

TUESDAY 18 MAY  
ST JOHN'S SMITH SQUARE  
LONDON



GLUCK  
**THE CROWN**  
(LA CORONA, 1765)  
CONCERT PERFORMANCES

SATURDAY 22 MAY  
UNIVERSITY CHURCH  
OXFORD

*Azione teatrale*, in one act (1765)

Libretto by **Pietro Metastasio** (1698-1782), sung in Italian with linking English narration

Music by **Christoph Willibald Gluck** (1714-1787)

Performed in the edition by Gerhard Croll with permission of Bärenreiter-Verlag Kassel

**Atalanta**, princess of Argos, follower of Diana

**Meleagro**, prince of Etolia (Calydonia) and leader of the hunt

**Climene**, follower of Minerva, sister of Atalanta

**Asteria**, sister of Meleagro, follower of Diana, friend of Atalanta

**Narrator**

**Samantha Louis-Jean**

**Harriet Eyley**

**Lisa Howarth**

**Lucy Anderson**

**Rosa French**

**CHROMA (producer: Claire Shovelton)**

Caroline Balding (leader), Charlotte Bonneton, Chihiro Ono (violin 1); Florence Cooke, Katherine Roberts (violin 2); Bridget Carey, Katie Heller (viola); Cecilia Bignall ('cello); Adam Wynter (bass); Emma Feilding, Nicky Holland (oboe); Helen Storey (bassoon), Richard Bayliss, Richard Steggall (horn).

**Conductor**

**Robert Howarth**

Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782) was the most prolific opera poet of the mid-eighteenth century, his huge output of libretti, mostly classical *opera seria*, being set by over 300 composers. From 1730 until his death he was renowned as 'Caesarian' court poet to the imperial Habsburg household in Vienna, responsible not only for major dramatic works such as *La clemenza di Tito*, set by both Gluck and Mozart, but also for an abundant host of oratorios, cantatas and occasional pieces designed for court weddings, birthdays and name-days. The Empress Maria Theresa (1717-1780) sang in three of his works before her accession in 1740 and she continued to commission occasional pieces from him for lavish court spectacles, two of which enabled her talented daughters to take their turn on stage. *Il parnaso confuso* (performed by Bampton Classical Opera in 2014) was commissioned from Metastasio and Gluck early in 1765 for the wedding of the Empress's son Archduke Joseph – his younger brother Leopold conducted, whilst the solo roles were taken by the Archduchesses Maria Elisabeth, Maria Amalia, Maria Josepha and Maria Carolina, the last aged only 13. The delightful text – with a gentle humour unusual for Metastasio – and Gluck's limpid and colourful scoring, clearly delighted and led Maria Theresa to commission a sequel, *La corona*, for the same forces, this time to honour her imperial husband. The commission was given soon after the January performance of *Il parnaso confuso*, the poem was submitted on 29 April and Gluck probably completed the score by June.

In both works, Gluck carefully considered the abilities and personalities of his royal performers, and Metastasio recommended that their voices would be more suitable to the intimate Salon de Bataille at Schönbrunn Palace, rather than the larger Schlosstheater as the Empress at first intended. The work was commissioned for the name-day of the Holy Roman Emperor Francis on 4 October 1765, and plans proceeded in secret to ensure that the event would be a surprise. The Empress intended that her husband, a hunting enthusiast, would be flattered by the choice of subject – the Calydonian boar hunt – and she presumably approved the concluding choral *licenza* in which the thematic laurel crown of honour is offered by the cast to the emperor himself, with words of gratitude for his benevolent rule. Sadly the pleasure was never experienced: on 18 August Francis suddenly died in his carriage returning from the opera in Innsbruck, and life at court was thrown into turmoil. The project was inevitably abandoned, and Gluck never heard the music. It was not until 1966 that the opera was performed (a broadcast by the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation) and it was only first staged on 13 November 1987 (marking the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the composer's death) in the originally intended venue, the Salon de Bataille. The first (and believed only) UK performance was earlier the same year when the City of London Festival presented a concert performance in the Guildhall Old Library. Two recordings have been made: an abridged version by Warschauer Kammeroper conducted by Tomasz Bugaj (1983) and a complete version by the Queen's Chamber Band conducted by Rudolph Palmer (2004).

