

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY

82ND SEASON

ASSEMBLY HALL, TUNBRIDGE WELLS

SUNDAY 10TH NOVEMBER 1985

3.00 P.M.

HANDEL

ALEXANDER'S FEAST

JACQUELYN FUGELLE (Soprano)

ADRIAN THOMPSON (Tenor)

JOHN HANCORN (Baritone)

Harpsichord played by WILMARC ELLMAN

Orchestra led by JANE PAMMENT

CONDUCTED BY

DEREK WATMOUGH

Programme 30p

ALEXANDER'S FEAST – Handel

In the early summer of 1735 Handel set out for Tunbridge Wells with his health and spirits at a low ebb. He was racked with rheumatism and deeply worried about his operatic ventures in London (he had, in particular, just quarrelled, disastrously, with one of his best Italian singers). According to Sir Newman Flower, he stayed in the town for some weeks, drinking the waters and walking about, “a lonely figure, moody, speaking to no one”. But great spirits are not so easily crushed. “There is no certainty of any scheme for next season”, he wrote to Charles Jennens, the librettist, “but it is probable something or other may be done . . .”

The “something or other” turned out to be a splendid setting of Dryden’s ode *Alexander’s Feast*. This is one of the finest of all Cecilian odes. The verse throughout is vigorous, picturesque and packed with incident, and it inspired Handel to write some of his most apt and effective music, varying in range from a jolly drinking song (“Drinking is the soldier’s pleasure”) to the majestic fugal chorus which ends the work. First performed at Covent Garden in February 1736, the piece was an immediate and triumphant success, drawing from a crowded house on the opening night “applause such as had seldom been heard in London”.

The poem is subtitled “or the Power of Musique”; and this provides the clue to what most of it is actually about: music’s power to “make alternate passions fall and rise”. In the first part, the celebrated musician Timotheus, who provides the main entertainment at the feast, flatters Alexander, and earns the applause of “The list’ning crowd”, by taking as truth the legend of the king’s divine pedigree. The sections that follow are in praise of wine and love, interspersed by way of contrast with a lament for “Great and good” Darius, the last king of the Persians, who had been treacherously murdered.

In the second part, the action hots up very quickly. Timotheus calls on the king to avenge the Greeks who were slain in battle

And unbury’s remain
Inglorious on the plain

– the occasion for one of Handel’s most famous bass arias. Roused by this, and led on by ‘lovely Thais’, Alexander sets fire to the palace (there is a legend that this actually happened, at Persepolis). But this dismal act of vandalism does not conclude the poem. “At last divine Cecilia came”, revealing the true art of music as an altogether more elevated, sacred and ‘angelic’ affair; and we finish with a sort of competition between her and Timotheus:

Let old Timotheus yield the prize,
Or both divide the crown:
He rais’d a moral to the skies;
She drew an angel down.

CONTENTS

PART ONE

1	Overture	
2	'Twas at the royal feast	Recit.
3	Happy pair	Air and Chorus
(b)	Timotheus plac'd on high	Recit.
6	The song began from Jove	Recit., accomp.
7	The list'ning crowd	Chorus
8	With ravish'd ears	Air
9	The praise of Bacchus	Recit.
10	Bacchus, ever fair and young	Air and Chorus
11	Sooth'd with the sound	Recit.
12	He chose a mournful muse	Recit., accomp.
13	He sung Darius great and good	Air
14	With downcast looks	Recit., accomp.
15	Behold Darius great and good	Chorus
16	(a) The mighty master smil'd	Recit.
17	(a) Softly sweet, in Lydian measures	Arioso
18	War, he sung, is toil and trouble	Air
19	The many rend the skies	Chorus
20	The prince, unable to conceal pain	Air

PART TWO

21	Now strike the golden lyre again and Chorus	Recit. accomp.,
22	Revenge, revenge, Timotheus cries	Air
23	Give the vengeance due	Recit., accomp.
24	The princes applaud with a furious joy	Air
25	Thais led the way	Air and Chorus
26	Thus long ago	Recit., accomp.
27	At last divine Cecilia came	Grand Chorus
30	Let old Timotheus yield the prize	Recit.
31	Let old Timotheus yield the prize	Chorus.

JACQUELYN FUGELLE studied at the Guildhall School of Music where she gained her A.G.S.M. Diploma with Distinction in Performance. She has performed in most of the major concert halls and cathedrals in Britain and also extensively abroad in Canada, Germany, Netherlands and Belgium. Forthcoming engagements include Mendelssohn's "Lobgesang" Bach's "B Minor Mass", Haydn's "Creation" and several concerts with the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

Jacquelyn Fugelle is new to the society and we extend a warm welcome to her.

ADRIAN THOMSON has been closely associated with Glyndebourne for several years and his roles have included Ferrando in "Cosi Fan Tutte" and Flute in "A Midsummer Night's Dream". He also appears regularly with the English Chamber Orchestra and broadcasts frequently in both concerts and recitals on the B.B.C. He last sang with us in 1983 when he sang the leading role in "Dream of Gerontius". His engagements for 1984/5 include the Last Night of the Proms and Snout in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" for Glyndebourne Festival Opera.

JOHN HANCORN was born in Inverness and is a graduate of Trinity College of Music. He has also studied at the Britten-Pears School for Advanced Musical Studies and the National Opera Studio. He last sang for us in "A Sea Symphony" by Vaughan-Williams three years ago. He is an experienced concert singer and has appeared in leading festivals and with many leading orchestras. His future plans include continuing commitments to the Royal Opera, Covent Garden and Kent Opera. This Autumn he joins the Welsh National Opera.

**Forthcoming Concerts at the
Assembly Hall
at 3.00 p.m.**

- Sunday November 17th – The Green Room Concerts
Sunday December 1st – Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra
Sunday December 15th – Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society
Carol Concert.
Sunday April 13th – Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society
Coleridge Taylor:- Hiawatha

ALSO:

The Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society are holding a COFFEE MORNING at the PAROCHIAL HALL, WESTERN ROAD, SOUTHBOROUGH on SATURDAY 14th DECEMBER at 10-12 NOON. Just in time for CHRISTMAS.



The Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society acknowledge financial assistance from South East Arts Association.

THE ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY 82nd SEASON

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We are most grateful for the support of Patrons and Vice-Presidents and new ones are always welcome. Please ring or write to the General Secretary, Mr L. A. Lee, 233 Greggs Wood Road, Tunbridge Wells (TW 21937).

The Choir rehearses on Monday evening from September to April. New members are always welcome. There is a simple and private audition. Please ring the General Secretary (as above) if you are interested in becoming a singing member.

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