
Thursday 12 February 2009 at 6.30pm

Handel Samson

An oratorio in three acts

Libretto adapted by Newburgh Hamilton from John Milton's *Samson Agonistes*

The Sixteen

Orchestra of The Sixteen

Harry Christophers *conductor*

Gillian Keith *soprano*

Dalila, Philistine Woman,
Israelite Woman

Catherine Wyn-Rogers *mezzo-soprano*

Micah

Mark Padmore *tenor*

Samson

Nicholas Mulroy *tenor*

Messenger

Roderick Williams *baritone*

Manoah

Jonathan Lemalu *bass-baritone*

Harapha

5.00pm: pre-concert talk in the Redgrave Room

There will be one interval of 20 minutes after Act 1.

Barbican Hall



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George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

Samson, HWV 57 (1742)

When Handel first arrived in London in 1710, it was unlikely that he had much thought for English literature. He had come, after all, as a composer of Italian opera, and although over the next 20 or so years he composed a number of works in English (notably church music and the dramas *Acis and Galatea* and *Esther*), *opera seria* remained his primary concern. By the 1730s however, its popularity was in decline, and Handel had begun to turn to English oratorio, a genre he found to be not only more successful with the public but increasingly inspiring. His first English oratorios had mainly been adaptations of earlier works, done with the help of a jobbing and inexperienced librettist, but in 1736 he began a move towards more exalted texts with a setting of *Alexander's Feast*, an ode in honour of St Cecilia by John Dryden. The poem had been adapted for him by Newburgh Hamilton, just one of a number of literary figures who, having heard what Handel could do with English words, were eager to see his genius wedded to some of the finest texts the language had to offer. Gradually they began to get their way; over the next few years Handel set Dryden again in his *Ode for St Cecilia's Day*, the King James Bible in *Israel in Egypt* and *Messiah*, and Milton in *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*. It was a further setting of Milton that was to provide one of the greatest of his oratorio successes, *Samson*.

Even so, at the time of its composition, and in spite of having achieved some success in oratorio, Handel was still hoping to revive the public's flagging interest in Italian opera. The failure of *Deidamia* early in 1741 seemed to signal the end, however, and rumours began to spread that the composer was ready to take his talents elsewhere. He did, too, though not as permanently as Londoners might have feared. Within a few months he had accepted an invitation to visit Dublin, and by the end of the year he was there, having over the summer composed two new oratorios, *Messiah* and *Samson*.

Samson he kept back for the time being, but *Messiah* was so warmly received at its premiere in April 1742 that when Handel returned to London the following August he quickly began to plan an oratorio season for Covent Garden. *Samson* was retouched and given its first performance on 18 February 1743, meeting with immediate success and gaining a popularity that initially outstripped that of *Messiah* and helped to persuade the composer of his future course. He never wrote another opera.

The Milton connection almost certainly added to *Samson's* appeal. Nearly 70 years after his death, Milton was still perhaps England's most widely admired poet, acknowledged both as a master of the sublime in verse and as a figure of compelling moral stature. *Samson Agonistes*, his final dramatic poem showing the last hours of the Israelite hero Samson (first related in the biblical Book of Judges), was considered by many to be his most powerful work, and Handel himself had been much impressed by a private reading of it he had attended at Lord Shaftesbury's house in London in 1739. The idea of making an oratorio of it may well have originated then, but when it finally happened it was again Hamilton who adapted Milton's words, a task he carried out with great care and skill. Though the poem is cast in the form of speeches for named roles, it was not, Hamilton observed, 'divided by [Milton] into Acts or Scenes, nor design'd for the Stage; but given only as the Plan of a Tragedy with Chorus's, after the manner of the Ancients', and while this may at first make it seem ripe for transformation into an oratorio, there was in fact much work still to be done. Milton's original not only had to be condensed and fitted to the differing needs of recitatives and arias by means of a judicious mixture of cuts and paraphrases, but a more balanced theatrical structure had to be created, with extra numbers for Israelites and (especially) Philistines. Some of this new material Hamilton wrote himself, but

much of it was supplied by inspired borrowings from 13 other Milton poems, including *At a Solemn Music*, *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, and the Psalm paraphrases. He also invented a new character, Micah, to whom he gave words Milton had assigned to his Israelite chorus. The effect was to open the drama up into something more public, and at the same time give Handel opportunities for more varied musical treatment. Milton's is a dark and claustrophobic tragedy (we must not forget that, like Samson, the poet was blind), but Hamilton not only widened the canvas with his changes and additions, he also deliberately plotted the libretto's imagery to suggest an overall progression from darkness to 'endless blaze of light'.

Although *Samson* is dramatic in its style of presentation, it does not rely on action for its effect. The talent for depicting the inner self that Handel had displayed so often before is here used to illustrate the psychological regeneration of a character who, when we meet him, is utterly broken in spirit. The oratorio begins with Samson already blinded and imprisoned by the Philistines, the sorry result of divulging the source of his superhuman strength (his long hair) to his wife Dalila, herself a Philistine. Over the course of the oratorio, however, the cumulative effect of encounters with his friend Micah and his father Manoah, the break with the past represented by his rejection of Dalila, and finally his goading by the Philistine champion Harapha, cause him to arrive at ultimate fulfilment and redemption as an instrument of God's will. His one decisive physical act, the pulling down of the temple on himself and his prematurely celebrating enemies, occurs 'off-stage'.

