

Season 2015/16  
+ Season 2016/17

# George Friedrich Handel

## ARMINIO



 **par  
nas  
sus** | arts  
productions

Neuerscheinung  
bei Decca  
im Frühling 2015



# George Friedrich Handel

## ARMINIO



Described by one contemporary commentator as “a miracle”, and another as “in every respect excellent & vastly pleasing”, *Arminio* strangely received only six performances between 12 January and 12 February 1737 at London’s Covent Garden, and was never staged again for almost two hundred years. Also unfairly neglected in more recent times, it is ripe for reappraisal and a new representation for today’s audiences. A heroic story, based on historical events occurring on the Germanic fringes of the Roman Empire, it is now being revived in a new and ravishing production by Parnassus Arts under their artistic director Max Emanuel Cencic: a combination with an

unequalled track record in Handelian opera seria, as witnessed by their multiply-award-winning staging and recording of *Alessandro* (from 2012 to date).

The story of *Arminio* is based on the infamous defeat at the Battle of Teutoburg Forest (AD9), of three Roman legions under their General Publius Quintilius Varus at the hands of the barbarian prince Hermann/Arminius, commanding an alliance of seven Germanic tribes. Called the “Clades Variana” (the Varian disaster) in Roman sources, this catastrophe ended forever the Empire’s dream of dominating any large territory beyond the River Rhine. It is typical of the attitudes of opera seria librettists to history that these events, and Varus’ subsequent death, are only referred to in a few lines of recitative at the opera’s dénouement. Instead, the author of the libretto, Antonio Salvi, takes the main characters’ names and weaves around them a powerfully-conflicted plot of love and jealousy, duty, deception and attempted suicide, in which *Arminio* is a long-suffering hero defeated and captured by the Romans, whose leader, Varo, lusts after his wife. The text that Handel set is much-revised, reducing especially Salvi’s recitative (over 1300 lines, cut to little more than 300: this may well have been done for the sake of Handel’s London audience, few of whom understood Italian). The original version was popular with other well-known composers, including Caldara and Galuppi, and was twice set by Handel’s great contemporary, Johann Adolf Hasse.

The greatest stars of Handel's operas were castrati, such as the famous contralto Senesino, his lead singer for seventeen of his earlier stage works. In 1733 he finally deserted Handel for a rival company, and so the composer hired other singers as his *primi uomini*, none of whom stayed with him for more than a couple of seasons. Considering the notorious rivalries between singers, castrati especially, which were perhaps even more prevalent in the eighteenth century than they are today, *Arminio* is rather unusual, in that it could be said to have two parts for "first man": the title role, written for the high alto Domenico Annibali, certainly has the larger amount to sing, but the first performer of the role of Sigismondo, the soprano castrato Domenico Conti, called Gizziello, was probably the more famous singer at the time, as well as being the only male soprano (rather than mezzo or contralto) for whom Handel wrote roles in London. Conti, however, was a famously modest person, which probably facilitated Handel's solving of this problem of singer protocol. Annibali, for long in the service of the Electors of Hannover at Dresden (thus, amongst many other claims to fame, becoming the only castrato modelled in porcelain by the famous Meissen factory), was described by a friend of Handel as having "the best part of Senesino's voice and Caristini's, [another of Handel's stars] with a prodigious fine taste and good action." Conti was a more typically itinerant singer, achieving fame throughout Italy, in Vienna, and Lisbon. Handel was said to consider him "a rising genius", but he was self-effacing almost to a fault. Once he fainted on hearing the great Farinelli sing, saying that he could never himself perform thereafter. According to the music historian Charles Burney, after surviving the disastrous Lisbon earthquake of 1755, Conti "was impressed with such a religious turn by the tremendous calamity, that he retreated to a monastery, where he ended his days" (this may be more legendary than factual, but makes for a good story ...). The lead soprano role of Tusnelda was taken by a woman of sterner stuff, the famous soprano Anna Maria Strada del Pò, who was a stalwart musical servant

