

Sunday, March 8, 2025, 3pm
Zellerbach Hall

The English Concert

Harry Bicket, *artistic director and harpsichord*

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

Hercules, HWV 60, an oratorio in three acts (1744)

Libretto by the Reverend Thomas Broughton

William Guanbo Su, *bass* (Hercules)

Ann Hallenberg, *mezzo-soprano* (Dejanira)

Hilary Cronin, *soprano* (Iole)

Alexander Chance, *countertenor* (Lichas)

David Portillo, *tenor* (Hyllus)

Jonathan Woody, *bass* (Priest of Jupiter)*

Craig Phillips, *bass* (First Trachinian)*

* member of The Clarion Choir

The Clarion Choir

Steven Fox, *artistic director*

Lily Arbisser Shorr, *supertitles*

*There will be one 20-minute intermission partway through Act II,
approximately 90 minutes into the performance.*

*The performance will last approximately
three hours and five minutes, including the intermission.*

*This performance is made possible in part by
The Lynne LaMarca Heinrich and Dwight M. Jaffee Fund,
The Estate of Ross E. Armstrong,
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Act I

In their royal apartment in Trachis, Hercules' wife Dejanira anxiously awaits his return from the war against Oechalia. Hyllus, their son, arrives with a gloomy prophecy from the Oracle predicting Hercules' death. Dejanira fears she will never see him again on earth, but only in the shades of Elysium. But the herald Lichas arrives with comforting news: Hercules has defeated Oechalia and is about to return with a train of captives, including the Oechalian princess Iole. A march announces the arrival of Hercules, who rejoices that, having satisfied the rage of Juno, the goddess of marriage, he can now rest in peace at home. He grants Iole her freedom within Trachis, but she continues to mourn the death of her father at Hercules' hands and her loss of liberty.

Act II

Scene 1, Iole's apartment: Iole bewails her ruined stature. Enraged with jealousy, Dejanira enters, convinced that Hercules has been unfaithful to her with Iole. Iole firmly denies the charge, saying that Hercules ruined her land and killed her father. She warns Dejanira to beware of jealousy, which kills love and peace. After she leaves, Dejanira repeats her accusations to Lichas, who also cautions her. Having fallen in love with Iole, Hyllus appears and tries to woo her. She remains unsympathetic to such ardor, coming as it does from the son of her enemy. She urges him to not give way to the weakness of love; Hyllus, backed by the Chorus, declares the universal power of the "wanton god of amorous fires."

Scene 2, Hercules and Dejanira's apartment: Dejanira bitterly scolds Hercules for having been conquered by a "captive maid." Not realizing the seriousness of her accusation, Hercules blithely dismisses it

as false and departs to inspect preparations for the solemn rites at the Temple that will celebrate his victory. Left alone, Dejanira's rage intensifies. She suddenly remembers she has a vest dipped in the blood of the dying centaur Nessus, slain by Hercules, who told her this garment would serve as a "love charm." Hoping to regain Hercules' love through this stratagem, she summons Lichas and commands him to take it to the Temple and urge Hercules to wear it as a "pledge of reconciliation." Iole enters, and Dejanira apologizes for her earlier hostility, promising she will help restore her to royal power.

Act III

At the Temple of Jupiter, Lichas describes the horror of the scene after Hercules puts on Dejanira's gift. The heat of the altar's flames has melted the Hydra's poison in Nessus' blood and coursed through Hercules' body. In agony, he tries to tear it off, but only tears away his flesh. We then see the scene ourselves as the dying Hercules curses Dejanira and begs Hyllus to carry his body to the top of Mt. Oeta and burn it on a funeral pyre, so that his immortal soul can escape to the gods of Olympus.

At the palace, Dejanira—who had unknowingly carried out Nessus' revenge and brought about Hercules' terrible death—has a vision of the Furies pursuing her to torment her guilty soul. When Iole enters, Dejanira tries to blame the tragedy on her, but then realizes she herself is the sole "guilty cause." Despite her own suffering, Iole feels empathy for her captors' plight. The Priest of Jupiter enters with the consoling news that Hercules' soul, carried aloft by an eagle, has been accepted by the gods. He then tells Hyllus and Iole that their destiny is to marry, thus wrenching a happy ending from the tragedy. The Chorus sings in praise of Hercules as the bringer of peace and freedom.

Pursuing a creative career in early 18th-century England was a perilous enterprise requiring courage and political skills to rival one's artistic excellence. Certainly, this was George Frideric Handel's lot for much of his nearly five decades at the top of London's musical/dramatic world. In the 1720s and especially the 1730s, he had battled rival opera companies, often supported by a changing cast of royal supporters. By the end of the 1730s, he had abandoned his illustrious career in Italian opera and moved on to another realm of vocal music: English-language oratorio usually setting texts from the Bible.

