

VOL. 8/10

3 CD Set

THE MASTERWORKS

George Frideric Handel

Belsazar



BRILLIANT
CLASSICS

CD 3

- | | |
|---|------|
| 1. Recitativo Nitocris: O Herr, nicht verzage | 1'50 |
| 2. Aria & recitativo Daniel: Nein! Du behalte deinen Prunk | 4'36 |
| 3. Recitativo Nitocris: O du allzu strenger Spruch | 0'28 |
| 4. Aria Nitocris: O blick' auf deiner Mutter Gram | 5'23 |
| 5. Aria Cyrus: O Gott des Heils | 4'24 |
| 6. Recitativo Cyrus: Du Gobrias | 1'13 |
| 7. Choir: O tapfrer Fürst | 5'13 |
| 8. Aria Nitocris: Vorahnend hofft und bangt | 4'52 |
| 9. Recitativo Nitocris, Daniel: Gern hofft'ich noch | 0'34 |
| 10. Aria Daniel: Lässt denn der Löwe die Natur | 2'14 |
| 11. Recitativo Nitocris, Arioch, messenger: Ich hoff' auf's neu | 1'51 |
| 12. Choir of the Jews: Baal sank dahin | 1'32 |
| 13. Aria Belsazar: Ich danke, Sesach | 1'40 |
| 14. War's music | 0'38 |
| 15. Aria Gobrias: Den ew'gen Mächten sei der erste Dank | 2'17 |
| 16. Recitativo Cyrus: Suche nun eilig | 0'23 |
| 17. Aria Cyrus: Zerstör'nder Krieg, hier ist dein Ziel | 2'24 |
| 18. Duet Nitocris, Cyrus: O Held, gebeugt siehst du mich nah'n | 3'28 |
| 19. Recitativo Cyrus, Daniel: Sprich, ehrwürdiger Seher | 1'00 |
| 20. Soloists & choir: Kündet überall den Heiden | 1'40 |
| 21. Recitativo Cyrus: Ja, ich bau'deine Stadt dir | 1'30 |
| 22. Soloists & choir: Sei von mir gepriesen | 5'17 |

Total time:

54'31



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George Frideric Handel

Belsazar




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Belsazar

The 1744 opera season at London's Haymarket Theatre had been anything but a financial success for its leaseholders. The opera-going public had become hostile to Italian and Catholic vocalists, had presumably also had enough of the superficial world of the stage, ruled as it was by castratos and prima donnas. So they simply stopped attending opera performances, and the Haymarket directors had no plans for reopening the theatre. Handel therefore hired it for the coming season, "engaged Signorina Francensina, Messrs Robinson, Beard, Reinhold, Mr Gates and his boys and some of the best chorus singers from the church choir" (Handel), and wrote to his trusty librettist Charles Jennens bidding him to create a libretto for a new oratorio. At intervals of several months this rich and eccentric member of the landed gentry, whose arrogance and underhandedness had often enough made him the composer's antagonist, presented Handel with the three acts of the libretto for "Belsazar". Anyone attending the first performance on March 27, 1745 could see the exact extent to which Handel had abridged the verbal excesses of an indignant Jennens. It was then the custom at the theatre to hand out librettos, in which the entire original text appeared; quotation marks indicated the passages which the composer had not set to music.

In common with "Esther", "Deborah", "Saul", "Israel in Egypt", "Samson", "Judas Maccabeus", "Joshua", "Solomon", "Susanna" and "Jephtha", "Belshazzar" is of course based upon Old Testament events. The ancient Biblical figures and their fates enjoyed special popularity among the middle class audiences of Handel's time. However, the composer too felt himself especially drawn to the colourful world of Jewish history, with its naively graphic qualities and unrelenting, archaic grandeur. Here, he was free of the



rigid constraints of Baroque opera typology and, by making uncommonly high demands on the chorus, was able musically to characterize the fates of whole nations and make them the centre of the dramatic action. In a supreme act of synthesis, he unified various musical styles into an artistic entity of exemplary quality. In their brilliance, the vocal solos evince all the essential elements of the Italian opera seria, in which tonal painting and instrumentation underline compositional and verbal structures. In his selection of musical material and in his dramatic conception of the choruses Handel fell back upon German oratorio traditions, yet in the large-scale choral scenes his English audiences recognized the style of ceremonial anthems in the best tradition of Henry Purcell.

