

# RECORDING OF THE MONTH



## FURTHER LISTENING

**Armonia Atenea & George Petrou**

**GLUCK**

**Il trionfo di Clelia**

**Le Corre, Nesi, Karalanni, Uyar, Kavaya, Ouzounidis, Armonia Atenea/Giuseppe Sgorbini dir de l'Orchestre**

**MDG MDG 609 073-2 195-29 min**

**BBC Music Direct £29.99**

**[This] performance with Armonia Atenea is one of**

**the trumpets, oboes and kettle drums are paradigm-smart in the overture and treasured sinfonias. June 2012**

**HANDEL**

**Tarafilar MWV 18**

**Spanos, Nesi Christopoulou, Katsuli, Karalanni, Magoulas, Orchestra of Patras/George Petrou**

**MDG 609 137-2 161-54 min**

**BBC Music Direct £29.99 (3 discs)**

**[Driving] ultimately**

**from the history of the Taron world**

**... who decimated much of Western**

**Asia in the 14th century. Handel's opera is one of his most intense ...**

**Petrou's conducting [is] expressive and nicely paced. December 2007**

**HANDEL**

**Armonia Atenea**

**Katsuli, Nesi Karalanni, Paparizou, Baka, Magoulas, Orchestra of Patras/George Petrou**

**MDG 609 1437-2 191-92 min**

**BBC Music Direct £29.99 (3 discs)**

**[The] almost entirely**

**singers and period instruments**

**under George Petrou**

**offers a mainly stylish if at times**

**underpowered account of the piece. June 2006**

**Indeed, the opera's been regularly**

**plundered whenever the heroines of**

**Cuzzoni and Bordoni have provided**

**such opportunities. ... Decca**

**however has gone to Greece and done the piece proud. Each of the**

**three leads is outstanding, at times**

**stupendous. But for all the star**

**quality, the performance remains a**

**supremely ensemble effort, singers**

**and instrumentalists striking sparks**

**off each other under the energised**

**stage as, say, Armonia Atenea or**

**Guido Gessi. Given a score of such**

**richness, variety and**

**passion, it's puzzling too that there**

**have been only three recordings in as**

**many decades, the first conducted by**

**Sigiswald Kuijken in the 1980s, with**

**a certain René Jacobs in the title role.**

**Each of the three**

**leads is outstanding, at times**

**stupendous**

**... Petrou's conducting [is] expressive**

**and nicely paced. December 2007**

**l'événement**

and energising musical direction

of George Petrou. In the title role

counter tenor Max Emanuel Cencic

is impertious hot-bloodedness

personified (the sheer spleen at

the line "Mi offendé – If I'm

offended – I'll tell you what

the 'If' is perfunctory, and the aria

"Vano amore" is as commanding as its

athleticism is secure). Julia Lezhneva

(Rossane) negotiates Act III's Brilla

nell'alma with intoxicating joie

de vivre. And perhaps best of all is

Karina Gauvin's uretly dazzling

Lisaura, her coloratura dazzling, her

bright soprano full of personality.

Act II's "Quanto dolce amor" utterly

ravishes while the surging virtuosity of "No, più soffrir non voglio"

is surfed with jaw-dropping aplomb.

Just as thrilling is the visceral

playing – on period instruments – of

Armonia Atenea. Pert and incisive,

the overture crackles with energy

and no holds are barred as the wall of

Ovidian spectre successfully succumbs to Alexander's mighty lute strings.

Virgil goes so wrong: never before

Greeks bearing gifts as munificent

and ear-opening as this! A revelation.

