

Season 2015/16

Nicola Antonio Porpora

GERMANICO IN GERMANIA



New release
in August 2015

DECCA

Nicola Antonio Porpora

GERMANICO IN GERMANIA



In a new co-production with the Innsbrucker Festwochen and the Academia Montis Regalis under the baton of Alessandro De Marchi and with set and costumes designed by Alfred Peter, Parnassus Arts presents Porpora's long-forgotten drama, a story from the strange borderlands of the ancient Roman Empire. After staged performances at the 2015 Innsbruck Festival, directed by Alexander Schulin, *Germanico in Germania* will tour and be recorded by Decca. The production will star Max-Emanuel Cencic as Germanico and the prodigious talents of Franco Fagioli and young soprano sensation from Russia, Julia Lezhneva - a real highlight of the summer/autumn season of 2015.

As interest in the Italian *opera serie* of the eighteenth century has grown apace in recent years, Handel's operas are now seen as increasingly mainstream, and several works by Vivaldi and other contemporaries have again seen the light of day, including a few by Nicola Porpora. However, until now, *Germanico in Germania* has, with the exception of one or two arias, remained firmly hidden on library shelves scattered around Europe. During his lifetime Porpora was as famous as a teacher of singing as for his compositions, so it is little wonder that his score is a veritable feast of vocal delights ripe for resurrection. Born in Naples on 17 August 1686 and educated at the city's Conservatorio dei Poveri di Gesù Cristo, Porpora's first opera, *Agrippina*, was given at the Neapolitan court in 1708. During the period 1715 to 1721, while *maestro di cappella* at the Naples Conservatorio di San Onofrio he also gained a reputation as a singing teacher: his most famous pupil was the castrato Farinelli. Almost contemporary reports of vocal instruction at such institutions give some idea of the students' rigorous daily routine:

"Before lunch: one hour singing difficult and awkward pieces, one hour practising the trill, one hour practising ornamented passaggi, one hour of singing exercises in their teacher's presence and in front of a mirror so as to avoid unnecessary movement of the body or facial grimaces, and one hour of literary study.

After lunch: half-an-hour of music theory, another writing counterpoint, an hour

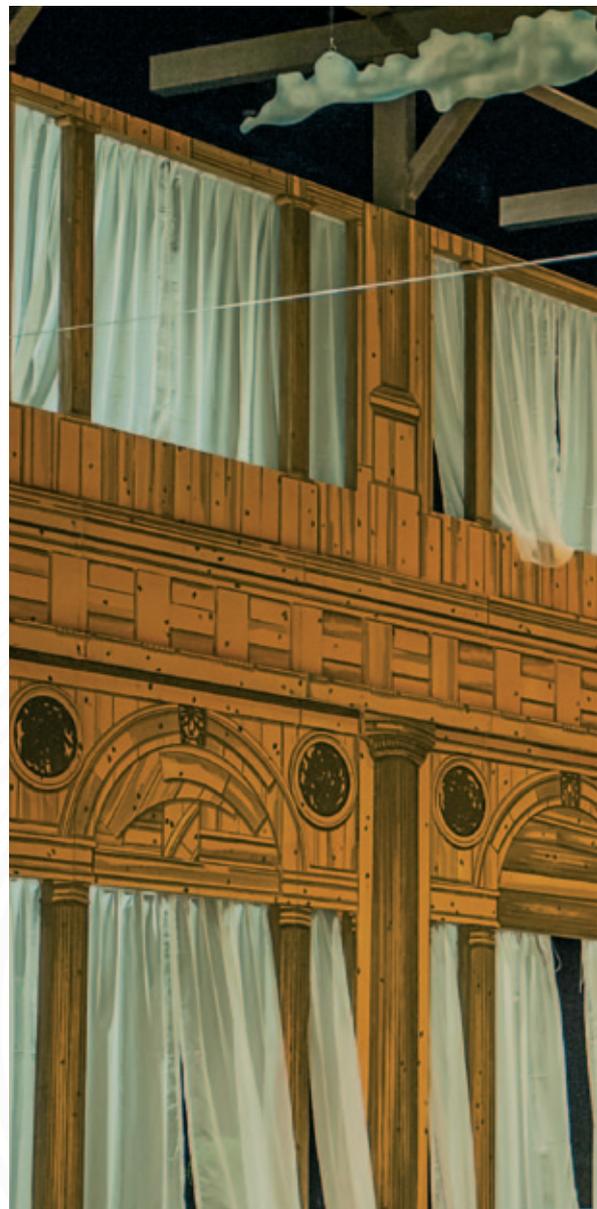
copying down the same from dictation, and another hour of literary study.