Handel's triumphs in this new genre steadily mounted: *Saul and Israel in Egypt* (both 1739), *Messiah* (1742), and *Samson* (1743). Except for *Messiah*, first performed in Dublin, his oratorios were premiered at the opening of the Lenten concert season in London and designed to appeal to that audience's love of moral edification combined with vocal splendor.

Meanwhile, backed by the Prince of Wales and many members of the nobility, Lord Middlesex's opera company was trying to establish itself on the London scene and importuning the composer to write new operas for them. However, Handel had no interest in working with a company he felt was below his standards, and despite demands from the Prince of Wales representing George II, he refused to compose for them.

For the beginning of the Lenten season of 1744, Handel hurled out a defiant challenge to Middlesex in the form of a brilliant new hybrid work in English—*Semele*. A bold departure from his sacred oratorios using Biblical texts, this was a thoroughly secular, even pagan story about the classical deity Jupiter and his fatal affair with a beautiful, utterly self-absorbed mortal *Semele*. As a Lenten offering, it shocked its proper British audiences, for it was as dramatic as any of Handel's Italian operas and indeed

now is usually staged as an opera. Charles Jennens, the librettist for *Messiah*, snippily called it: "No Oratorio, but a bawdy Opera!"

While Handel aficionados argued about *Semele*, the Middlesex opera company couldn't survive the competition and suddenly collapsed, announcing it would mount no operas in 1745. Not cowed by the *Semele* controversy, Handel decided to take an even riskier gamble: he would book the King's Theatre in Haymarket, the scene of many of his former triumphs and now vacated by the Middlesex. There he would double the length of his season to 24 performances, running from Autumn 1744 to Spring 1745 and showcasing two new works—the sacred oratorio *Belshazzar* and another secular drama from Greek mythology, *Hercules*.

More morally edifying than *Semele*, *Hercules* told of the last days of the mythical strong man who had performed stupendous feats and triumphed over every foe he fought against. Having returned home to Trachis after defeating the rival city Oechalia, he finds he is no match for his passionate, but jealous wife Dejanira, who convinces herself he is having an affair with Iole, the beautiful Oechalian princess who is among his captives. This marital spat leads to an agonized—though unintended—death for Hercules and a breakdown for Dejanira. Thus, the fatal flaw of jealousy is the crux of the tragedy and its moral message.

Considering his disparaging remarks about *Semele*, Handel would not use his regular librettist Jennens for this "musical drama" (who instead scripted *Belshazzar*) and turned to another literary clergyman, the Reverend Thomas Broughton, a learned Classical scholar and translator who drew on Sophocles' tragedy *Women of Trachis* and the ninth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for the libretto. As Handel scholar Paul Henry Lang writes: "He tightened the conflict by peeling off everything extraneous to the drama of jealousy. ... In Sophocles' play, Hercules does commit adultery

with the captive princess Iole; by making both innocent, the tragic passion of Dejanira is enhanced.” Though Hercules is the titular role, Dejanira in Broughton and Handel’s setting is the true protagonist.

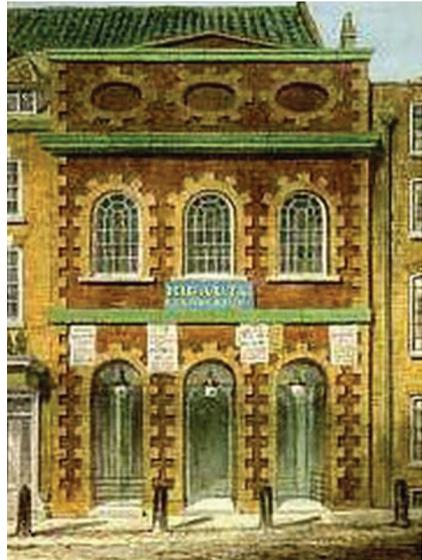
Handel assembled a cast made up of his most trusted performers: bass Henry Reinhold as Hercules; tenor John Beard (who created the role of Jupiter in *Semele*) as his son Hyllus; and French soprano Elisabeth

a tragic actress; for her, he built up the male alto role of the herald Lichas, adding many *da capo* arias* to what was originally a minor part. (After Cibber left Handel’s company, the composer cut Lichas’ arias back and even recommended the part be eliminated.)

Sadly, *Hercules*’ premiere at the King’s Theatre on January 5, 1745 was perhaps the greatest disaster of Handel’s career.



