordings to date with The English Concert include releases for Virgin Classics, Chandos, and Harmonia Mundi featuring Elizabeth Watts, David Daniels, Lucy Crowe, Sarah Connolly, and Rosemary Joshua and a concerto disc released in September 2018 on Signum. His discography also includes five recordings with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, among them a collection of Handel opera arias with Renée Fleming (Decca) and Ian Bostridge (EMI), as well as selections from Handel's *Theodora*, *Seerse*, and the cantata *La Lucrezia* with Lorraine Hunt Lieberson (Avie), which was nominated for a Grammy Award. His Gramophone Award-nominated CDs also include *Sento Amor* with David Daniels featuring arias by Gluck, Handel, and Mozart (Virgin Veritas) and *Il tenero momento* with Susan Graham, featuring arias by Mozart and Gluck (Erato).

Lucy Crowe (*Rodelinda*), *soprano*

Born in Staffordshire, Lucy Crowe studied at the Royal Academy of Music, where she is a Fellow. She was made an officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2023 King's Birthday Honors.

With repertoire ranging from Purcell, Handel, and Mozart to Donizetti's *Adina*, Verdi's *Gilda*, and Janáček's *Vixen*, she has sung with opera companies throughout the world, including the Royal Opera House,



Covent Garden, the Glyndebourne Festival, English National Opera, Teatro Real Madrid, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich, and the Metropolitan Opera,

New York. Recent opera highlights include her debut at Dutch National Opera in the title role *Rodelinda*, Musetta *La bohème*, and Poppea *Agrippina* at the Royal Opera House, Susanna *Le nozze di Figaro* at the Metropolitan Opera, and Pamina *Die Zauberflöte* at the Liceu Barcelona.

In concert, she has performed with many of the world's finest conductors and orchestras, including the Berlin Philharmonic/Harding, Haïm, and Nelsons; Vienna Philharmonic/Nelsons; City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra/Haïm, Oramo, and Nelsons; Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment/Egarr; Scottish Chamber Orchestra/Nézet-Séguin; the London Symphony Orchestra/Rattle; the Monteverdi Orchestra/Gardiner; the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia/Pappano; and Los Angeles Philharmonic/Dudamel. Recent appearances include Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* with Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks (BRSO); Peri in Schumann's *Das Paradies und die Peri* at the BBC Proms with the London Symphony Orchestra and Sir Simon Rattle; Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* with the Rotterdams Philharmonisch Orkest and with the BRSO; and her debut with the Cleveland Orchestra for performances of select Mozart arias. This season, Crowe sings the title role *Rodelinda* with the English Concert and Harry Bicket on a tour to the US and Asia; selected Haydn and Weber arias with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Maxim Emelyanychev; selected Mozart arias with the Tampere Philharmonic and Brahms' *Requiem* with the Handel & Haydn Society,

both with Bernard Labadie; Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* with the Orchestra of Age of Enlightenment and Andras Schiff; and Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 and Mass in C minor and on tour with the Monteverdi Choir & Orchestra.

A committed recitalist she has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, and the Aldeburgh, Edinburgh, Mostly Mozart, and Salzburg festivals, and as a regular guest at the BBC Proms and Wigmore Hall.

Her recordings include Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* with the LSO/Gardner; Handel's *Il Pastor Fido* and *Handel & Vivaldi* with La Nuova Musica/David Bates for Harmonia Mundi; works by Lutosławski with the BBC Symphony Orchestra/Gardner, Handel's *Alceste* with the Early Opera Company/Curnyn and Eccles' *The Judgement of Paris* all for Chandos; Handel's *Rodelinda* and *La Resurrezione* with the English Concert/Bicket, and MacMillan's *Christmas Oratorio* with the London Philharmonic Orchestra/Sir Mark Elder. Her debut recital recording (Berg, Strauss, and Schoenberg songs), was released by Linn Records in August 2021. Crowe received a Grammy nomination in 2021 for Best Opera Recording for Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* with the London Symphony Orchestra/Sir Simon Rattle.



Iestyn Davies (Bertarido), countertenor
After reading anthropology and archaeology at St John's College, Cambridge, Iestyn Davies studied at London's Royal Academy of Music.