Any remaining time was to be taken up with harpsichord practice, and the composition of vocal music, either sacred or secular, depending on the student's inclination."

Porpora is also said to have caused another great pupil, Caffarelli, to study only one page of exercises for six years.

As a composer Porpora's reputation spread throughout Italy, especially to Venice, where he was *maestro delle figlie* at the *Ospedale degli Incurabili* (one of the city's famous music schools for orphans) from 1726 to 1733, and Rome, where the Teatro Capranica saw the premiere of *Germanico in Germania* on 1 November 1732. In Rome, by Papal edict, operas were "all-male", and this cast was seriously "all-star". Caffarelli created a *furor* as Arminio: though, according to Charles Burney, his teacher Porpora "hated him for his insolence, he used to say that he was the finest singer Italy had ever produced." His arias in this work full justify that reputation, but Porpora clearly enjoyed stretching the other singers to the utmost, with every vocal trick at his command. *Germanico* was played by the experienced alto castrato, Domenico Annibali, later made famous in a portrait by Mengs and in a figure of Meissen porcelain. The *en travesti* female roles were taken, as was often the case, by young singers at the start of their careers, Rosmonda by Angelo Maria Monticelli (who had, again according to Burney, "a beautiful face and figure"), and Ersilda by Felice Salimbeni, famous for his "rendering of adagios, with discreet but effective ornamentation, and for his amazing swell from *pianissimo* to an almost unbelievable degree of sonority." Porpora continued composing for another thirty years, including several operatic seasons in London, where he wrote for the "Opera of the Nobility", in competition with Handel's company. *Kapellmeister* in Dresden from 1748 to 1752, he then moved to Vienna, where the young Haydn became his pupil and

valet. At the outbreak of the Seven Years' War in 1756, his pension from Dresden ceased and his financial position became precarious. Returning to Naples in 1759, his last opera, a revised version of his *Il Trionfo di Camilla*, was premiered the following year, but proved a failure: perhaps his florid style was falling out of favour. During his last years poverty never left him. As reported by his last pupil, Domenico Corri, "... Porpora kept so miserable a table, that he was frequently driven out of his house by hunger, to seek a dinner elsewhere."



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Synopsis

Rosmonda tells her husband, Arminio, Prince of Germania, that her father Segeste has betrayed their city to the Romans; Arminio leaves for his camp to plot a counter-attack. The Romans enter the city, but Rosmonda defies their leader Germanico, rebuking Segeste for his treachery. Germanico orders his captain Cecina to meet Arminio, offering him peace. Cecina, having been warned in a dream, refuses, so Segeste offers to go in his stead. Germanico upbraids Cecina for his weakness.

Ersinda, Rosmonda's sister and Cecina's beloved, reassures him that she is as faithful to him as she is to Rome and to her father. In Arminio's tent, Segeste tells him that he has allied himself with the Romans to avoid bloodshed and destruction, but Arminio replies proudly that, for freedom's sake, he would rather die.

Ersinda also attempts to convince Rosmonda of the benefits of becoming a Roman, but in vain. Germanico teases her that Arminio will accept his peace terms, but Rosmonda scorns him – rightly, for now Segeste announces that Arminio has indeed rejected all overtures – Germanico prepares for battle.

Segeste regrets that only one of his daughters has remained true to him, and Rosmonda is left alone with her conflicted feelings.

In the battle, Arminio is defeated and contemplates suicide, but is captured by Cecina.

Rosmonda and Ersinda worry about the fate of their loved ones. Segeste returns, announces Arminio's defeat and capture, and further upbraids Rosmonda.