Left: Portrait of Anastasia Robinson seated at the harpsichord by John the Faber the Younger after the 1723 oil painting by John Vanderbank. The inscription reads: “When Robinson awakes the warbling strings, And with her heavenly voice responding sings, Thy winged graces float upon the sound, Bless the sweet airs, and smiling play around.” **Right:** The King’s Theatre in the Haymarket, where *Hercules* was first performed.



Duparc as Iole, the source of Dejanira’s jealousy. The pivotal role of Dejanira—Handel’s greatest mezzo-soprano role—was given to a newcomer, Miss Anastasia Robinson. Handel was especially eager to engage the services of Susanna Cibber, a singer also renowned for her skills as

Sales for this lofty hybrid were weak, with only half the hall filled. And on opening night, Mrs. Cibber was too ill to sing. A minor singer had to speak many of her recitatives in order to maintain the flow of the storyline and, to make matters worse, was himself too hoarse to be heard much

* A *da capo* aria is a musical form from the Baroque era (c. 1600–1750) designed for a soloist with instrumental accompaniment, characterized by a ternary (A–B–A) structure. Meaning “from the head” in Italian, it directs the singer to repeat the opening “A” section after a contrasting “B” section, typically with improvised, elaborate ornamentation to showcase vocal virtuosity.

of the time, leading to derisive laughter from the audience. Even though Cibber recovered for the second performance, negative scuttlebutt made ticket sales even worse. Thus, one of Handel's greatest creations got off to a nightmarish start and only in the 20th century began to receive the applause it deserves.

Having already lost a lot of money earlier in the season, Handel now realized the folly of his gamble and announced in London's *Daily Advertiser* that he was closing his ambitious season early. He eloquently expressed the profound sorrow this failure had

The response to his candor was extraordinary. One subscriber after another begged him to continue the season and told him to hold onto their money. So, after a little delay, Handel continued with his other new oratorio, *Belshazzar*, which was a heartening success.

A Closer Listen

Today, *Hercules* is rightfully considered to be one of Handel's greatest masterpieces. Though originally performed without sets or costumes, it is a powerful tragic work and in its musical innovations point ahead to



given him in his announcement: "As I perceived, that joining good Sense and significant Words to Musick was the best Method of recommending this to an English Audience; I have directed my Studies that way, and endeavour'd to show, that the English language, which is so expressive of the sublimest Sentiments, is the best adapted ... to the full and solemn Kind of Musick. I have the Mortification now to find that my Labours to please are become ineffectual." The composer added that he begged his subscribers to forgive his need "to stop short before my losses are too great to support."

Christoph Willibald von Gluck's reform operas to come in the 1760s. In fact, Gluck was an admirer of *Hercules*, even though he sought to crush the reign of Baroque opera's *da capo* arias. In keeping with its story, *Hercules* is more streamlined than Handel's Italian operas and tends to de-emphasize *da capo* arias in favor of accompanied recitatives for its most important vocal moments. Writes Lang: "The pace of this oratorio is slow; largos predominate, as do tonalities in the minor mode. The harmonic language is bold, often heavily chromatic, and the accompanied recitative, which is used pro-

fusely, reaches an intensity, as well as dimensions, heretofore unknown to the Baroque.” Unfortunately, however, it did not appeal to Handel’s conservative London audiences and had to wait centuries before it could be fully appreciated.

Though his greater name recognition gives Hercules the title role, this opera is dominated by Dejanira, another of the remarkable female characters whom this bachelor composer excelled at creating. Given the lion’s share of the solo vocal numbers, she is an unforgettable, fully rounded character, who captures our sym-

Hercules’ moral message and predicts its dreadful denouement.

In Act I, we are introduced to the gentler side of Dejanira and her deep love for her husband as she mourns his absence in the aria “**The world, when day’s career is run.**” This is not a *da capo* aria, but a tender, through-composed lament, toughened by grinding dissonances within the orchestral prelude and between the voice and orchestra. But already in the aria and its anguished preceding accompanied recitative, one senses the character’s passionate and potentially dangerous nature.



pathy despite her fatal flaws. In Act III, Handel creates for her “a mad scene without parallel in the music of the age” (Jonathan Keates).

In his oratorios, whether they be sacred or secular, the Chorus always has a major role. Here, in a story from Greek mythology, they play the role of the Greek *choros*, supporting or admonishing the characters from a detached viewpoint. Handel exceeded his normal prowess in choral music with his daring writing here, especially in Act II’s “**Jealousy! Infernal pest,**” which, coming at the drama’s midpoint, delivers

After Hyllus in his florid, but brief action aria “**Where congealed the northern streams,**” promises to search the world for his father, Handel gives us his first magnificent chorus, “**O, filial piety,**” approving his courage and resolve. Lang calls it, “a tremendous choral fugue framed by two homophonic sections in slow dance rhythm.”