An esteemed Handelian, he has delighted audiences globally with his vocal agility and supreme musicianship in roles such as Bertarido, Orlando, Rinaldo, Ottone/*Agrippina* and David/*Saul*. Committed also to contemporary music, his intelligent and consid-

ered interpretations have led to fruitful collaborations with Thomas Adès, George Benjamin, and Nico Muhly.

On the opera stage, he has appeared at the Metropolitan Opera, New York; the Lyric Opera of Chicago; Teatro alla Scala Milan; the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; English National Opera; Glyndebourne Festival Opera; Welsh National Opera; Teatro Real Madrid; Salzburg Festival and in Munich, Vienna, and Zurich. Recent appearances include *Arsace/Partenope* in Madrid, *Ottone/Agrippina* in Hamburg and Munich, *Bertarido/Rodelinda* for the Metropolitan Opera, and *Ottone/L'incoronazione di Poppea* in Versailles.

Concert engagements have included performances at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan with Dudamel, the Concertgebouw and Tonhalle with Koopman, and at the Barbican, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, and at the BBC Proms in the Royal Albert Hall with orchestras that include the New York Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, English Concert, Britten Sinfonia, Concerto Köln, Concerto Copenhagen, Ensemble Matheus, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Academy of Ancient Music, and Scottish Chamber Orchestra. During the 2022/23 season, Davies appeared in concerts at Carnegie Hall with Bernard Labadie, the Berlin Philharmonie with Emmanuelle Haim, and at the Barbican in a world premiere production of music by Dowland with lutenist Thomas Dunford, staged by Netia Jones.

In the 2023–24 season, opera highlights include *Tolomeo/Cesare* at Opéra National de Paris and *Oberon/A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Atlanta Opera and at Garsington Opera. In concert, he joins Les Violons du Roy for Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra for Benjamin's *Written on Skin* conducted by George Benjamin, the English Concert for Bertarido *Rodelinda* on tour to the United

States and Asia, and the Australian Chamber Orchestra for a solo Bach program on tour in Australia.

An outstanding recitalist, he has performed in Vienna, Tokyo, Paris, and New York in repertoire ranging from Dowland to Clapton. He is a regular favorite at London's Wigmore Hall and Kings Place, where he has curated residencies.

Davies' recital discs have won three *Gramophone* Awards, and he performed on the Grammy-winning recording of Thomas Adès's *The Tempest*. He is the recipient of a Royal Philharmonic Society Award and was nominated for an Olivier Award for his singing role in *Farinelli and the King* opposite Mark Rylance (premiered at London's Sam Wanamaker Playhouse and transferring to the West End and Broadway). In 2017, he was awarded an MBE by the Queen for his services to music.



Eric Ferring (Grimoaldo), *tenor*
Emmy-winning, *Billboard*-charting American tenor Eric Ferring is known internationally as "a prodigiously gifted lyric tenor" (*Opera*

News) for his "fine, gleaming tenor" (*New York Classical Review*), as well as for having "a beautifully round and warm timbre, expressive, and with great finesse" (*Olyrix*). His expertise ranges from early *bel canto* repertoire and the music of Handel and Mozart to the origination of contemporary operatic roles.

Eric Ferring made his anticipated Metropolitan Opera debut during the 2021–22 season singing Pong in *Turandot*, followed by Tamino in *The Magic Flute*, Arturo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, a Royal Herald in

THE ENGLISH CONCERT

Violin 1

Nadja Zwiener (leader)
Manami Mizumoto
Anna Curzon
Davina Clarke
Jeffrey Girtan
Asuka Sumi

Violin 2

Tuomo Suni
Kinga Ujszászi
Chloe Kim
Diana Lee
Abel Balazs

Viola

Alfonso Leal del Ojo
Louise Hogan
Joanna Patrick

Violoncello

Joseph Crouch
Jonathan Byers
Alexander Rolton
Cullen Coty O'Neil

Double Bass

Alexander Jones

Flute

Rosemary Bowker

Oboe

Tatjana Zimre
Bethan White

Bassoon

Katrin Lazar

Theorbo

Sergio Bucheli

Harpsichord

Tom Foster

Chief Executive

Alfonso Leal del Ojo

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Don Carlos, and covering Grimoaldo in *Rodelinda*. He made his debut at Santa Fe Opera, singing Fenton in Sir David McVicar's new production of *Falstaff*, as well as his Spoleto Festival (USA) debut in Beethoven's 9th Symphony. In the fall of 2022, Ferring released his solo debut album with pianist Madeline Slettedahl titled *No Choice but Love: Songs of the LGBTQ+ Community* with *Lexicon Classics*. His performance in Chicago Lyric Opera's production of *Pagliacci* was nominated and won a 2022 Emmy Award. The 2022–23 season includes a return to Opéra de Rouen and debuts with the Opéra de Paris and the Opéra national du Rhin. This season includes a return to Opéra de Rouen, debuts with Opéra de Lille, Haymarket Opera, and the Dubuque Symphony, as well as the current world tour of *Rodelinda* with The English Concert.