of Handel throughout the 1730s. She sang thirteen opera premieres for him, as well as eleven revivals. Though no beauty (her most common nickname was "the Pig"), she was a fine artist of considerable emotional and vocal range. Handel supposedly regarded her as "a singer formed by himself, and modelled on his own melodies. She came hither a coarse and awkward [sic] singer with improvable talents, and he at last polished her into reputation and favour". The typically smaller role of the Roman commander Varo saw the third appearance in a Handel opera by the great English tenor John Beard, who didn't wholly escape a critical mauling, being described by Lord Shaftesbury as "absolutely good for nothing." Handel clearly disagreed: Beard went on to sing in another seven of his operas, and in almost every one of his English oratorios. He later, and with much scandal, married into the English aristocracy, and at length himself became proprietor of Covent Garden Theatre, the very place where *Arminio*, and so many of Handel's operas, were first performed.



Arminio

# ARMINIO

## Synopsis

Catone, a Roman senator, his daughter Marzia, and his ally Arbace, King of the Numidians, bemoan the fate of Rome under the yoke of Cesare. Catone wishes Marzia to marry Arbace, but the latter knows that Marzia secretly loves Cesare. Cesare and his ally Fulvio meet Catone at the gates of the city and offer him peace and friendship, but Emilia, widow of Pompeo, bids Catone to avenge her husband's death. She also enlists the help of Fulvio, who loves her, against Cesare.

Cesare next reassures Marzia of his feelings of esteem and friendship towards her father. Catone returns and wishes to take his daughter to marry Arbace, who, however, asks to delay the wedding – Catone departs in dismay. Emilia enters, and after much discussion, blames Cesare for the uncertainty. Marzia is left to contemplate her feelings.

Because of his wavering over the marriage to Marzia, Catone doubts Arbace's fidelity to him also. Fulvio arrives, bringing a proposal from the Senate and people of Rome for reconciliation with Cesare. Catone bids him return to his master, whom he spurns utterly. Marzia and Arbace quarrel, and Cesare is amazed at Catone's pride. Fulvio now enters with the news that Catone, influenced by the citizens of Utica, has changed his mind, though his assent was bitter. Emilia and he dissemble with one another – he falsely promises to kill Cesare.

Marzia hopes against hope that her father and her lover can be reconciled, but when they actually meet, Catone is resolute

and demands that Cesare renounce his dictatorial power. Cesare refuses: this means war. Catone, concerned for Marzia's safety, bids her leave the city by a secret passage to the sea. Arbace enters. Knowing that soon he and Catone must go into battle, as a sign of fidelity he offers his hand to Marzia again, but she rejects him angrily, and admits that Cesare is her true love. Catone calls down curses upon her. Marzia turns on Arbace and Emilia, asking if they are now satisfied to see her wretched. Emilia can barely believe what has happened, and Arbace is left in despair.