The longed-for return of Hercules introduces us to the most important of his prisoners of war, the Oechalian princess Iole who will be the unwilling catalyst of the tragedy to follow. In her second aria, “**My father,**” she reveals her heavy grief over her

father's death and her dignity as a king's daughter—the opposite of the seductive schemer of Dejanira's obsession. This is actually a double aria, with the first section more like an accompanied recitative or *arioso* with the spare vocal utterances dominated by a deep, rich-toned orchestra expressing her suffering. The second section “Peaceful rest” is a lyrical lament over a softly treading accompaniment begging for rest for her father's spirit.

In Act II, Dejanira confronts Iole with her suspicions. But here Iole throws off her victimhood and proves herself a match for Dejanira. In the racing, C-minor *da capo* aria “Ah! Think what ill the jealous prove,” she warns Dejanira to beware of jealousy, which only destroys peace and love. Orchestra and voice stunningly combine in this demanding showpiece to paint a portrait of the madness her adversary will soon experience.

Even more forceful is the Chorus's “Jealousy! infernal pest,” the oratorio's greatest chorus and one of the finest in Handel's capacious choral repertoire. It is the linchpin of the entire work—the ultimate statement of *Hercules'* central theme. Handel often remarked how important eloquent words were to the creation of his music. Working creatively with a form derived from the *da capo* aria, this chorus opens with a dotted-rhythm motto hurled out in unison by the orchestra; it is the rhythm of “jealousy,” and it will pervade the piece. When the chorus enters whispering that word, they shatter the E-minor tonality. The B section is in complete contrast, treating the words “trifles light as floating air” as fragile, insubstantial imitative counterpoint. No composer has created musical word-painting to exceed what Handel does here.

Another major component is the fierce marital spat that takes place between Hercules and Dejanira, demonstrating how the physically powerful hero is no match for his

outraged wife. When Dejanira sarcastically accuses him of being conquered by “a captive maid,” he counters with a very macho, blustering *da capo* aria in C major “Alcides' fame in latest story” (Alcides being another name for Hercules). Rather than using trumpets for this martial air, Handel substitutes the cackling voices of oboes to undermine his boasting.

Now Dejanira wields the knife with her emasculating *da capo* aria “Resign thy club and lion's spoils.” Mocking violins intensify her vicious putdown of Hercules' achievements, and the B section provides her most demeaning insult with the downward-sliding chromaticism for “Venus and her whining boy.” Hercules bluntly denies her charges and then, like every man bested by a woman's fury, takes off to review the sacred rites at the Temple of Jupiter.

Act III, in which the terrible denouement of the story transpires, contains the oratorio's most powerful and revolutionary music. Each act is preceded by an orchestral sinfonia, but the prophetic Largo prelude to Act III, steeped in tragic harmonies, is the finest. Played only by the strings, it is divided between slow, soft music skillfully intensified by trills and fiery, galloping rhythms marked *Furioso e forte*.

Hercules' brutal death wearing Dejanira's poisoned gift is first presented in narratives by Lichas and the Chorus, but then more vividly in Hercules' lengthy accompanied recitative *scena* “O Jove! what land is this.” The Sinfonia's fiery, racing passages are now fully developed as they describe the agonizing pains Hercules is experiencing from the garment he cannot remove as he cries out in anguish. After a wild orchestral interlude, this *scena* transforms into a coloratura-filled “rage aria”—a stock Baroque form designed to show off the flexibility of a deep bass voice, but here heightened to a tragic purpose. Handel continues the scene in a flexible combination of *secco* and accompanied

recitative as Hercules begs Hyllus to carry him to a mountain-top funeral pyre where he can die and join the gods.

The ghostly news has now reached Dejanira, who had no idea that Nessus' garment would harm her husband. Tormented by guilt for what she has done, she has a total breakdown, expressed in one of Handel's greatest creations: a mad scene in which Dejanira believes she is being pursued by the classical Furies to punish her for her crime. Handel sets it as an extended accompanied recitative *scena*, ranging through ever-shifting moods and tempos. Lang: "The astounding variety of the music faithfully follows the constantly changing thoughts and feelings of Dejanira ... in one of the most expressive and intimate character studies to be found in the operatic literature."