Handel composed *Samson* in some haste, which may explain the oratorio's sizeable proportion of 'borrowed' music. Passages can be traced to Telemann, Carissimi and Muffat among others, but as usual the end result is

utterly Handelian, profoundly humane and profoundly emotional. There are many memorable moments: the Act 1 aria in which Samson bemoans his blindness ('Total eclipse') would be deeply moving even if we did not know that Handel himself would later lose his sight, and that performances of the aria during the 1750s were tearful occasions for composer and audience alike; Micah's heartfelt plea to Jehovah in Act 2 ('Return, O God of Hosts') is a truly Handelian inspiration, one of the finest of his many inimitable slow arias; and the angry exchange with Harapha in Act 2, culminating in a shouting match between rival choruses of Israelites and Philistines, is excellent theatre. Then there is virtually the whole of Act 3, but especially Manoah's outpouring of fatherly devotion ('How willing my paternal love') and the funeral sequence for Samson, devoid of bombast but shot through with solemn dignity.

Handel's skill at vivid character portrayal is also much in evidence, not least in the brilliant way he draws the coquettish Dalila (her first aria accompanied by cooing, enticing violins) or the boastful Harapha, the 'bulk, of spirit void' with his empty, blustering scales. Even the respective Israelite and Philistine choruses have their own musical personalities – ardent and anthem-like for the former, carefree and firmly secular (often with horns added to the orchestra) for the Philistines.

Samson has always been highly regarded among Handel's oratorios, yet performances of this lengthy work remain relatively rare. Even in Handel's day cuts were common, yet for those who sit through it the rewards are high. For George Bernard Shaw, writing in 1892, it showed Handel 'in his brightest, most heroic vein, at the height of his strength, decision, audacity and mastery'. One might add, at the height of his nobility and compassion too.

Programme note © Lindsay Kemp

Synopsis

The action takes place 'before the prison in Gaza'. Samson, the Israelite warrior, has been captured and blinded by the Philistines, who were helped by his wife Dalila cutting off his hair and thus depriving him of his strength.

Act 1

The Philistines are holding a festival in honour of Dagon, their god, and Samson has been temporarily released to receive visits from friends. Micah is appalled by the depths to which he has fallen, but Samson blames only himself for succumbing to a woman. He is also visited by his father, Manoah, who reveals that he is trying to negotiate his release, but this only makes Samson long the more for death. His friends attempt to console him with thoughts of the eternal life to come.

Act 2

Samson is visited by Dalila, full of conspicuous remorse for her 'rash, misthought deed', but Samson rejects her angrily. Next comes the Philistine giant Harapha; in answer to his boasting, Samson challenges him to

combat, but Harapha disdains to fight a blind slave, and instead derides Jehovah for abandoning his follower. Micah suggests that he ask Dagon to demonstrate his power, and the Act ends with Philistines and Israelites noisily hymning their respective deities.

Act 3

Harapha invites Samson to show off his strength at the feast. Samson initially declines with scorn, but, after the chorus have again applied to Jehovah, begins to feel his powers renew. He accepts Harapha's challenge, and goes with him to the feast, bidding his followers remain behind. As Manoah arrives, still hoping to obtain Samson's release, the nearby sound of Philistine revels is interrupted by shouts of horror and woe. An Israelite messenger enters, and tells how Samson pulled the temple down upon the Philistines and himself, causing their joint destruction. Samson's body is carried in and the Israelites lament his passing before turning their voices to praise of Jehovah.

Synopsis © Lindsay Kemp

ACT 1, SCENE 1

Before the prison in Gaza.

Overture

Samson, blind and in chains. Priests of Dagon, celebrating his festival.

**Recitative
Samson**

This day, a solemn feast to Dagon held,
Relieves me from my task of servile toil;
Unwillingly their superstition yields
This rest, to breathe heaven's air,
Fresh blowing, pure and sweet.

Chorus of Philistines

Awake the trumpet's lofty sound!
The joyful sacred festival comes round,
When Dagon king of all the earth is crown'd

**Air
Philistine Woman**

Ye men of Gaza, hither bring
The merry pipe and pleasing string,
The solemn hymn, and cheerful song:
Be Dagon prais'd by ev'ry tongue!

Chorus of Philistines

Awake the trumpet's lofty sound!, *etc.*

**Recitative
Samson**

Why by an angel was my birth foretold,
As in a fiery column ascending
From off the altar, in my parent's sight?
Why was my nurture order'd and prescrib'd,
As of a person separate to God?
If I must die, betray'd and captiv'd thus,
The scorn and gaze of foes? Oh cruel thought!
My griefs find no redress! They inward prey,
Like gangren'd wounds, immedicable grown.

SCENE 2

Enter Micah and Israelites, observing Samson.

**Recitative
Micah**

O change beyond report, thought, or belief!
See, how he lies with languish'd head, unpropt,
Abandon'd, past all hope! Can this be he?
Heroic Samson? Whom no strength of man,
Nor fury of the fiercest beast, could quell!
Who tore the lion, as the lion tears the kid!
Ran weaponless on armies clad in iron,
Useless the temper'd steel, or frock of mail!

**Air
Micah**

O mirror of our fickle state!
In birth, in strength, in deeds how great!
From highest glory fall'n so low,
Sunk in the deep abyss of woe!

**Recitative
Samson**

Whom have I to complain of but myself,
Who Heaven's great trust could not in silence keep,
But weakly to a woman must reveal it!
Oh glorious strength! Oh impotence of mind!
But without wisdom, what does strength avail?
Proudly secure, yet liable to fall?
God (when he gave it) hung it in my hair,
To show how slight the gift.
But, peace, my soul!
Strength was my bane, the source of all my woes,
Each told apart, would ask a life to wail.

Micah

Matchless in might! Once Israel's glory, now her grief!
We come (thy friends well known) to visit thee!

Samson

Welcome my friends!

Micah

Which shall we first bewail,
Thy bondage, or lost sight?

Samson

Oh loss of sight! Of thee I most complain!
Oh worse than beggary, old age, or chains!
My very soul in real darkness dwells!

Air

Samson

Total eclipse! No sun, no moon,
All dark amidst the blaze of noon!
Oh glorious light! No cheering ray,
To glad my eyes with welcome day!
Why thus depriv'd Thy prime decree?
Sun, moon, and stars are dark to me!