Metastasio designated his poem as an *azione teatrale* – a small scale work with a clear plot intended for a simple staging (Calzabigi's libretto for Gluck's ground-breaking *Orfeo ed Euridice*, 1762, was also originally similarly entitled). The subject of the Calydonian boar hunt was certainly unusual – Metastasio sensibly planned that the hunt and the bloody kill should occur offstage – although the love affair between the hero Meleagro and the beautiful but powerful Atalanta had already formed the central theme of Handel's 1736 opera *Atalanta* (Gluck and Handel met and collaborated in London in 1746). As with so many mythological subjects in the poetry and visual arts of the Renaissance and Baroque, the story comes primarily from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (book VIII) and Metastasio was characteristically sensitive to the pictorial and natural contexts of his theme. His stage direction for the single scene might evoke the paintings of Claude Lorrain: "On the right, the exterior of a grand but rustic royal hunting lodge, set on high ground and near to the forest; on the left are overgrown ancient ruins, with a small temple to Diana set a little further back, with her statue holding a laurel wreath; the rest of the scene depicts the immense Calydonian forest." A painting by Johann Franz Greipel depicting the four archduchesses in their roles in *Il parnaso confuso* indicates that the court scenic painters were well capable of responding with scenery of sensitive natural beauty.

The goddess of the hunt, Diana, feels slighted by the absence of respectful sacrifices from the king of Calydonia, a mountainous coastal area of Greece north of the Gulf of Corinth. As a punishment she sends an enormous and ferocious boar to ravage the country with death and destruction. The king's son, Meleagro, resolves to gather a troupe of brave heroes to hunt and slaughter the offending beast. The opera however is concerned not with masculine prowess and bravery but with the role and ambitions of women. Atalanta is peeved that only men can have the honour of the hunt and of gaining the crown of victory. She resolves to join the chase but is restrained by her more cautious sister Climene. Their friend, Princess Asteria, too is eager for action, but can only mope when told she is too young. It is no surprise that their embryonic feminism is not accepted by Prince Meleagro – boar-hunting is men's work and, besides, these girls are precious adornments of Greece whose lives cannot be put at risk. The girls are deflated but cannot help but hear the stirring sounds of the chase. Atalanta and Asteria impetuously run off into the thick forest, leaving Climene alone and frightened. But it only takes the length of her aria before Asteria and then Atalanta rush back in panic – their arrows have hit the fearsome beast which is now intent on their destruction. "A weapon, any kind of weapon!" shouts Atalanta – and, with a snatched prayer to Diana she runs off again. In the final scene, all convene, exhausted, sweaty, but triumphant. Meleagro announces that Atalanta has bravely killed the beast and saved the nation. However since Meleagro delivered the *coup de grâce*, Atalanta is adamant that it is he who should receive the honour of Diana's crown. In the end, what can be the solution? They all agree to present the crown instead to their own god – their august patron, Emperor Francis – "for grateful to him are they over whom he rules".

Gluck matches the poetry of his collaborator with music which is always amiable and beguiling. The 1760s saw a period of radical experimentation in opera, and Gluck had already pioneered a style of 'reform' in *Orfeo ed Euridice* in 1762, to be pursued further in *Alceste* in 1769 and *Paride ed Elena* the following year. But Gluck was always a pragmatist and understood that works for the court stage and *feste* needed to be immediately accessible and untroubling. Whilst in the published prefaces to his more radical works he railed against the 'ridiculous and wearisome' disfigurements which opera singers introduced through over-elaborated cadenzas and *da capos*, he nevertheless seems to permit that possibility in *Parnaso* and *Corona*. The fact that he was composing for young amateurs perhaps explains the relative simplicity of the music which eschews Baroque counterpoint without adopting the dramatic intensity of his larger works of the period. Whilst each movement is underpinned by restrained harmonic foundations, the variety of line and orchestral colour perfectly expresses the moods of the four idealised characters and their arcadian setting.

A tripartite overture suggests the contexts for the story, with an opening *allegro* capturing a mood of excitement and the chase, punctuated by the calls of the hunting horns in the forest. A short central *lento* seems languid and listless, perhaps expressive of the boredom and frustration of the girls who long to join the hunt. A final *allegro* in 3/8 creates an almost argumentative mood which sets up the fiery discussion between the girls in the opening dialogue: Gluck later recycled this passage to great effect in *Paride ed Elena*. In the following arias the changing and sometimes faltering moods of courage amongst the girls seem expressed by the patterns and colours of the music, and often the calls of the hunting horns interrupt as reminder of the distant chase being played out. Especially noteworthy are the longer arias for Atalanta and Meleagro: in no. 4, the alternating tempi and decoration depict the initial restraint of a trickling brook which then grows strong enough to assault the sea, and in no 6, the florid voice is paired with a concertante oboe in music telling of Meleagro's passion as he attempts to crown Atalanta as victor. Their glorious duet, no 7, anticipates the excitement of the ensembles in *Paride ed Elena* as the two squabble over who rightfully deserves the crown.