In the classical sources for this story, Dejanira commits suicide. But the formula for Handel's oratorios, whether sacred or secular, required a happy, uplifting ending,

no matter what has come before. Handel begins this shift with Iole's compassionate visit to Dejanira, in which she proves to be an ally rather than an enemy. Her lovely aria "My breast with tender pity swells" (many have noticed its melody slightly resembles *Messiah's* "I know that my Redeemer liveth") begins the healing process for Dejanira and her grief-stricken family.

When the priest of Jupiter decrees that Iole shall wed Hyllus as a token of peace, she gives up her resistance, and the two sing a charming love duet in a dancing three beats. In another dancing rhythm, the Chorus adds its assent with a hymn in praise of Hercules and his wondrous deeds.

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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. Founded by Trevor Pinnock in 1972 and now under the artistic direction of Harry Bicket and principal guest Kristian Bezuidenhout, group has earned a reputation for combining urgency, passion, and fire with precision, delicacy, and beauty.

Trevor Pinnock directed the ensemble for more than three decades, shaping the orchestra's distinctive sound and championing the performance of Baroque and Classical music on period instruments. The orchestra's outstanding recording output under his leadership, which includes critically acclaimed interpretations of Bach,

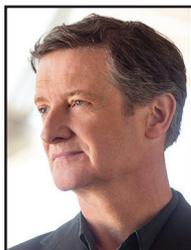
Handel, and Vivaldi, garnered international recognition and helped to establish the English Concert as a leading force in the early-music revival. This rich musical legacy continues to inspire and inform the orchestra's work today.

The English Concert's regular collaborations with key artistic partners reflect and enhance the pursuit of new ways to bring music to life. Joyce DiDonato, Dame Sarah Connolly, Iestyn Davies, Alison Balsom, and many others have both brought their extraordinary skills to individual projects and continue to help shape the way the ensemble performs.

A cornerstone of the orchestra's annual cycle is its international Handel Opera tour. Blossoming from an ongoing relationship with Carnegie Hall established by Harry Bicket, the orchestra now regularly present operas and oratorios at the Theater an der

Wien, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, the Elbphilharmonie, and Barbican Hall, with the roster of great venues continuing to grow, particularly in East Asia and the United States. Meanwhile, a regular London series allows the ensemble to explore a different path, presenting programs that challenge and inspire audiences closer to home.

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. For more information, visit englishconcert.co.uk.



Born in Liverpool, **Harry Bicket** is internationally renowned for his interpretations of Baroque and Classical repertoire. He studied at the Royal College of Music and the University

of Oxford, where he was Organ Scholar at Christ Church. Bicket is an Honorary Member of the Royal Academy of Music and was appointed OBE in the 2022 Queen's Birthday Honors.

Bicket was appointed Artistic Director of the English Concert in 2007. With the ensemble, he has undertaken an ambitious project to record all of Handel's works as an online resource. Recent and forthcoming seasons include tours of *Rinaldo* in Asia and *Hercules* across the United States and United Kingdom, alongside a regular Wigmore Hall series, recording projects, and a residency in Malta.

Since 2013, Bicket has served as Music Director of Santa Fe Opera, conducting a wide range of repertoire including *Don Giovanni*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Fidelio*, *Carmen*, *Alcina*, *Candide* and *Così fan tutte*. In 2019, he conducted Strauss's *Vier letzte Lieder* with Renée Fleming, and he returns in the summer of 2026 to lead productions of *Die Zauberflöte* and *Rodelinda*.

A frequent guest at the Metropolitan Opera, his recent productions include *Rodelinda*, *Giulio Cesare*, *Agrippina*, *Die Zauberflöte*, and *Così fan tutte*. He has also appeared with Lyric Opera of Chicago, Canadian Opera Company, Houston Grand Opera, and leading opera houses across Europe, including Paris Opera, Bavarian State Opera, Opernhaus Zürich and the Liceu, Barcelona, where he received the Opera Critics' Best Conductor Prize.

Equally in demand on the concert platform, Bicket has worked with major orchestras throughout North America, Europe, and Asia. A prolific recording artist, his extensive discography includes numerous acclaimed recordings with the English Concert, as well as Grammy- and *Gramophone*-nominated collaborations with artists such as Renée Fleming, Ian Bostridge, Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, David Daniels, and Susan Graham.



William Guanbo Su makes his debut with the English Concert with *Hercules*. Also during the 2025–26 season, he returns to the Metropolitan Opera as Masetto in *Don Giovanni* and Santa Fe Opera as Garibaldi in *Rodelinda*. He makes additional debuts with Los Angeles Opera as Colline in *La bohème* and the Irish National Opera as Oroveso in *Norma*. Last season, he made role and company debuts as Publio in *La clemenza di Tito* (Staatsoper Hamburg), Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Nashville Opera), and Somus and Cadmus in *Semele* (Atlanta Opera). He also returned to the Metropolitan Opera as the Speaker in *The Magic Flute* and Angelotti in *Tosca* as well as Colline in *La bohème* with Dallas Opera.