Ferring's numerous awards include top prizes at competitions including the George London Foundation for Singers, Glyndebourne Opera Cup, Gerda Lissner Foundation International Voice Competition, American Opera Society of Chicago, and the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, as well as grants and awards from the Richard Tucker Foundation, Sullivan Foundation, Santa Fe Opera, and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.

He is a native of Dubuque, Iowa and graduated from Drake University with his BM in vocal performance and the Boston Conservatory with his MM in opera performance. Ferring is a graduate of the Lyric Opera of Chicago's Ryan Opera Center and the Pittsburgh Opera Resident Artist Program.

Ferring is also Project Curator for Lexicon Classics, Soloists Vice President at the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA), and Executive Director of the Collaborative Arts Institute of Chicago (CAIC). ericfering.com or [@ericfering](https://www.instagram.com/ericfering) on Instagram.



Christine Rice
(Eduige),
mezzo-soprano

Christine Rice's operatic appearances have taken her to the Metropolitan Opera; the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; the

Opéra national de Paris; Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich; Deutsche Oper, Berlin; Madrid's Teatro Real; the Opernhaus Zürich; and the Glyndebourne and Salzburg festivals.

Her wide ranging repertoire includes the roles of Brangäne/*Tristan und Isolde* and Erda/*Das Rheingold*; Jezibaba/*Rusalka*; Judith/*Duke Bluebeard's Castle*; the title role in *Carmen*; Giulietta *Les contes d'Hoffmann*; Marguerite/*La damnation de Faust*; Hänsel/*Hänsel und Gretel*; the title roles in *Gloriana* and *The Rape of Lucretia*; Dorabella/*Così fan tutte* and Donna Elvira/*Don Giovanni*; Penelope/*Il Ritorno d'Ulisse* and Irene/*Theodora*, Ruggiero/*Alcina*, and the title role in *Ariondante*.

She created the roles of Miranda and Blanca in the world premieres of Adès' *The Tempest* and *The Exterminating Angel*, and Ariadne in Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*.

Highlights in Christine's 2023–24 season include Auntie/*Peter Grimes* for the English National Opera; Blanca/*The Exterminating Angel* for the Opéra national de Paris; Hippolyta/*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Marchesa del Poggio in Rossini's *Un giorno di regno* for Garsington Opera; and Eduige in the current international concert tour of Handel's *Rodelinda* with The English Concert and Harry Bicket.

Rice also has a busy concert career, appearing throughout the UK, Europe, North America, and at the BBC Proms and Edinburgh International and Aldeburgh festivals with conductors that include Sir Antonio Pappano, Sir Mark Elder, Sir Simon Rattle, Sir Andrew Davis, Edward Gardner, Fabio Luisi, and Yannick Nézet-Séguin.



Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen (Unulfo),
countertenor

Praised as a “young star” and “complete artist” by the *New York Times* and “extravagantly gifted... poised to redefine

what’s possible for singers of this distinctive voice type” by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, countertenor Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen is one of the classical vocal world’s most promising rising stars. He has been honored with the Grand Prize of the 2017 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, a 2017 Sara Tucker Study Grant, and 2022 Career Grant from the Richard Tucker Music Foundation, and a 2023 George and Nora London Award. His first commercial recording project—the world premiere recording of Kenneth Fuchs’ *Poems of Life* with the London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by JoAnn Falletta—was honored with a 2019 Grammy Award in the Best Classical Compendium category, which recognizes albums featuring multiple soloists and multiple works.