Chorus of Israelites

Oh first created beam! And thou great word:
'Let there be light!' – and light was over all;
One heav'nly blaze shone round this earthly ball;
To thy dark servant, life, by light afford!

Recitative

Samson

Ye see, my friends, how woes enclose me round:
But had I sight, how could I heave my head
For shame? Thus, for a word, or tear, divulge
To a false woman God's most secret gift,
And then be sung, or proverb'd for a fool!

Micah

Here comes thy rev'rend sire, old Manoah,
With careful steps, and locks as white as down.

Samson

Alas! Another grief that name awakes.

SCENE 3

Enter Manoah.

Recitative

Manoah

Brethren and men of Dan, say, where is my son,
Samson, fond Israel's boast? Inform my age!

Micah

As signal now in low dejected state,
As in the height of pow'r – see where he lies!

Recitative

Manoah

Oh miserable change! Is this the man,
Renown'd afar, the dread of Israel's foes?
Who with an angel's strength their armies duell'd.
Himself an army! – Now unequal match
To guard his breast against the coward's spear!

Micah

Oh ever failing trust in mortal strength!
And oh, what not deceivable and vain in man!

Manoah

The good we wish for often proves our bane.
I pray'd for children and I gain'd a son,
And such a son, as all men hail'd me happy;
But who'd be now a father in my stead?
The blessing drew a scorpion's tail behind;
This plant (select and sacred for a while,
The miracle of all) was in one hour
Ensnar'd, assaulted, overcome, led bound,
His foes' derision, captive, poor and blind!

Air

Manoah

Thy glorious deeds inspir'd my tongue
Whilst airs of joy from thence did flow
To sorrow now I tune my song,
And set my harp to notes of woe.

Recitative**Samson**

Justly these evils have befall'n thy son;
 Sole author I, sole cause.
 My griefs for this
 Forbid mine eye to close, or thoughts of rest.
 But now the strife shall end: me overthrown,
 Dagon presumes to enter lists with God,
 Who, thus provok'd, will not connive, but rouse
 His fury soon, and his great name assert;
 Dagon shall stoop, ere long be quite despoil'd
 Of all those boasted trophies won on me.

Air**Samson**

Why does the God of Israel sleep?
 Arise with dreadful sound;
 And clouds encompass'd round!
 Then shall the heathen hear thy thunder deep.
 The tempest of thy wrath now raise,
 In whirlwinds them pursue,
 Full fraught with vengeance due,
 Till shame and trouble all thy foes shall seize!

Recitative**Manoah**

For thee, my dearest son, must thou meanwhile
 Lie, thus neglected, in this loathsome plight?

Samson

It should be so.
 Why should I live?
 Soon shall these orbs to double darkness yield.
 My genial spirits droop, my hopes are flat;
 Nature in me seems weary of herself
 My race of glory run, and race of shame;
 Death, invocated oft, shall end my pains,
 And lay me gently down with them that rest.

Air**Micah**

Then long eternity shall greet your bliss
 No more of earthly joys, so false and vain!

Chorus of Israelites

Then round about the starry throne
 Of Him, who ever rules alone,
 Your heav'nly-guided soul shall climb:
 Of all this earthly grossness quit,
 With glory crown'd for ever sit,
 And triumph over Death, and thee, oh Time!

INTERVAL 20 minutes

ACT 2, SCENE 1

The same scene. Samson, Manoah, Micah and Israelites.

Recitative

Samson

My evils hopeless are! One pray'r remains:
A speedy death, to close my miseries.

Micah

Relieve thy champion, image of thy strength,
And turn his labours to a peaceful end!

Air

Micah

Return, oh God of hosts! Behold
Thy servant in distress!
His might griefs redress
Nor by the heathen be it told.

Chorus and Micah

To dust his glory they would tread,
And number him amongst the dead.

Micah

Return, oh God of hosts!, *etc.*

Chorus

To dust his glory they would tread, *etc.*

SCENE 2

Samson and Micah. Enter Dalila, attended by her virgins.

Recitative

Micah

But who is this, that so bedeck'd and gay
Comes this way sailing like a stately ship?
With all her streamers waving in the winds,
An odorous perfume her harbinger,
A damsel train behind?
'Tis Dalila, thy wife.

Samson

My wife? My traitress! Let her not come near me!

Micah

She stands, and eyes thee fix'd with head declin'd
(Like a fair flow'r surcharg'd with dew) she weeps;
Her words address'd to thee, seem tears dissolv'd
Wetting the borders of her silken veil.

Dalila

With doubtful feet, and wav'ring resolution,
I come, Oh Samson!, dreading thy displeasure
But conjugal affection led me on,
Prevailing over fear and tim'rous doubt;
Glad if in aught my help or love could serve,
To expiate my rash, unthought misdeed.

Samson

Out thou hyaena! 'Twas malice brought thee here!
These are the arts of women false like thee,
To break all vows, repent, deceive, submit,
Then with the instructed skill again transgress.
The wisest men have met such bosom snakes,
Beguil'd like me, to ages an example.

Dalila

I would not lessen my offence, yet beg
To weigh it by itself. What is it then
But curiosity? A small female fault –
Greedy of secrets, but to publish them.
Why would you trust a woman's frailty then,
And to her importunity your strength!
A mutual weakness mutual pardon claims.

Samson

How cunningly the sorceress displays
Her own transgressions, to upbraid me mine!
I to myself was false, ere thou to me:
Bitter reproach, but true. The pardon, then
I to my folly give, take thou to thine!

Air

Dalila

With plaintive notes and am'rous moan,
Thus coos the turtle left alone.

Recitative**Dalila**

Alas! Th'event was worse than I foresaw;
 Fearless at home of partners in my love,
 'Twas jealousy did prompt to keep you there
 Both day and night, love's prisoner, wholly mine.

