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NEW RELEASES

By Francis Muzzu



ARMINIO

Handel

C Major 744408 – 2 DVDs

★★★★

There is yet more of Cencic in Handel's *Arminio*, filmed at that composer's festival in Karlsruhe last year. This time Cencic directs the opera too, and proves generally as much of a success in that task as in his singing of the title role. The production is essentially traditional but with an updated twist: as Germanic leader Arminio and his wife Tuscelda flee their following defeat they are betrayed, and the plot moves through the machinations of their Roman enemy Varo to dispose of them, before the tables are turned. Here, the royal couple is Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette (an idea presumably inspired

by their failed flight to Varennes in 1791) rushing from the formality of the dinner table into the maelstrom of revolution, led by a Napoleonic Varo: visually, Vigée-Lebrun meets Goya with suitably jarring effect. The stage is a revolve, in constant use, though Cencic does know when to keep things still. The device allows for a pleasing dramatic fluidity to the production; plus Handel had already culled over a thousand lines of libretto, for which we owe him huge thanks, so the arias succeed each other briskly. Everyone here gets to show off but also share moments of repose. Cencic sings another role created by Annibali with his usual aplomb. Tuscelda is the rising star Lauren Snouffer, whose even-toned soprano possesses a beguiling shimmer. Juan Sancho appears again, as Varo, and proves himself an excellent actor as well as fluent tenor. The whole cast rises to the occasion, though George Petrou's conducting this time does fall prey to some exaggerations in its dramatic quest.