PERFORMANCE \*\*\*\*\*

RECORDING \*\*\*\*\*

ON THE WEBSITE Hear extracts from this recording

and the rest of this month's choices on

www.classical-music.com

## A dazzling Handel rarity

*Alessandro* is packed with showstopping musical numbers, finds Paul Riley



**HANDEL**  
Alessandro  
Max Emanuel Cencic (counter-tenor), Julia Lezhneva (soprano), Karina Gauvin (soprano), Xavier Sabata (contralto), Juan Sancho (tenor), In-Sung Sim (Cleito), Vassily Khoroshchev (counter-tenor), Armonia Atenea, The City of Athens Choir/George Petrou Decca 478 4699 190, 26 mins (3 discs) BBC Music Direct £29.99

Caution. These discs should come with an asbestos slipcase, so incendiary is the performance they convey. And they force you to question why *Alessandro* is not as familiar a mainstay of the Handelian stage as, say, *Antigone*, *Alcina* or *Giulio Cesare*. Given a score of such richness, variety and passion, it's puzzling too that there have been only three recordings in as many decades, the first conducted by Sigiswald Kuijken in the 1980s, with a certain René Jacobs in the title role.

Faced with the opportunity to unite the fiery Italian divas Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni alongside the equally crowd-pulling castrato Senesino, Handel was firing on all cylinders for this 1726 operatic take on Alexander the Great. Given the provocative claim to be the son of Jove, and his conquests in India (on and off the battlefield), Showstopper follows showstopper in a dazzling array calculated to exploit the phenomenal talents so obligingly to hand.

**Each of the three leads is outstanding, at times stupendous**

**... Petrou's conducting [is] expressive**

**and nicely paced. December 2007**

All discs can be ordered from [www.classical-music.com/shop](http://www.classical-music.com/shop)

## Q&A

### GEORGE PETROU

REBECCA FRANKS talks to the Greek conductor about bringing Handel's *Alessandro* back into the spotlight



Why do you think *Alessandro* has been so slow to catch on?

I guess the most important reason is that it's a real tour de force for the three protagonists, Alessandro, Lisaura, and Rossane, as it was composed for three of the greatest singers of Handel's time. The demands are so complicated and almost superhuman, so finding singers to deal with these roles is difficult. But the soloists we have – counter-tenor Max Emanuel Cencic, soprano Karina Gauvin and mezzo Julia Lezhneva – are fantastic, and so technically proficient and profoundly musical. I think we have the best.

It's a long opera, and your recording fizzes with energy. How do you keep that level of intensity?

It's something you learn over the years. Certainly the orchestra's motivation meant that they play live: they don't lose that energy. They give everything, which is what I want to thank them for. There were many good takes. In fact the soloists, during which I immediately sit with the soloists, there's a lot of changing moods and colours. We don't just accompany a text to follow the action, but to underline it. So then there's also an issue about which takes to choose, because each is really different. There were different improvisations and even different combinations of instruments.

And how did you work on ornamentation and embellishment?

The singers mainly worked with me on this. I tried to avoid the idea of rewriting the line, but tried to use ornaments that could have been improvised. It's a free improvisation on the written texts. We let ourselves be a little more adventurous with the cadenzas. But I think the effort to make it sound exactly like Handel did is really not worth it. We are children of our age, used to much louder music, faster speeds and electronic sounds; we have Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and Bartók in our ears. We need the knowledge of historical performance practices, but we have to create our own music for the 21st century.

To order CDs call BBC Music Direct +44 (0)1634 832 789; prices include P&P

# Au soleil d'Alessandro

Premier opéra que Handel destina aux «rival queens» Cuzzoni et Faustina, Alessandro n'attendait donc, pour triompher, qu'un chef et... des voix !

**UNE FÉERIE VOCALE**

Avant même de voir le spectacle (Athènes et Versailles au printemps prochain), il paraît évident que Max Emanuel Cencic, initiateur et vedette de l'opération, a saisi l'enjeu : métamorphoser une joute banale en féerie vocale. Louange le Grandaine le Grand : «Fils de Jupiter, monarque surhumain, invincible, auguste, inaccessible, pieux, divin...» peut-on mieux incarner le héros étincelant et fat que Max Emanuel Cencic ? Les