Samson

Did love constrain thee? No! 'Twas raging lust!
 Love seeks for love; thy treason sought my hate.
 In vain you strive to cover shame with shame;
 Once joined to me, though judged your country's foe,
 Parents and all, were in the husband lost.

Air**Samson**

Your charms to ruin led the way,
 My sense deprav'd, my strength enslav'd;
 As I did love, you did betray.
 How great the curse! How hard my fate
 To pass life's sea with such a mate!

Recitative**Dalila**

Forgive what's done, nor think of what's past cure.
 From forth this prison-house come home to me
 Where with redoubled love and nursing care,
 (To me glad office!) my virgins and myself
 Shall tend about thee to extremest age.

Air**Dalila**

My faith and truth, oh Samson, prove,
 But hear me, hear the voice of love!
 With love no mortal can be cloy'd,
 All happiness is love enjoy'd.

Chorus of Virgins

Her faith and truth, oh Samson, prove,
 But hear her, hear the voice of love!

Recitative**Samson**

Ne'er think of that! I know thy warbling charms
 Thy trains, thy wiles, and fair enchanted cup:
 Their force is null'd; where once I have been caught,
 I shun the snare; these chains, this prison-house,
 I count the house of liberty to thine.

Dalila

Let me approach, at least, and touch thy hand.

Samson

Not for thy life, lest fierce remembrance wake
 My sudden rage to tear thee limb from limb.
 At distance I forgive: depart with that.
 Now triumph in thy falsehood, so farewell!

Dalila

Thou art more deaf to pray'rs than winds or seas;
 Thy anger rages on eternal tempest.
 Why should I humbly sue for peace, thus scorn'd,
 With infamy upon my name denounc'd?
 When in this land I ever shall be held
 The first of womankind, living or dead;
 My praises shall be sung at solemn feasts,
 Who sav'd my country from a fierce destroyer.

Duet**Dalila**

Traitor to love! I'll sue no more
 For pardon scorn'd, your threats give o'er!

Samson

Traitress to love! I'll hear no more
 The charmer's voice, your arts give o'er!

Exit Dalila.

SCENE 3**Recitative****Micah**

She's gone! A serpent manifest; her sting
 Discover'd in the end.

Samson

So let her go!
 God sent her here to aggravate my folly.

SCENE 4

Recitative

Micah

No words of peace, no voice enchanting fear,
A rougher tongue expect; here's Harapha,
I know him by his stride and haughty look.

Enter Harapha and Philistines.

Harapha

I come not, Samson, to condole thy chance;
I am of Gath, men call me Harapha;
Thou know'st me now. Of thy prodigious might
Much have I heard, incredible to me!
Nor less displeas'd that never in the field
We met, to try each other's deeds of strength:
I'd see if thy appearance answers loud report.

Samson

The way to know were not to see, but taste

Harapha

Ha! Dost thou then already single me?
I thought that labour and thy chains had tam'd thee.
Had fortune brought me to that field of death,
Where thou wrought'st wonders with an ass's jaw,
I'd left thy carcass where the ass lay thrown.

Samson

Boast not of what thou wouldn't save done, but do.

Harapha

The honour certain to have won from thee
I lose, prevented by thy eyes put out;
To combat with a blind man, I disdain.

Air

Harapha

Honour and arms scorn such a foe
Though I could end thee at a blow;
Poor victory, to conquer thee,
Or glory in thy overthrow!
Vanquish a slave that is half slain?
So mean a triumph I disdain.

Recitative

Samson

Cam'st thou for this, vain boaster? Yet take heed!
My heels are fetter'd but my hands are free.
Thou bulk, of spirit void! I once again,
Blind and in chains, provoke thee to the fight!

Harapha

Oh Dagon! Can I hear this insolence,
To me unus'd, not rend'ring instant death?

Duet

Samson

Go, baffled, coward, go,
Lest vengeance lay thee low,
In safety fly my wrath with speed!

Harapha

Presume not on thy God,
Who under foot has trod
Thy strength and thee, at greatest need.

Recitative

Micah

Here lie the proof: if Dagon be thy God,
With high devotion invoke his aid;
His glory is concern'd. Let him dissolve
Those magic spells that gave our hero strength
Then know whose God is God; Dagon, of mortal make,
Or that Great One whom Abram's sons adore.

Chorus of Israelites

Hear, Jacob's God, Jehovah, hear!
Oh save us, prostrate at thy throne!
Israel depends on thee alone,
Save us, and show that thou art near!

Recitative

Harapha

Dagon, arise! Attend thy sacred feast!
Thy honour calls, this day admits no rest.

Chorus of Philistines

To song and dance we give the day,
Which shows thy universal sway.
Protect us by thy mighty hand,
And sweep this race from out the land!

**Chorus of Israelites and Virgins, Dalila, Samson,
Harapha and Manoah**

Fix'd in his everlasting seat,
Jehovah/Great Dagon rules the world in state.
His thunder roars, heav'n shakes and earth's aghast;
The stars with deep amaze,
Remain in steadfast gaze
Jehovah/Great Dagon is of gods the first and last.

ACT 3, SCENE 1

Samson, Micah and Israelites.

Recitative**Micah**

More trouble is behind; for Harapha
Comes on again, speed in his steps and look.

Samson

I fear him not, nor all his giant brood.

Harapha

Samson, to thee our Lords thus bid me say:
This day to Dagon we do sacrifice
With triumph, pomp and games,: we know, thy strength
Surpasses human race: come then, and show
Some public proof to grace this solemn feast.

Samson

I am Hebrew, and our law forbids
My presence at their vain religious rites.

Harapha

This answer will offend; regard thyself.

Samson

Myself! My conscience and internal peace!
Am I so broke with servitude, to yield
To such absurd commands? To be their fool,
And play before their god? I will not come.

Harapha

My message, given with speed, brooks no delay.