During the 2023–24 season, he returns to Glyndebourne to assay the title role of Handel’s *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* in Sir David McVicar’s acclaimed production—he sings the role of Sesto in the same opera for his debut at Teatro dell’Opera di Roma under the baton of Rinaldo Alessandrini—and he debuts at Deutsche Oper Berlin in the company premiere of Sir George Benjamin’s *Written on Skin* as First Angel/The Boy in Katie Mitchell’s original production. His busy concert schedule includes the current worldwide tour of Handel’s *Rodelinda* with The English Concert, *I Tre Controtenori* at the Teatro dell’Opera di Roma, Bach’s *Magnificat* with Cantata Collective under the direction of Nicholas McGegan, Bach’s solo alto cantatas *Widerstehe doch der Sünde*, BWV 54 and *Ich habe genug*, BWV 182 with Jeffrey Thomas leading the American Bach Soloists,

and Bach’s *Erfreut euch, ihr Herzen*, BWV 66 and *Easter Oratorio*, BWV 249 with Jeannette Sorrell and Apollo’s Fire.



Brandon Cedel
(Garibaldo),
bass-baritone

American bass-baritone Brandon Cedel is a recent graduate of the Metropolitan Opera’s Lindemann Young Artist Development Program, and was an ensemble member of Oper Frankfurt from 2016–19.

Highlights in his 2023/24 season include a return to the Metropolitan Opera as Dan Brown in a revival of Kevin Puts’ *The Hours*;

a return to the Boston Lyric Opera as Don Magnifico in *La Cenerentola*; his debut for the Komische Oper, Berlin in the title role of a new production of *Hercules*; and Garibaldo in the current international concert tour of *Rodelinda* with The English Concert with Harry Bicket.

Recent appearances include the title role in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Bottom A *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Leporello *Don Giovanni* and Argante *Rinaldo* for the Glyndebourne Festival; the title role in *Hercules* for the Karlsruhe Handel Festival; the title role in *Don Giovanni* for the Atlanta Opera; Dan Brown in the world premiere of *The Hours* with the Philadelphia Orchestra/Yannick Nézet-Séguin; Masetto *Don Giovanni* for the Metropolitan Opera and the Lyric Opera of Chicago; Collatinus *The Rape of Lucretia* for the Boston Lyric Opera; the title role in *Le nozze di Figaro* for Opera Philadelphia and the Stuttgart Staatsoper and Colline *La bohème* and Basilio *Il barbiere di Siviglia* for the Canadian Opera Company.

His many roles for Oper Frankfurt include Masetto, Sprecher *Die Zauberflöte*, Lieutenant Ratcliffe *Billy Budd*, Argante, Ariodate *Xerxes*, Cesare Angelotti *Tosca*, and Achior in Mozart’s *La Betulia Liberata*.



Stefan Cohen

A voice for change

San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus: Pioneers of a Queer Choral Movement

by Krista Thomas

Born in a spontaneous moment of activism, the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus has remained a leading voice of advocacy, community, and hope for 45 years.

The San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus (SFGMC), which performs its special *Holiday Spectacular* at Zellerbach Hall on Sunday, December 17, has been a powerful voice of change since its founding 45 years ago. Created by Jon Reed Sims who recruited members by way of flyers posted on the city's telephone poles, the group was organized with the simple goal of providing more music for the local Gay Freedom Day Parade. However, less than a month after their first practice, the chorus of already more than 100 singers found itself taking part on a more serious occasion.

November 27, 1978, the night of the group's fifth-ever rehearsal, marked the assassinations of Supervisor Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in California, and San Francisco Mayor George Moscone. Moved by the city's sense of loss, over 100 members of the chorus followed the candlelight vigil march onto the steps of SF City Hall and, in an emotional moment, spontaneously began singing. Just like that, the choir made its first public appearance—one rooted not just in the idea of a celebration of identity, but committed to the true work of the community, of calling for justice and working for solidarity.

Following this historic performance, the SFGMC held its first formal concert in December. The group credits a significant portion of their publicity and resulting sold-out concerts during those first few years to a public standoff with the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which, in 1979, refused to publish

the cover art for their “Lovers Too” concert—artwork that featured a drawing of two men kissing. The chorus protested by blocking the entrance to the newspaper’s office and, in the end, was able to generate significant press and community support. (The *Chronicle* would prove to be a great ally and champion of the chorus later on.)