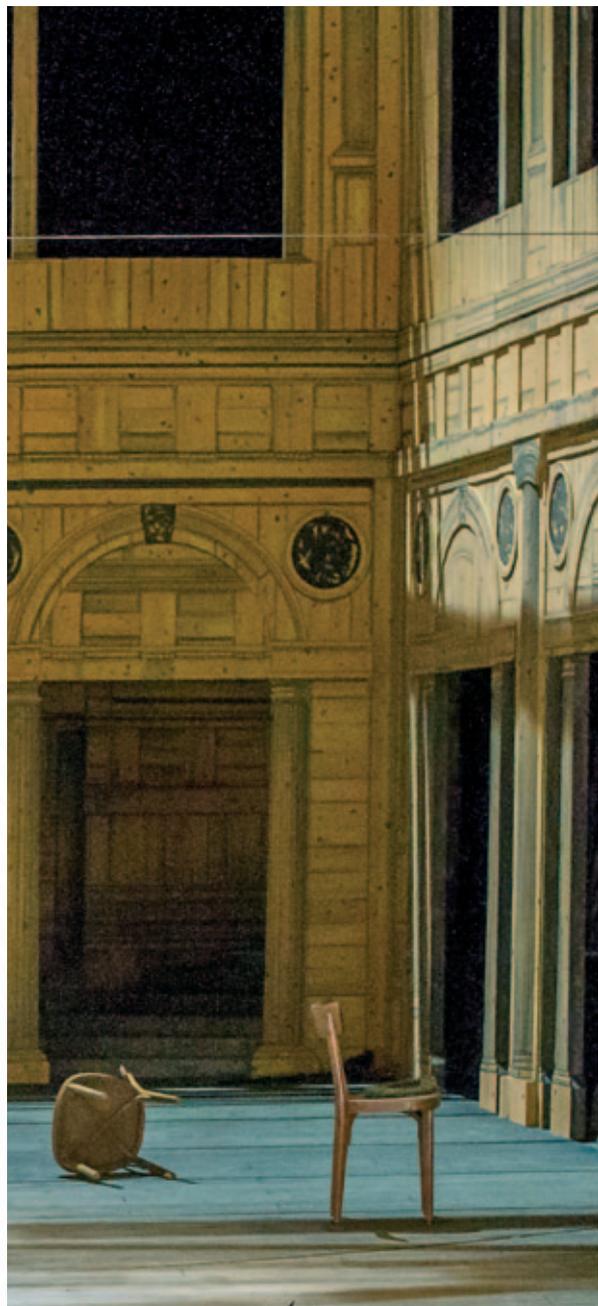
Germanico leads Arminio in a triumphal procession. Rosmonda wishes to die with her husband, but Arminio tells her that she must live to care for their son, and bids her a fond farewell. The reunion of Ersinda and Cecina is altogether joyful.

Segeste tells Germanico that, through having her son under his care, he can convince Rosmonda to swear allegiance to Rome. When Arminio is brought in, he defies Germanico, as does Rosmonda. Germanico condemns Arminio to death.

Segeste persuades the now wavering Germanico that Arminio must die. Rosmonda now pleads with Germanico for her husband's life, asking to be allowed to visit him in prison: perhaps, if he sees her distress, he will submit. Both Ersinda and Segeste are troubled by her obvious distress, but dare not help her. Germanico, and then Cecina, tell Ersinda that she must still wait a little before her love is fulfilled, but she cannot bear the delay.

In prison, Arminio laments his fate, and is outraged when Rosmonda, accompanied by Segeste, pleads with him to make peace with the Romans. Rosmonda tells her father that all she said was merely a stratagem to discover the true depth of Arminio's patriotism: now she is resigned to his death. Segeste furiously rounds on them both, leaving them to sing a sad farewell.

All now gather to witness the death of Arminio, who welcomes the end of his suffering. He kisses the altar and the sacrificial axe, and curses the power of Rome. Impressed by his proud defiance, Germanico asks Arminio whether he would like to see his son before he dies. Arminio's proud farewell greatly moves Germanico, and when Rosmonda threatens to kill herself, he yields – Arminio's pride will not outdo his mercy. He will not die, but will be brought to Rome, either as Rome's friend or her prisoner - but he must decide. Arminio, appealing to the heavens for aid, decides at length to bury his old enmity. All join in foretelling the union of the Rhine and the Tiber.



GERMANICO IN GERMANIA

Cast



Max Emanuel Cencic (*Germanico*)



Franco Fagioli (*Arminio*)



Julia Lezhneva (*Ersinda*)



Vince Yi (*Cecina*)



Carlo Vincenzo Alemanno (*Segeste*)



Alexander Schulin (*stage director*)

Stage productions



Alessandro De Marchi (conductor)

Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik,
Innsbruck, AT

12 august 2015 *Premiere*

14 august 2015

16 august 2015



Alfred Peter (set & costumes)

recording period:

june 2014



Academia Montis Regalis (orchestra)

Partners