Air**Harapha**

Presuming slave, to move their wrath
For mercy sue,
Or vengeance due
Dooms in one fatal word thy death.
Consider, ere it be too late,
To ward th'unerring shaft of fate.

Exit Harapha.

Recitative

Micah

Reflect then, Samson, matters now are strain'd
Up to the height, whether to hold, or break.
He's gone, whose malice may inflame the Lord's.

Samson

Shall I abuse this consecrated gift
Of strength, again returning with my hair,
By vaunting it in honour to their god,
And prostituting holy things to idols?

Micah

How thou wilt here come off surmounts my reach;
'Tis Heaven alone can save both us and thee.

Chorus of Israelites

With thunder arm'd great God, arise!
Help, Lord, or Israel's champion dies!
To thy protection this thy servant take,
And save, oh save us for thy servant's sake!

Recitative

Samson

Be of good courage; I begin to feel
Some inward motions, which do bid me go.

Micah

In time thou hast resolv'd; again he comes.

Enter Harapha.

Harapha

Samson, this second summons send our Lords,
Art thou our captive, slave and public drudge,
Yet dare dispute thy coming when we send?
Hast thee at once; or we shall engines find
To move thee, though thou wert a solid rock.

Samson

Vain were their art if tried; I yield to go,
Not through your streets be like a wild beast trail'd.

Harapha

You thus may win the Lords to set you free.

Samson

In nothing I'll comply that's scandalous
Or sinful by our law. Brethren, farewell!

Your kind attendance now, I pray, forbear,
Lest it offend to see me girt with friends.
Expect of me you'll nothing hear impure,
Unworthy God, my nation, or myself.

Micah

So may'st thou act as serves his glory best.

Samson

Let but that spirit (which first rush'd on me
In the camp of Dan) inspire me at my need;
Then shall I make Jehovah's glory known
Their idol gods shall from his presence fly,
Scatter'd like sheep before the God of Hosts.

Air

Samson

Thus when the sun from's wat'ry bed,
All curtain'd with a cloudy red,
Pillows his chin upon an orient wave;
The wand'ring shadows ghastly pale,
All troop to their infernal jail,
Each fetter'd ghost slips to his sev'ral grave.

Recitative

Micah

With might endured above the sons of men,
Swift the lightning's glance His errand execute,
And spread His name amongst the heathen round!

Air

Micah

The Holy One of Israel be thy guide,
The Angel of thy birth stand by thy side!
To fame immortal go,
Heav'n bids thee strike the blow
The holy one of Israel is thy guide.

Chorus of Israelites

To fame immortal go,
Heav'n bids thee strike the blow.
The holy one of Israel is thy guide.

SCENE 2*Micah, Manoah and Israelites.***Recitative****Micah**

Old Manoah, with youthful steps, makes haste
To find his son, or bring us some glad news.

Manoah

I come, my brethren, not to seek my son,
Who at the feast does play before the Lords;
But give you part with me, what hopes I have
To work his liberty.

Chorus of Philistines*(at a distance)*

Great Dagon has subdued our foe
And brought their boasted hero low,
Sound out his pow'r in notes divine,
Praise him with mirth, high cheer and wine!

Recitative**Manoah**

What noise of joy was that? It tore the sky.

Micah

They shout and sing, to see their dreaded foe
Now captive, blind, delighting with his strength.

Manoah

Could my inheritance but ransom him,
Without my patrimony having him
The richest of the tribe.

Micah

Sons care to nurse
Their parents in old age; but you – your son!

Air**Manoah**

How willing my paternal love
The weight to share
Of filial care,
And part of sorrow's burden prove!
Though wand'ring in the shades of night,
Whilst i have eyes he wants no light.

Recitative**Micah**

Your hopes of his deliv'ry seem not vain,
In which all Israel's friends participate.

Manoah

I know your friendly minds, and ...

Sinfonia*A symphony of horror and confusion.***Recitative****Manoah**

Heav'n! What noise!
Horribly loud, unlike the former shout.

Chorus of Philistines*(at a distance)*

Hear us, our God! Oh hear our cry!
Death! Ruin! Fall'n! No help is nigh,
Oh, mercy, Heav'n we sink, we die.

Recitative**Micah**

Noise call you this? A universal groan,
As if the world's inhabitation perish'd!
Blood, death and ruin, at their utmost point!

Manoah

Ruin indeed! Oh! They have slain my son!

Micah

Thy son is rather slaying them;
That cry from slaughter of one foe could not ascend.
But see my friends, one hither speeds,
A Hebrew of our tribe.

SCENE 3

Enter a Messenger, an Israelite officer.

Recitative

Messenger

Where shall I run, or which way fly the thoughts
Of this most horrid sight? Oh countrymen!
You're in this sad event too much concern'd.

Micah

The accident was loud, we long to know from whence.

Messenger

Let me recover breath; it will burst forth.

Manoah

Tell us the sum, the circumstance defer.

Messenger

Gaza yet stands, but all her sons are fall'n.

Manoah

Sad! Not to us: but now relate by whom.

Messenger

By Samson done.

Manoah

The sorrow lessens still,
And nigh converts to joy.

Messenger

Oh Manoah!

In vain I would refrain: the evil tale
Too soon will rudely pierce thy aged ear.

Manoah

Suspense in news is torture! Speak them out.

Messenger

Then take the worst in brief – Samson is dead.

Manoah

The worst indeed! My hopes to free him hence
Are blasted all, but death, who sets all free.
Hath paid his ransom now.

Micah

Yet, ere we give the reins to grief, say first:
How died he? Death to life is crown, or shame.

Messenger

Unwounded of his enemies he fell,
At once did he destroy, and was destroyed.
The edifice, where all were met to see,
Upon their heads, and on his own he pulled.

Manoah

O lastly over-strong against thyself!
A dreadful way thou took'st to thy revenge:
Glorious, yet dearly bought!

