

George Frederick Handel (1685-1759)

Crudel tiranno Amor

Allegro – Recitative – Largo – Recitative – Allegro

The first performance of Handel's 'cantata con stromenti' *Crudel tiranno Amor* took place in 1721 at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, where it was performed as part of a benefit concert for Margherita Durastanti. Poor Madame Durastanti enjoyed an uneven career, although she had a long association with Handel: some years after creating the role of *Agrippina* at its first performance in 1709, Handel also heard her singing in Dresden, and recruited her for London. Her arrival in 1720 was greeted with a mixed response. The librettist Paulo Antonio Rolli commented: 'It is said for certain that Durastanti will be coming for the operas. Oh! What a bad choice for England! I shall not enter into her singing merits, but she really is an Elephant!'

However, she evidently pleased Handel, perhaps as her dramatic abilities and voice-type meant that she was able to perform male and female roles, indeed her first role in London was the title role in *Radamisto*. Charles Burney was kinder than Rolli: after hearing her in *Floriodante*, saying that 'additional airs were composed to display her peculiar powers; and we find by these that her abilities as a singer and musician were greatly superior to those of her predecessor'. He added that her performance of 'Dolce mia speranza' was the 'most pathetic and beautiful of the slow Siciliana kind I ever heard.' The capacity for drama and passion which clearly inhabited Durastanti contributes to the varied moods of *Crudel tiranno amor*, in which the protagonist appeals to Love to return her errant paramour. The beautiful 'Dolce mia speranza' forms the emotional centre of Handel's cantata for this dynamic figure of the eighteenth-century London stage.

Aria:

Crudel tiranno Amor,
o rendi mi'l mio ben,
o dammi libertà.

Cruel tyrannous Love,
Oh give me back my love,
Oh give me freedom.

Del suo fedele ardour
questa mercede al sen
ingrato non si dà.

The boon of his faithful
Ardour would not render
This heart ungrateful.

Recitativo:

Ma tu mandi al mio core
la speme lusinghiera
che promette il ritorno,
il ritorno bramato,
del caro bene amato.

But you send my heart
The flattering hope
Which promises the return,
The longed-for return,
Of the dearly beloved one.

Aria:

O dolce mia speranza,
no, non partir da me.

Per te, di lontananza
non sento più tormento
e vivo sol per te.

Recitativo:

Senza te, dolce speme,
viver in tanto duolo
io non potrei;
tu degli affanni miei
tempri il dolore
e prometti che un dì
contenta, lieta,
superato il rigor del fato rio,
tornerò ad abbracciar
l'idolo mio.

Aria:

O cara speme
del mio diletto,
il core amante
si fida in te.
L'amato bene
che torni aspetto,
fido e costante
al par di me.

O my sweet hope,
No, do not leave me.

Because of you, I no longer
Feel the pain of distance
And live only for you.

Without you, sweet hope
I would not be able
To live in such sorrow;
You soften the
Pain of my sufferings
And promise that one day,
Contented, glad,
Cruel destiny overcome,
I shall return to embrace
My beloved.

Oh, dear hope
Of my delight,
My loving heart
Relies on you.
I await my well-beloved
Who may return
As faithful and constant
As I am.