doubles-croches (de «Risolto abbandonar» – notamment) vous coupeont le souffle, pas le sien. De ses deux conquêtes, Alexandre observe que «l'una est barbare, l'altra esclave». Voilà comme une diva dont se tenir : enchaînée aux notes mais la rage au ventre. Ainsi font Karina Gauvin, assez sauvage pour les cabrioles de «No, più soffrir non voglio», assez fine pour la sicilienne «Che tirannia d'Amor», et Julia Lezhneva, oiseau de paradis («Alla sua gabbia d'oro») d'une maîtrise stupéfiante dans la couleur comme dans le phrasé («Brilla nell'alma»). Jusqu'au tantif Cléone, les comparais ne sont pas moins bien traités. Et comme, depuis le pasticcio Oresta, le jeune chef grec George Petrou occupe une place centrale dans la galaxie handélienne, notre cœur ne balance plus. Représenter nous ici ou là la rien d'affection («Vano amore»), quelques allegros cravachés à

l'identique, un italien variable et de menus accrocs dans le montage ? Aucune importance. Malgré le charme du pionnier Kuijken (avec le trio Jacobs-Boulin-Poulenard, DHM 1984), malgré le récitatif théâtral de Michael Form (cf. page 112), non seulement ce coup de soleil qu'est Alessandro n'a jamais tant brûlé, mais l'opéra handélien espérait un tel hommage depuis... depuis trop longtemps.

**Ivan A. Alexandre**

DIAPOSON | 83

[www.fonoforum.de/index.php?id=9329](http://www.fonoforum.de/index.php?id=9329)

## FONO FORUM

KLASSIK JAZZ HIFI

[www.fonoforum.de](http://www.fonoforum.de)

Foyer Musikleben Porträts Rezensionen Multimedia Archiv Abo Partner Intern FAQ

Rézonances > Dezember 2012 > Koloraturen seidenweich

Koloraturen seidenweich

Wenn man die fantastische junge russische Sopranistin Julia Lezhneva mit der Arie der Rossane „Brilla nell'alma“ hört, dann glaubt man sogleich, dass der Sopranistinnen-Wettkampf, den Handel bei der Uraufführung seiner Oper „Alessandro“ 1726 in London veranstaltete, die Opernenthusiasten in Verzückung brachte. Faustina Bordoni trat als Rossane gegen die legendäre Francesca Cuzzoni an in der Rolle der Lisaura. Beide bühnen um die Gunst Alexanders des Großen. In „Brilla nell'alma“ schüpfte Rossane erneut Hoffnung, und Julia Lezhneva tut dies mit einem seidenweichen

Koloraturen-Feuerwerk, fein juchzenden Spitzenton, angeleiteten Portamenti in einem unglaublichen Tempo. Sie ist Star der Aufnahme. Das ist fast ungerecht gegenüber Karina Gauvin, die die Lisaura verkörpert, die ihre etwas dunklere Stimme fast ebenso viel Farbigkeit aufblühen lässt.

Die dritte Hauptrolle gehört natürlich auch Karina Gauvin, die im Arie „Vano amore“ so warm tönen (wie ein echter Mezzosopran) erlebt, z. B. in der Arie „Vano amore“. Auch die anderen Rollen sind so besetzt, dass man von neuer Referenzaufnahme sprechen kann. Das griechische Ensemble Armonia Atenea, der Ableger für historische Aufführungspraxis der Athener Camerata, und der Dirigent George Petrou, der bisher Händel-Opern bei Dabringhaus und Grimm aufgenommen hat, sind ein Gespann, das die Sängerinnen intelligent kommentiert und die Vokalakrobaten zugleich weich bettet. Petrou lässt diese Oper mit ihren zahllosen schönen und schönen Nummern nie aufdringlich, aber immer in einer präsenten und durchsichtigen Klanglichkeit fließen. Dazu kommen eine kluge Tempowahl und die Kunst, die Motive auch im Ensembleverband affektgenau, man könnte auch sagen emotional, zu artikulieren. Live ist diese Produktion bei den Händel-Festspielen Halle 2013 zu erleben.

**Richard Lorber**

[www.gobuz.com/clasica](http://www.gobuz.com/clasica) | [www.gobuz.com/clasica](http://www.gobuz.com/clasica) | [www.gobuz.com/clasica](http://www.gobuz.com/clasica)

**LES CHOCS DU MOIS**

## Un grand « Alessandro »

LE CONTRE-TÉNOR MAX EMANUEL CENCIC, AVEC L'AIDE D'UN ÉTONNANT JEUNE