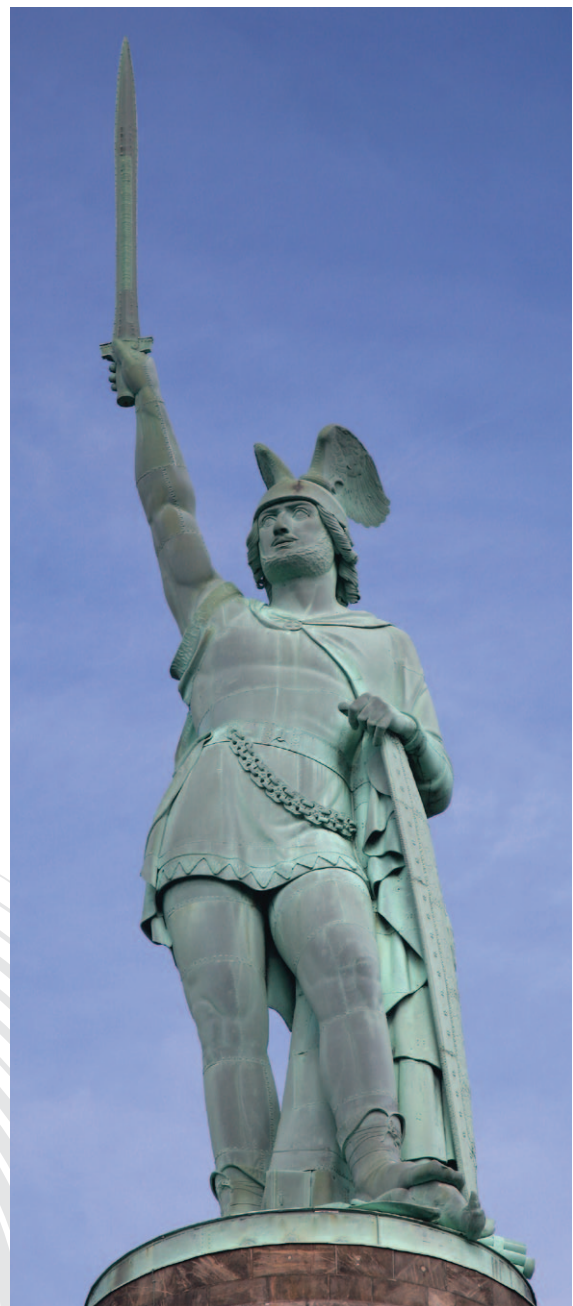
While preparing to leave Utica, Cesare is informed by Fulvio that armed followers of Emilia are lying in wait to kill him, but that one faithful to Catone will lead him to safety towards the sea by a secret way. Marzia is amazed to find Cesare in the city – her feelings towards him are confused. Cesare is now approached by Arbace, whom he does not know – on recognising him, their feelings of rivalry are overcome by concern for Marzia's safety.

In the underground passage, Marzia seeks to escape, but finds the way shut: Emilia has had this done in order to trap Cesare and murder him. Brought this way by a deceitful follower of Catone, Cesare confronts Emilia, but suddenly Marzia reveals herself. Catone enters with his sword drawn, and seeing Cesare and Marzia, thinks they wish to flee together; he threatens them. Fulvio arrives with more soldiers and announces that Utica is about to fall to Cesare's forces.

In the city Fulvio encounters Arbace and tells him that Cesare only wants his friendship, but Arbace retorts that nothing is left for him but to die by the sword. Emilia arrives and tells them that Catone has stabbed himself. He now enters with Marzia, who, goaded by his spurning of her, asks her father's pardon, promising to obey his desire that she should marry Arbace and reject Cesare. With a final embrace he bids her farewell. At the last moment Cesare enters but Catone dies cursing him, and Cesare's triumph is confounded.



Julius Caesar



Statue of Arminio (Hermannsdenkmal) in Teutoburger Wald

# Cast



**Max Emanuel Cencic** (*Arminio*)



**Layla Claire** (*Tusnelda*)



**Sandrine Piau** (*Tusnelda*)



**Ruxandra Donose** (*Ramise*)



**Vince Yi** (*Sigismondo*)



**Juan Sancho** (*Varo*)



**Owen Willets** (*Tullio*)



**Xavier Sabata** (*Tullio*)



# Dates



**Pavel Kudinov** (*Segeste*)



**Petros Magoulas** (*Segeste*)



**George Petrou** (*Conductor*)

**13 02 2016:** Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe (DE)

**15 02 2016:** Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe (DE)

**17 02 2016:** Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe (DE)

**19 02 2016:** Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe (DE)

**21 02 2016:** Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe (DE)

**23 02 2016:** Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe (DE)

**20 04 2016:** Theater an der Wien (AT)

**24 02 2017:** Badisches Staatstheater, Karlsruhe (DE)

**26 02 2017:** Badisches Staatstheater, Karlsruhe (DE)

**01 03 2017:** Badisches Staatstheater, Karlsruhe (DE)

Director: **Max Emanuel Cencic**

Stage design, lighting: **Helmut Stürmer**

Costumes: **Helmut Stürmer, Corina Gramosteanu**

Videoprojection: **Etienne Guiol, Arnaud Pottier**

Dramaturgy: **Michael Fichtenholz**



**Armonia Atenea** (*Orchestra*)

# Scene photos







# Partners

Armonia  
ATENEA

DECCA

BADISCHE STAATS  
KARLSRUHE THEATER

HÄNDEL-FESTSPIELE  
HALLE