The idea for tonight's performance emerged from the necessary postponement to 2021 of our planned 2020 production of Gluck's *Paride ed Elena*, which would have celebrated the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its première on 3 November 1770. *La corona*, an opera which has been on our wish-list for several years, enables us to work with the four sopranos originally engaged for the larger piece, and its small scale (adapted with an English narrative replacing very lengthy recitatives) suits better the constraints of Covid-era performances. We offer this story of the hunting and slaughter of the Calydonian boar, an unwelcome visitor to a tranquil land, as an allegory of hope for our own troubled times.

The final word should go to the French novelist Stendhal who in 1812 penned a personal and insightful appreciation of the librettist, and who curiously anticipates the experience we may have of watching an online concert performance at home:

*"The object of music is to give pleasure, and Metastasio was the poet of music. His natural tenderness of feeling led him to avoid whatever would have given the slightest pain to the spectator. He has abstained from describing poignant distress... His pieces never terminate tragically; never do they exhibit the gloomy realities of life, or those chilling suspicions, which infuse their poison into the most tender passions. He was sensible that if the music of his operas was good, it would agreeably divert the mind of the spectator, by leading him to think of what he most loves.... He seems to say to the spectator, 'Enjoy yourself, I will not even give you the trouble of attending. Do not concern yourself about the plot of the piece; forget the theatre altogether. Make yourself happy in your box; give yourself up to the tender sentiment which my hero expresses.'*

## Overture (*Allegro; lento; allegro*)

### 1. Aria (*Andante ligato*) – Atalanta

Vacilla il mio coraggio,  
il mio vigor vien meno,  
per voi se il cor nel seno  
mi sento palpitar.

*My courage falters, my resolve lessens; my heart is pounding with concern for you.*

Fra quella'orror selvaggio  
dal vostro rischio oppressa  
mi scorderei me stessa,  
non ardirei pugnar.

*In this frightening wilderness, oppressed by the risk you face, I would forget about myself and would not dare to fight.*

### 2. Aria (*Grazioso; moderato*) – Meleagro

Sol voi rese il ciel cortese  
degnò oggetto a' 4ostril voti,  
bello sprone a grandi imprese,  
dolce premio alla virtù.

*The gracious heavens chose you alone to be the worthy object of our vows, the lovely encouragement for our great ventures and the sweet prize for virtue.*

Su gli eroi dagli astri amici  
è il regnar concesso a voi;  
e agli eroi l'esser felici  
in sì cara servitù.

*The friendly stars have chosen you to rule over the heroes and to make them happy in their sweet slavery.*

### 3. Aria (*tempo di marcia*) – Asteria

Anch'io mi sento in petto.  
scintille di valor.  
di gloria acceso il cor  
mi sento anch'io.

*I also feel the sparks of bravery in my breast, I also feel my heart is aflame with glory.*

Se giusto è che si vanti  
di tanti il nome e tanti  
qual legge, qual dover,  
ignota a rimaner,  
condanna il mio?

*If it is fair that so many men can flaunt their names,  
What law or right condemns me to remain unknown?*

#### 4. Aria (*adagio/allegro*) – Atalanta

Quel chiaro rio che a pena  
serpeggia or per l'arena,  
altero fiume un giorno  
al mare insulterà.

*That clear stream that barely winds its way through the sand will, one day, confront the sea as a mighty river.*

Quel arborscel gentile  
che ai zeffiri d'aprile  
or contrastar non sa,  
coi procellosi venti  
con le stagioni argenti,  
un di contrasterà.

*That sweet sapling that now cannot withstand the April breezes will, one day, resist tempestuous winds and the bleak seasons.*

#### 5. Aria (*moderato; andante*) – Climene

Benchè inesperto all'armi,  
spavento il cor non ha;  
la tenera amistà  
lo rende audace.