Micah

In life and death, thou hast fulfill'd
The work for which foretold:
And now thou liest victorious, though self-kill'd,
Triumphant o'er a heap of slaughter'd foes,
More than thy life has slain.
Let Israel now the voice of lamentation raise,
And sing a parting requiem to this honour'd soul.

Air

Micah

Ye sons of Israel, now lament;
Your spear is broke, your bow's unbent,
Your glory's fled! Amongst the dead great Samson lies!
Forever clos'd his eyes.

Chorus of Israelites

Weep Israel, weep a louder strain;
Samson, your strength, your hero, is slain!

Recitative

Manoah

Proceed we hence to find his body, soak'd
In vile Philistine blood; with the pure stream,
And cleansing herbs, wash off the clodded gore,
Then solemnly attend him to my tomb,
With silent obsequies and fun'ral train.

March of the Dead

Recitative

Micah

The body comes; we'll meet it on the way
With laurels evergreen and branching palm;
Then lay it in his monument, hung round
With all his trophies, and great acts enroll'd
In verse heroic, or sweet lyric song.

Manoah

There shall all Israel's valiant youth resort
And from his memory inflame their breasts
To matchless valour, whilst they sing his praise.

Enter Israelites with the body of Samson.

Chorus

Manoah and Israelites

Glorious hero, may thy grave
Peace and honour ever have
After all thy pains and woes,
Rest eternal, sweet repose!

An Israelite Woman

The virgins too shall on their feastful days
Visit his tomb with flow'rs and there bewail
His lot unfortunate in nuptial choice.

Chorus of Virgins

Bring the laurels, brings the bays,
Strew his hearse, and strew the ways!

An Israelite Woman

May ev'ry hero fall like thee
Through sorrow to felicity.

Chorus of Virgins

Bring the laurels, brings the bays, *etc.*

Chorus of Israelites

Glorious Hero, may thy grave
Peace and honour ever have!
After all thy pains and woes,
Rest eternal, sweet repose!

Recitative

Manoah

Come, come! No time for lamentation now
No cause for grief: Samson like Samson fell,
Both life and death heroic. To his foes
Ruin is left; to him eternal fame.

Micah

Why should we weep or wail, dispraise him or blame
Where all is well and fair to quiet us?
Praise we Jehovah then, who to the end
Not parted from him, but assisted still,
Till desolation fill'd Philistia's lands,
Honour and freedom giv'n to Jacob's seed.

Air

Israelite Woman

Let the bright Seraphim in burning row
Their loud, uplifted angel-trumpets blow.
Let the Cherubic host, in tuneful choirs
Touch their immortal harps with golden wires.

Chorus of Israelites

Let the bright Seraphim in burning row
Their loud, uplifted angel-trumpets blow.
Let the celestial concerts all unite,
Ever to sound his praise in endless blaze of light.

*Adapted by Newburgh Hamilton (fl1712; d1759) from
'Samson Agonistes' and other poems by John Milton
(1608–74)*



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Harry Christophers *conductor*



Marcus Borggreve

Harry Christophers is known internationally as founder and conductor of The Sixteen as well as a regular guest conductor for many of the major symphony orchestras and opera companies worldwide. He has made a significant contribution to the recording catalogue (with some 90 titles already to his name) for which he has won

numerous awards including a Grand Prix du Disque for Handel's *Messiah*, numerous Schallplattenkritik, a *Gramophone* Award for Early Music, and a Classical Brit Award 2005 for his disc entitled *Renaissance*.

In 2000 he instituted the 'Choral Pilgrimage' – a national tour of English cathedrals from York to Canterbury in music from the pre-Reformation – as The Sixteen's contribution to the millennium celebrations. It raised awareness of this historic repertoire so successfully that it is now central to the ensemble's annual artistic programme. To celebrate The Sixteen's 30th anniversary, this year's pilgrimage will mark the anniversaries of three composers whose music forms a key part of British music: Purcell, Handel and James MacMillan.

Last September Harry Christophers was appointed Artistic Director of Boston's Handel and Haydn Society. He is also Principal Guest Conductor of the Granada Symphony Orchestra, enjoys a special partnership with the BBC Philharmonic, and is a regular guest conductor with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and the Orquesta de la Comunidad de Madrid, all of which have benefited from his dynamic brand of programming. Within the last few years he has also conducted the Hallé, and London and San Francisco Symphony orchestras.

In October last year, Harry Christophers was awarded the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Music from the University of Leicester.

Gillian Keith *soprano*



Benjamin Edelweg Photography

Canadian soprano Gillian Keith, winner of the Kathleen Ferrier Award in 2000, studied at McGill University in Montreal and at the Royal Academy of Music in London.

She appears frequently with many leading orchestras including the Academy of Ancient Music, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment,

English Baroque Soloists, The King's Consort and Tafelmusik.

Her operatic appearances have included Tytania (Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) at the Royal Opera House's Linbury Theatre, the title-role in Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppaea* with Theater Basel, Nannetta (*Falstaff*) for English National Opera, *King Arthur* for ENO and in San Francisco, the Dew Fairy (*Hansel and Gretel*) at the BBC Proms, Diana (Stuart MacRae's *The Assassin Tree*) for ROH2 and at the Edinburgh International Festival, Iole (*Hercules*) and Silvia (Mozart's *Ascanio in Alba*) for the Buxton Festival, the Woodbird (*Siegfried*), Papagena (*The Magic Flute*) and Amor (*Orfeo ed Euridice*) for Scottish Opera, Bellezza (Handel's *The Triumph of Time and Truth*) for Almeida Opera, Tiny (*Paul Bunyon*) at the Bregenz Festival and Ginevra (*Ariodante*) in Halle.