Recent performances include Basilio in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Seattle Opera); Ma-



The Death of Hercules. Painting by Francisco de Zurbarán, 1634, oil on canvas, Museo del Prado.

setto in *Don Giovanni* (Santa Fe Opera); Blich in *Susannah* (Opera Theatre of Saint Louis); Colline in *La bohème* (Boston Lyric Opera, Utah Opera); Alidoro in *La Cenerentola* (Opera Maine); Bonze in *Madama Butterfly* (Houston Grand Opera, Grand Tetons Music Festival); Basilio in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Angelotti in *Tosca* (Austin Opera); and Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte* and Garibaldo in *Rodelinda* (Aspen Opera Festival).

On the concert stage, he has sung the Demon in Pergolesi's *Li prodigi della divina grazia nella conversione e morte di San Guglielmo Duca di Aquitania* (Les Talent Lyriques at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence), Simon in Handel's *Judas Maccabeus* (American Symphony Orchestra), and Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* and Handel's *Messiah* (Cecelia Chorus of New York).



The Swedish mezzo-soprano **Ann Hallenberg** appears regularly in opera houses and festivals such as Teatro alla Scala Milan, Teatro La Fenice Venice, Teatro Real Madrid, Theater an

der Wien, Opernhaus Zürich, Opéra National Paris, Opéra de Lyon, Théâtre de la Monnaie Brussels, Bayerische Staatsoper München, Staatsoper Berlin, Semperoper Dresden, Royal Swedish Opera, Salzburg Festival, Verbier Festival, Proms Festival London and Edinburgh Festival. She has built an unusually vast concert repertoire that spans music from the early 17th century up to contemporary works and she has also gained much attention as a Lied recitalist, receiving special praise for her interpretations

of songs by Nordic and German composers. She has recorded more than 50 CD and DVD with music by Bach, Handel, Vivaldi, Mozart, Haydn, Gluck, Rossini, Mendelssohn, Brahms, and Bruckner, just to mention a few. In November 2025 her solo CD *Gluck Arias* won the award for Best Operatic Recital at the International Opera Awards in London, the first artist ever to receive the award three times, previously having won in 2014 and 2016.



Hilary Cronin won both First Prize and Audience Prize at the 2021 London Handel International Singing Competition and was selected by *BBC Music Magazine* as a “Rising Star of 2022.”

Conductors with whom she has worked include Sofi Jeannin, David Bates, Kristian Bezuidenhout, Harry Bicket, Harry Christophers, Jonathan Cohen, Laurence Cummings, Christian Curnyn, Maxim Emelyanychev, John Eliot Gardiner, Trevor Pinnock, Christophe Rousset, Andras Schiff, Dinis Sousa, and Peter Whelan.

During the 2025–26 season, Cronin makes her debut at MusikTheater an der Wien singing the title role in a new production of Cesti’s *L’Orontea* and sings Melissa in *Amadigi* with the English Concert at Buxton International Festival. With Polyphony, she sings Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio* and *Messiah*; with Springhead Constellation, she tours Bach’s *Easter Oratorio* and Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang*; with Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, she sings Bach’s *St John Passion*; with Royal Northern Sinfonia, she sings Mahler’s *Symphony No. 4*; and with Gabrieli

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ROAR, she appears in *Baroque Masterpieces*. Cronin will also join Arcangelo to sing Handel's *Nine German Arias* at London Handel Festival; Irish Baroque Orchestra to sing *Messiah*; and The King's Consort to sing *Coronation of King George* and *Messiah*.

Her growing discography now includes Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* (DGG); Charpentier's *A Baroque Christmas* (SDG CD); Handel's *Chandos Anthems* (Alpha Classics); Howells' *Sine nomine* (Hyperion); Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (Pentatone); and Telemann's *Donner-Ode* (cpo).



Alexander Chance has worked with many of the leading conductors in the early-music world, including Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Masaaki Suzuki, René Jacobs, Masato Suzuki, Laurence Cummings, Jonathan Cohen, Kristian Bezuidenhout, Marcus Creed, and Lionel Meunier. He is in demand as a concert soloist and has given many recitals around Europe, making his recital debut at the Wigmore Hall and Concertgebouw Amsterdam in 2024. Chance's debut recording, *Drop not, mine eyes* with lutenist Toby Carr, was named one of *Gramophone* magazine's "Best albums of 2023." His recent opera roles include Oberon (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Britten) for the Grange Festival; Apollo (*Death in Venice*, Britten) for Welsh National Opera; and Tolomeo (*Giulio Cesare*, Handel) for English Touring Opera.