In 1981, the choir embarked on its first national tour—a costly endeavor that necessitated three SFGMC members taking out mortgages on their houses. But the investment was one that undoubtedly paid off. This landmark tour hit nine major cities across all regions of the US and is credited as the direct inspiration for many gay men’s choruses that sprung up immediately following. Lauded affectionately as the “grandfathers” of the gay choral movement, the SFGMC sparked a true national (and, later, even international) trend that is still evidenced in the official histories of local groups like the Gay Men’s Chorus of Washington, DC, as well as the national Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA), which formed to help organize this plethora of new organizations.

The tour finished with a home concert in San Francisco, during which the chorus received the key to the city. And while the tour was and continues to be a cause for tremendous celebration, it coincided with the very beginning of a period of great difficulty for the choir and the nation at large: The same *San Francisco Chronicle* issue that celebrated the group’s return also bore the headline “A Pneumonia that Strikes Gay Men.” What in 1981 was positioned as a small and perplexing outbreak would, in the decades to follow, become known as the HIV/AIDS Epidemic.

Of the 337 reported cases of HIV/AIDS in 1981, the very first year of the epidemic, nearly 40% died before the end of the year. It took years before a test was created to detect the virus and, in the meantime, the lack of information and the fear surrounding this epidemic, particularly in the gay male community, was not only physically danger-

ous, but mentally and socially trying as well. According to the choir, “As a result [of the crisis], many Americans were reluctant to interact with LGBTQ+ people because they assumed they would instantly contract HIV. Consequently, many individuals actively avoided the LGBTQ+ community altogether. In response, many LGBTQ+ individuals remained closeted.” In a time of increased isolation and loss, members of the chorus used their voices to build bridges and to retain a sense of community.

In 1987, the chorus was part of the landmark march on Washington, designed to bring attention to this issue. At that time, the group had lost 32 members to HIV/AIDS, including its founding director in 1984. In 1993, the *San Francisco Chronicle* posted a sobering photo of the chorus that featured 115 of its 122 members turned around, representing the 115 members of “the fifth section” of the chorus, those they’d lost to AIDS so far. According to the Foundation for AIDS Research, the virus had killed more than 234,000 people in the US by the end of that year.

For decades, the chorus continued to advocate and fundraise for those impacted by AIDS, and even commissioned a number of moving songs to capture the tumultuous feelings of the community during this period—the first of which, “I Shall Miss Loving You,” was commissioned in 1986 and is among the first-ever song commissions on the subject.

As of this year, the group has lost just over 300 members to AIDS, who have, over time, been memorialized on a special “fifth section” quilt the chorus commissioned in their honor. While AIDS detection, support, and prevention have improved dramatically in the current age, there remain over a million people living with AIDS in the US today. The chorus has continued their strong voice of activism and in 2018 established the Artists Portal Monument within the National AIDS Memorial Grove.

Though AIDS became a focus of much of its work, the group has been a voice of

strength in many social justice conversations, including the fight for legalized gay marriage, in criticism of the military's Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, and, most recently, as a voice for members of the queer community who have seen their legal protections once again challenged by politicians, particularly in the Deep South. Their 2017 tour of the Deep South with the Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir, titled *The Lavender Pen Tour*, was turned into an award-winning documentary, *Gay*

a voice: when we raise them together in harmony, love will always win." Today, the chorus continues to focus on advocacy, education, and joy, through its concerts; its benefit efforts; the numerous educational resources on its website, which include articles on how to come out and understanding pronouns (as well as inspiring videos with LGBTQ+ celebs and allies, such as Broadway superstar Kristin Chenoweth, who last month appeared at Zellerbach Hall); and the group's active youth



Chorus, Deep South, released in 2019. The film documents the opposition the group faced, particularly from local religious communities, and how the 300+ singers used their voices to "[bring] a message of music, love, and acceptance, to communities and individuals confronting intolerance."

While its history is in many ways defined by setbacks the queer community has faced over the past five decades, the SFGMC is anything but bitter or resigned. A recent public letter from Artistic Director Jacob Stensberg in honor of Pride begins, "Pride, like hope, should never be silent. We all have

program, RHYTHM, for which chorus members visit local schools to deliver a message of acceptance and to combat isolation and bullying.

We at Cal Performances are delighted to have the opportunity to be part of their holiday concert series, which has been a beloved hallmark of their programming since the group's founding! We invite you to learn more about the SFGMC and its incredible mission, as well as to look at the chorus' resources, at sfgmc.org.

Krista Thomas is Cal Performances' Associate Director of Communications.