Most recent and future commitments include Zerbinetta (*Ariadne auf Naxos*) and Tytania for the Royal Opera House, Poppaea at the Boston Early Music Festival, Pretty Polly (Sir Harrison Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*) at ENO, Serpina (*La serva padrona*) with the Gabrieli Consort throughout Norway, plus concerts in Calgary, Madrid, Toronto and throughout the UK.

Gillian Keith's recordings include early *mélodies* by Debussy, Purcell's *The Tempest*, and Handel's *Gloria* and Bach cantatas under Sir John Eliot Gardiner.

Catherine Wyn-Rogers *mezzo-soprano*

Catherine Wyn-Rogers won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music, where she gained several prizes.

She is much in demand in recital and oratorio, appearing with major British orchestras and at festivals including the Three Choirs, Edinburgh International, Aldeburgh and the BBC Proms.

She is equally renowned for her performances with period-instrument orchestras. Her recent engagements have included appearances with the Philharmonia under Leonard Slatkin, the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Bernard Haitink and Sir Andrew Davis, the Netherlands Radio Orchestra under Gennady Rozhdestvensky, the European Union Youth Orchestra under Haitink and her debut with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra under Sir Roger Norrington.

On the opera stage she has worked with Scottish Opera, Welsh National Opera, Opera North, Dresden's Semperoper, Bordeaux Opera, the Teatro Real in Madrid, Netherlands Oper and at the Salzburg Festival. She is a regular guest artist with English Opera, the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Bavarian State Opera and she made her debut with the Lyric Opera of Chicago in Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage*.

Catherine Wyn-Rogers's future engagements include Waltraute (*Götterdämmerung*) under Zubin Mehta in Valencia and Florence, staged performances of *Messiah* for ENO, *Die Schweigsame Frau* in Munich and *Peter Grimes* for Houston Grand Opera, the Royal Opera, and in her debut for La Scala, Milan.

Her recordings include *Samson* with The Sixteen, Mozart's *Vespers* under Trevor Pinnock and Requiem under Sir Charles Mackerras, Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music* with Norrington, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* under Vernon Handley, *Peter Grimes* under Sir Colin Davis and Schubert Lieder with Graham Johnson.

Mark Padmore *tenor*

Marco Borggreve

Mark Padmore has established a flourishing career in opera, concert and recital. His performances of Bach's Passions have gained particular notice throughout the world.

Recent performances in the opera house include *Les Troyens* at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris and Handel's

Jephtha at Welsh National Opera and English National Opera. Future plans include Tom Rakewell in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* at La Monnaie and the main role in *The Corridor*, a new opera by Birtwistle, at the Aldeburgh Festival.

In concert he has performed with many of the world's leading orchestras including the Berlin, Vienna and New York Philharmonic orchestras, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the London and BBC Symphony orchestras and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. In 2007 he made his debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Sir Simon Rattle.

He has given recitals in Amsterdam, Barcelona, Brussels, Milan, Moscow, New York and Paris. He appears frequently at the Wigmore Hall in London where he last year performed all three of Schubert's song-cycles and premiered a new work written by him by Mark-Anthony Turnage with the Nash Ensemble. Other composers who have written for him include Sally Beamish and Huw Watkins. As well as his regular collaborators Julius Drake, Roger Vignoles and Andrew West, he works with many internationally renowned chamber musicians, including Imogen Cooper, Till Fellner and Paul Lewis.

Mark Padmore's many recordings include Bach's Passions and cantatas, Haydn's Masses, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and *La clemenza di Tito*, operas by Rameau and Charpentier, and a disc of Handel arias, which won *BBC Music Magazine's* Vocal Award in 2008. Other recent and future releases include Haydn's *Creation*, *Messiah* under Sir Colin Davis and the LSO and Britten's *Winter Words* with Robert Vignoles.

Nicholas Mulroy *tenor*



Nicholas Mulroy studied at Cambridge University and at the Royal Academy of Music in London.

Recent appearances include the Novice (Prokofiev's *Betrothal in a Monastery*) for Glyndebourne Festival, Bach cantatas with Sir John Eliot Gardiner at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam,

and the Royal Festival Hall, Patacha (Chabrier's *L'étoile*) at the Opéra-Comique, Monteverdi's *Vespers* and Campra's *Requiem* at the BBC Proms, Charpentier's *Actéon* with Emanuelle Haïm, Haydn's *Harmonie-Messe* with the Staatskapelle Dresden, the Evangelist in Bach's *St Matthew Passion* at Symphony Hall, Birmingham, and the London Handel Festival, Berio's *Sinfonia* and the world premiere of Stephen Pratt's *Uneasy Vespers 2* with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Tamino (*The Magic Flute*) in Dublin and at Manchester's Bridgewater Hall, the world premiere of John Joubert's *Wings of Faith* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and the UK premiere of Rautavaara's *Vigilia* with Stephen Layton.

Recital highlights include Vaughan Williams's *On Wenlock Edge* with the Badke Quartet, appearances at the Oxford Lieder Festival, and Schumann's *Liederkreis*, Op. 24 and *Die schöne müllerin* with John Reid.

Future engagements include Handel's *Theodora* with Trevor Pinnock in Halle, Stravinsky's Cantata with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie* at the Théâtre Capitale de Toulouse under Haïm, and Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* with Gardiner in London.

Nicholas Mulroy's recordings include a *Gramophone* Award-winning *Messiah* with John Butt, Monteverdi *Vespers* with both The King's Consort and the Rodolfus Choir, a series of Monteverdi with I Fagioni and the part of the Evangelist in Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, again with John Butt.

Roderick Williams *baritone*



Keith Saunders

Roderick Williams is equally active in the opera house and on the concert platform, encompassing a repertoire ranging from the Baroque to new music.