Recent and future highlights include his debut appearance at the BBC Proms; a return to Wigmore Hall with the London Handel Players; solo recitals and concert tours with the English Concert, including at Carnegie Hall; Freiburger Barockorchester; Dunedin Consort; and Andronico/Tamerlano at the International Handel Festival in Karlsruhe. In 2022, he became the first

countertenor to win the International Handel Singing Competition, also winning the Audience Prize.



David Portillo, winner of the prestigious Sphinx Medal of Excellence (2024), has established himself as one of his generation's leading classical singers.

During the current season, Portillo sings Jupiter (*Semele*) at Dutch National Opera, conducted by Emmanuelle Haïm; Frederic (*The Pirates of Penzance*) with Seattle Opera; the title role in *Idomeneo* with Boston Baroque; *Carmina Burana* with Lyric Opera of Chicago; Mozart's *Requiem* with Manfred Honeck and the San Francisco Symphony, and with Jane Glover and Philadelphia Orchestra.

Portillo has appeared in multiple leading roles at major theaters worldwide, including Tamino (*The Magic Flute*) at Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and Glyndebourne Festival; David (*Die Meistersinger*) at Lyric Opera of Chicago; Lysander (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) at Seiji Ozawa Matsumoto Festival and Opéra de Lille; Count Almaviva (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*) at the Wiener Staatsoper; Lurcanio (*Ariodante*) at Palau des les Arts Reina Sofia and Festival d'Aix-en-Provence; and Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*) at Hyōgo Performing Arts Center, Kyoto.

Concert highlights include Beethoven's *Mass in C major* and Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass* with Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic; Los Angeles Master Chorale for Mozart's *Requiem* with Grant Gershon; an orchestral program of Italian repertoire with San Antonio Symphony and Sebastian Lang-Lessing; Britten's *Serenade for Tenor, Horn, and Strings* with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra; the title role in *Jephtha* with Music of the Baroque; Minnesota Or-

chestra for Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*; and New York Choral Society for Tippett's *A Child of our Time* at Carnegie Hall.

Mr. Portillo grew up in San Antonio, Texas, and resides in Zürich, Switzerland.

The Clarion Choir is a professional chamber choir based in New York City and one of the leading vocal ensembles in the United States. Formed in 2006, the choir made its Lincoln Center debut in 2011 performing Bach chorales as part of the White Light Festival. The group has since performed in some of classical music's most storied venues and produced five Grammy-nominated recordings. The Clarion Choir has a focus on Baroque and Classical repertoire, often performing with the period-instrument Clarion Orchestra. Yet over the last decade, it has also expanded into later literature, including the choral music of Rachmaninoff and his contemporaries, and newly composed works. In 2016, the choir premiered a lost Russian masterwork from the 1920s, *Passion Week* by Maximilian Steinberg, in the Grand Philharmonic Hall in St. Petersburg, at Rachmaninoff Hall at the Moscow Conservatory, and at the Royal Academy of Music in London. The choir's performances were featured on PBS and its recording of *Passion Week* received a Grammy nomination for Best Choral Performance and a nomination for *BBC Music Magazine's* annual Choral Award. The choir has since premiered and recorded other lost works from this period, such as Alexander Kastalsky's *Memory Eternal* and *Requiem for Fallen Brothers*. During the 2023–24 season, the choir performed Rachmaninoff's complete cycle of choral works in celebration of the composer's 150th birthday, culminating with a performance of his *Vespers* at Carnegie Hall. Most recently, the choir premiered and recorded a new work by American composer Patti Drennan, *Requiem of Light*.

The Clarion Choir is joining The English Concert and Harry Bicket for a third time as

part of that group's annual presentation of Handel oratorios and operas on tour. The choir also has a special partnership with the Metropolitan Museum of Art and its Met Live Arts series. It has presented eight Renaissance and early-Baroque programs in the Medieval Sculpture Hall and Met Cloisters in recent years. The choir has also collaborated with other notable ensembles and artists including the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of St. Luke's, Susan Graham, Isabel Leonard, Leonard Slatkin, Raphaël Pichon, and Madonna at the 2018 Met Gala.