*Although inexperienced with weapons, my heart is not afraid, tender friendship makes it brave.*

Là vorrei già trovarmi,  
fin che lontan sarò,  
sento che non avrò  
riposo e pace.

*I would like to be already there, for as long as I am far away from them, I can know neither rest or peace.*

#### 6. Aria (*moderato; adagio*) - Meleagro

Fe' germogliare il fato  
per degno tuo decoro  
quel trionfale alloro  
e l'educò per te.

*May the Fates allow this triumphal laurel to flourish in your honour, and to flower for you.*

E dovrà dir chi ornato  
il tuo bel crin ne vede,  
che di gran lunga eccede  
il merto alla mercé.

*And whoever sees it adorning your noble brow must say that merit far exceeds compassion.*

## 7. Duet (*grazioso*)– Meleagro and Atalanta

*Mel:* Deh l'acchetta, ah giunga alfine quella fronte a circondar!

*Come, accept it, so that at last it may encircle that brow!*

*At:* Tu lo serba: è su quel crine destinato a verdeggiar.

*You must keep it, for it was destined to adorn that head!*

*Mel:* Ch'io l'usurpi a quel valore che primier l'ha meritato!

*Would I take it from that heroine who first deserved it?*

*At:* Ch'io l'involi al difensore che I miei giorni ha conservato?

*Would I steal it from the protector who saved my life?*

*Mel:* Tanto ingiusto! No!

*Such injustice! No!*

*At:* Tanto ingrato! No!

*How ungrateful! No!*

*Both:* Non mi sento il core in sen  
se la gloria dell'impresa  
fu dal fato a me contesa,  
arrossir non voglio almen.

*I can barely feel my heart in my breast. If Fate disputes the glory of the enterprise, I do not wish to blush for shame.*

## 8. Chorus

Sacro dover ci chiama  
del nostro Nume al piede,  
e un tenero lo chiede  
e riverente amor.  
Gli dica il nostro aspetto,  
in mezzo al suo rispetto,  
quelche non osa il labbro  
e dir vorrebbe il cor.

*Sacred duty summons us to the feet of our own god, imploring his tender and caring love. May our demeanour show our respect, speaking what our lips dare not utter but which our hearts long to express.*

## Biographies

Founded in 1997, **CHROMA** is a flexible chamber ensemble dedicated both to new music and to revisiting classic repertoire in fresh and exciting contexts; mentoring the next generation of composers, and involving audiences in compelling, inspirational experiences. In addition to its own projects and performances, CHROMA collaborates with the ROH (8 premières and 5 revivals in the last decade), Tête à Tête (Associate Ensemble), Iford Festival (12 operas, 8 cloister concerts and 4 primary school projects since 2009), Bampton Classical Opera (10 operas at St John's Smith Square in last 8 years), the Royal Philharmonic Society (workshops for women conductors), and mentors student composers at Royal Holloway University of London (Ensemble in Residence), Royal Academy of Music and Oxford University.

**Robert Howarth** (conductor) read music at the University of York and is fast establishing a growing reputation as director and conductor of early and classical repertoire. His opera engagements include Opernhaus Zürich, Norwegian Opera, Hamburg State Opera, Opera North, Welsh National Opera, Theater St Gallen, The Grange Festival, English Touring Opera, Early Opera Company, Academy of Ancient Music, Dartington and Birmingham Opera Company. Howarth was Music Director for *Farinelli & the King* at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, Duke of York's Theatre and Belasco Theatre, New York City. He has conducted the Hallé, Danish Radio, Bilbao Symphony, Royal Seville Symphony, RTE National Symphony, Salzburg Mozarteum, Irish Baroque and English Chamber Orchestras; the Academy of Ancient Music, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, English Concert and St James Baroque.

**Lucy Anderson** is a former Scottish Opera Emerging Artist, graduate of the Opera Course at the Guildhall and a Britten-Pears Young Artist. Recent highlights include first prize in the Bampton Classical Opera Young Singers' Competition 2019, First Lady *The Magic Flute*, the Opera Highlights Tour (Scottish Opera), finalist in the Wagner Society Competition at Wigmore Hall and her debut performance of Strauss' *Four Last Songs* with Northumberland Orchestra. Alongside playing the role of Helen *Paris & Helen* with Bampton this summer, Lucy was due to join Opera Holland Park as a Young Artist, performing the role of Tatiana in *Eugene Onegin*. Lucy is currently taking part in a project entitled Opera for Thought with OHP and Resonate Arts, leading workshops and performing for people with dementia and their carers.