For Opera North he has sung the title-role in *Don Giovanni*, The Count (*The Marriage of Figaro*), Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*), Figaro (*The Barber of*

Seville) and Ned Keene (*Peter Grimes*). For Scottish Opera his roles have included Marcello (*La bohème*) and Lord Byron in the world premiere of Sally Beamish's *Monster*. Other notable world premieres have included David Sawer's *From Morning to Midnight* and Martin Butler's *A Better Place* for English National Opera, as well as Alexander Knaifel's *Alice in Wonderland* and Michel van der Aa's *After Life* for Netherlands Opera.

Future engagements include a return to ENO to sing Kaija Saariaho's *L'amour de loin*, *After Life* for Netherlands Opera, and concerts with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, RIAS Kammerchor, Britten Sinfonia, Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra in San Francisco.

In concert Roderick Williams has appeared with all the BBC orchestras, and many other ensembles including the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Russian National Orchestra, Academy of Ancient Music and Bamberg Symphony Orchestra.

He is also an accomplished recitalist, performing at the Wigmore Hall and at many festivals. His recordings include operas by Vaughan Williams, Lennox Berkeley and Britten, Verdi's *Don Carlos*, and two discs of English song. Roderick Williams is also a composer and has had works premiered at the Wigmore and Barbican Halls, the Purcell Room and live on national radio.

Jonathan Lemalu *bass-baritone*



Alastair Thain

New Zealand-born Samoan Jonathan Lemalu is at the forefront of today's young singers. After studies in London, he was joint winner, in 2002, of both the Kathleen Ferrier Award and the Royal Philharmonic Society's Young Artist of the Year award.

He has appeared at the Tanglewood, Edinburgh, Munich and Ravinia festivals and the BBC Proms, and has sung with the Boston, Chicago, London, New Zealand and Tokyo Symphony orchestras, the Berlin, Netherlands and New York Philharmonic orchestras, the Hallé and the Salzburg Camerata, among others. Equally at home on the recital platform, he has given recitals throughout Europe and North America, taking him to Cologne, Athens, Birmingham, Amsterdam, Salzburg, Brussels, Baden-Baden, Vienna, Montreal, Vancouver, Atlanta, San Francisco, Washington, New York's Carnegie Hall and London's Wigmore Hall.

His operatic engagements in the UK have included the title-role in *The Marriage of Figaro* and Don Basilio (*The Barber of Seville*) for English National Opera, Papageno (*The Magic Flute*) for Glyndebourne Festival Opera, and Zoroastro (*Orlando*) and Colline (*La bohème*) for the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. In Germany he has sung the title-roles in *Saul* and *The Marriage of Figaro*, Argante (*Rinaldo*) and Leporello (*Don Giovanni*) for the Bayerische Staatsoper, Leporello for Hamburg Opera, Rodomonte (Haydn's *Orlando Paladino*) and Papageno for the Theater an der Wien and Bottom (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) for Opéra de Lyon. For Opera Australia he has sung Leporello and Mozart's Figaro. He made his debuts for the Metropolitan Opera, New York, as Masetto (*Don Giovanni*) and for the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Papageno.

Jonathan Lemalu's future engagements include Figaro for Cincinnati Opera, Porgy at the Styriarte Festival and Queequeg in the world premiere of Jake Heggie's new work based on *Moby Dick* for Dallas Opera.

The Sixteen

After 30 years of performances around the world and prodigious recording, The Sixteen is recognised as one of the world's leading ensembles. Comprising both choir and period-instrument orchestra, The Sixteen's total commitment to the music it performs is its greatest distinction. Its special reputation for performing early English polyphony, masterpieces of the Renaissance, bringing fresh insights into Baroque and early Classical music and a diversity of 20th-century music, is drawn from the passions of conductor and founder, Harry Christophers.

At home in the UK, The Sixteen has been named 'The Voices of Classic FM', TV Media Partner with Sky Arts, and Associate Artists of Southbank Centre. The group promotes an annual series at the Queen Elizabeth Hall as well as The Choral Pilgrimage, a tour of the UK's finest cathedrals, bringing music back to the buildings for which it was written. The Sixteen has recently featured in the highly successful BBC Four television series, *Sacred Music*, presented by actor Simon Russell Beale.

The Sixteen tours throughout Europe, Japan, Australia and the Americas and regularly appears in major concert halls and festivals worldwide, including the Barbican Centre, Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Sydney Opera House, Tokyo Opera City and Vienna Musikverein, as well as at the BBC Proms and the festivals of Granada, Lucerne, Istanbul, Prague and Salzburg.

In addition, The Sixteen's period-instrument orchestra has taken part in highly acclaimed semi-staged performances of Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* in Tel Aviv and London, a fully staged production of Purcell's *King Arthur* in Lisbon's Belem Centre, and new productions of Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* at the Lisbon Opera House and *The Coronation of Poppaea* for English National Opera.

A discography of over 90 recordings reflects The Sixteen's quality in a range of work spanning the music of 500 years. Since 2001 The Sixteen has been developing its own record label, CORO, which now boasts over 70 releases, including an acclaimed recording of *Samson*.

Orchestra of The Sixteen

Violin I

Walter Reiter
Claire Duff
Sarah Sexton
Jean Paterson
Ellen O'Dell
Iona Davies

Violin II

Simon Jones
Theresa Caudle
Andrea Morris
Sarah Moffatt
Dan Edgar

Viola

Annette Isserlis
Jane Norman

Cello

Sarah McMahon
Andrew Skidmore

Double Bass

Malachy Robinson

Flute

Christine Garratt
Katy Bircher

Oboe

Hannah McLaughlin
Catherine Latham

Bassoon

Siona Spillett
Zoe Shevlin

Horn

Nicolas Fleury
Sue Dent

Trumpet

Robert Farley
Christopher Pigram

Timpani

Adrian Bending

Theorbo

David Miller

Harp

Frances Kelly

Harpsichord/Organ

Alastair Ross

Organ

Julian Perkins

**Keyboard
Technician**

Keith McGowan

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Alison Hill
Kirsty Hopkins
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David Clegg
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