Steven Fox is Artistic Director of the Clarion Choir & Orchestra. He is also Music Director of Cathedral Choral Society at Washington National Cathedral. Fox has served as Assistant Conductor at the New York Philharmonic to Jaap van Zweden during the 2022–23 and 2023–24 seasons and has appeared as a guest conductor with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Washington National Opera, Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Handel & Haydn Society, Orchestre Symphonique de Québec, Opéra de Québec, Charleston Symphony Orchestra, Music of the Baroque in Chicago, Washington Bach Consort, and Theatre of Early Music in Toronto. He has served as a chorus master for the National Symphony Orchestra at Wolf Trap (2024) and the Kennedy Center (2025). In 2023 and 2024, Fox led performances of Rachmaninoff's complete choral works, a project that was featured in the *New York Times* and *BBC Music Magazine*, and which culminated with a performance of the composer's *Vespers* at Carnegie Hall. He has made four recordings of choral music by Rachmaninoff and his contemporaries Maximilian Steinberg and Alexander Kastalsky. This series has received nominations for a Grammy (Best Choral Performance) and the *BBC Music Magazine* Choral Award and was named an

Editor's Choice in *Gramophone*. He has been recently nominated for a Grammy for Best Choral Performance for Clarion's new recording of *Requiem of Light* by Patti Drennan. Fox was named an Associate (ARAM) of the Royal Academy of Music and has

given master classes at the Royal Academy of Music, his alma mater Dartmouth College, the Juilliard School, and Yale University, where he also served for two years as preparatory conductor of the Yale Schola Cantorum.

THE ENGLISH CONCERT

Harry Bicket,
artistic director and harpsichord

First Violins
Tuomo Suni, *leader*
Kinga Ujszászi
Anna Curzon
Henry Tong
Ruiqi Ren
Cristina Prats Costa

Second Violins
Manami Mizumoto
Jacek Kurzydło
Mark Seow
Eleanor Legault
Alice Poppleton

Violas
Alfonso Leal del Ojo
Louise Hogan
William Drancsak

Violoncellos
Jonathan Byers
Samuel Ng
Madeleine Bouïssou

Double Bass
Giuseppe Ciraso

Oboes
Clara Espinosa Encinas
Bethan White

Bassoon
Katrin Lazar

Trumpets
Mark Bennett
Thomas Sævik

Theorbo
Sergio Bucheli

Harpsichord/Organ
Tom Foster

Timpani
Stefan Beckett

Alfonso Leal del Ojo,
Chief Executive
Sarah Fenn,
Head of Artistic Planning
Juliette Reid,
Artistic Planning Manager
Aidan Tulloch,
Development and Events Officer
Peter Jones,
Video Production Lead

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THE CLARION CHOIR

Steven Fox,
Artistic Director
Sopranos
Rachel Doehring Jackson
Olivia Greene
Aine Hakamatsuka
Madeline Healey
Linda Lee Jones
MaryRuth Miller
Raha Mirzadegan
Molly Quinn

Altos
Hannah Baslee
Luthien Brackett
Wendy Gilles
Kate Maroney
Timothy Parsons
Pamela Terry
Tenors
Steven Fox
Andrew Fuchs
Nickolas Karageorgiou

Oliver Mercer
Matthew Newhouse
John Ramseyer
Basses
Benjamin Howard
Neil Netherly
Craig Phillips
Jared Swope
Edward Vogel
Jonathan Woody



music dance theater
Cal Performances

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

2025–26 Season

Alexandre Kantorow, *piano*

This gifted French pianist, admired for his “assured, eloquent playing” (*The New York Times*), makes his Berkeley debut in a program of Chopin, Beethoven, Liszt (after Bach), and Scriabin along with a rarely performed sonata by Nikolai Medtner.

This performance is made possible in part by Art Berliner and Marian Lever.

Apr 23 ZELLERBACH HALL, BERKELEY



Víkingur Ólafsson, *piano* *Opus 109*

Cal Performances’ 2025–26 Artist in Residence explores the first of Beethoven’s great final piano sonata trilogy, Op. 109, taking us on a journey of musical inspiration and influence that includes side trips through the keyboard music of Bach and Schubert.

Leadership support for the 2025-26 Víkingur Ólafsson residency at Cal Performances is provided by Michael P. N. A. Hornel.

This performance is made possible in part by Jeffrey Mackie-Mason and Janet Netz.

Apr 29 ZELLERBACH HALL, BERKELEY



Renée Fleming, *soprano* Inon Barnatan, *piano*

Among the most celebrated singers of our time, Renée Fleming captivates with her sumptuous voice, consummate artistry, and riveting stage presence. Here, the five-time Grammy winner is joined by gifted pianist Inon Barnatan for a program of songs and arias.

Support for the presentation of Israeli artists is provided by The Sir Jack Lyons Charitable Trust. This performance is made possible in part by Michael A. Harrison and Susan Graham Harrison.

May 3 ZELLERBACH HALL, BERKELEY



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