**Harriet Eyley** was a Welsh National Opera Associate Artist between 2018 / 2020, her programme supported by the WNO Sir John Moores Award and the WNO Chris Ball Bursary, singing Frasquita *Carmen*, Norina *Don Pasquale*, Barbarina *Le nozze di Figaro* and Oscar *Un ballo in maschera*, as well as appearing in *A Night in Vienna*. Other recent engagements have included *Beethoven Unleashed: the 1808 Concert* with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, *Four Seasons by Candlelight* for Raymond Gubbay Ltd, *New Year Gala* concerts with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Lucy Worsley's *Queen Victoria's Music* for BBC 2. Future engagements include an international concert tour (Brussels, Dortmund, Paris) with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra conducted by Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla singing Oscar *Un ballo in maschera*.

**Lisa Howarth** read English at Cambridge University, where she held both choral and academic scholarships. After singing professionally with groups including The Sixteen and the BBC Singers, she studied opera at the Guildhall and the Cardiff International Academy of Voice. She has since worked for many UK companies, including ENO, Opera North, Scottish Opera, The English Concert, Garsington Opera and Bampton Classical Opera, and was, until December 2016, full time at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. For Bampton she has sung the Countess *The Marriage of Figaro* (Marcos Portugal) and Pleasure *The Choice of Hercules* as well as the soprano solos in our *Messiah* of December 2019.

**Samantha Louis-Jean** trained at the Maîtrise de Radio-France, the University of Montreal and with Janice Chapman. Recent opera credits include Elvira *L'italiana in Algeri*, Angelica *Orlando Furioso*, Olympia, Antonia, Giulietta and Stella, *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, Mélisande *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Zerlina *Don Giovanni*, La Sastue and Céphise *Pygmalion*, Venus *Amour et Psyché*, Euridice *La descente d'Orphée aux enfers*. She has performed at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Dijon Opera, Lille Opera, Luxembourg Opera, Montpellier Opera, Quebec Opera, the Aix-en-Provence Festival, Montreal Baroque Festival, the Folles

Journées de Nantes and worked with conductors including Jean-Claude Malgoire, Emmanuelle Haïm and Christophe Rousset. Samantha is a winner of the Froville International Baroque Competition, the Prix d'Europe Competition, the Lyndon-Woodside Oratorio Society of New York Competition and the Jacqueline Desmarais Foundation. She is a grant recipient of the Conseil des Arts et des Lettres du Québec, the Canada Council of the Arts, the Jeunesses Musicales du Canada and the Père-Lindsay Foundation.

**Rosa French** (narrator) trained in drama at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Her theatrical credits include: *Right right left with heels*, *Dawn A Lesson*, *Masha Three Sisters*, *Cordelia / The Fool King Lear*, *Jane Eyre Jane Eyre*. For film, Rosa's credits include *The Goob* with the BBC and BFI. She has acted in several Bampton operas, including *An Italian Girl in London* at the Buxton Festival. She co-established the London-based theatre company STIGMAcollective in 2017, writing and performing in *A Lesson* and *Unexpected*. The company performed the UK première of Polish play *right left with heels*, which is returning to the VOILA! Europe festival at The Cockpit theatre on 11th and 12th November.

**Bampton Classical Opera** was founded in Oxfordshire in 1993 by its artistic directors, Gilly French and Jeremy Gray. It has established a strong national reputation for lively and accessible productions of little-known works of the later eighteenth century, usually given in English, including many UK premières. The smaller operas of Gluck have formed one of several strands of interest. It has performed regularly at St John's Smith Square since 2002, and other major venues have included Wigmore Hall, Purcell Room, and the Buxton and Cheltenham Festivals. The company is committed to developing the careers of outstanding young singers through performances and a biennial Young Singers' Competition. Bampton Classical Opera is a Finalist in the current (2019) International Opera Awards.

Bampton Classical Opera is very grateful for the generous support received during this difficult year from:

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The London concert is being filmed and will be available for viewing on our website from 23 May.

PR for Bampton Classical Opera: Margaret Skeet PR  
Programme notes: Jeremy Gray

Patrons: Bonaventura Bottone, Brian Kay, Sir Roger Norrington, Andrew Parrott, Sir David Pountney, Sir Curtis Price, Jean Rigby

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