Jennens took the core of the action from the fifth chapter of Daniel, which relates how the irresponsible Babylonian King Belshazzar defiled the sacred vessels that his Jewish captives had rescued from their temple, when he used them in a libertine feast, and how he then paid for the sacrilege with his life and the fall of his Kingdom. Jennens took his Nitocris—a figure to whom he assigns a leading role, who possesses something of Cassandra's clarity of vision and who is caught up in a conflict between anger, pity and maternal love—from Herodotus's "History". Equally at home in Biblical and Classical themes, the librettist likewise made use of Xenophon's "Cyropaedia", for instance, exploiting his artistic freedom as a dramatist to construct coherent and logical plots from these disparate sources.

This impassioned drama characterizes the licentious Babylonians, the warlike Persians and the devout Jews in individual choral groups, and presents the following persona: Belshazzar, the historically misrepresented King of Babylon (tenor), his mother Nitocris (soprano), Cyrus, ruler of the Persians (contralto), Gobrias, a Babylonian courtier and a messenger.

Uwe Kraemer



SYNOPSIS

The fast section of the bipartite overture sets the scene in the turbulent festivities at the Babylonian palace-the interruptions by static chords presumably relate to the scene in which the appearance of the ghostly hand writing on the wall causes stark terror.

Act one.

In her opening aria, queen mother Nitocris bemoans the decay of the kingdoms and rulers of the world, compares their decadence with God's eternal kingdom and is enjoined by the prophet Daniel not to question the wisdom of the Almighty.-From the ramparts of their fortified and well-provided city, the chorus of the Babylonians looks mockingly down upon the Persian besiegers and their king, Cyrus, for his exaggerated war aspirations. At Cyrus's side is the Babylonian defector, Gobrias, whose son the tyrant Belshazzar had executed. Cyrus tells him of his dream: a thunderous voice had caused the Euphrates to run dry and called upon him to liberate the people of Israel. He decides to change the course of the river so that the water will flood the city during the feast of Sesach.-Daniel sings the praises of the Holy Scriptures as the source of truth to the Jews, and prophesies that Cyrus, God's anointed, will rescue them.-While the drunken Sesach feast is in progress Belshazzar is irritated by the dark looks the Jews give him. Ignoring his mother's entreaties to forgo such blasphemy, he demands from his guests that they use the holy vessels looted from the Temple of Jerusalem to drink from. The appalled chorus of the Jews warns him of the thunderbolt of God's wrath.

**Act two.**

The diversion of Euphrates- damned as "treacherous" by certain of the Persians - has been accomplished, and the triumphant besiegers' way into the royal city is free. At the orgiastic Sesach festival Belshazzar, standing before the graven images of the Babylonian gods, challenges the god of Israel. As he makes to drink from the vessel, a hand appears which writes three words on the wall opposite him. The scholars he summons admit their inability to decipher the script, and the courtiers cry for help, human or supernatural. Only Daniel, whom Nitocris has fetched, can solve the riddle: the words MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN signify the fall of the king, whom God has weighed in the balance and found wanting, as well as the apportionment of his kingdom between the Medes and the Persians. His mother urges Belshazzar to show a sign of remorse, but he refuses. The mighty chorus of the Persian warriors occupying the city acclaim the coming peace.

Act three.

All Daniel's comforting words are to no avail in Nitocris's acute distress. A messenger announces the outcome of the idolatrous orgy and of the enemy's entry into the city. Completely drunk and enraged, Belshazzar awaits the approach of Cyrus and his warriors. They capture the royal palace and Cyrus kills the tyrant. He refuses to accept Nitocris's voluntary gesture of submission. Instead, he asks her to see him as her son. After the Israelites have sung a round chorus at the magnificent victory celebration, Cyrus promises them that the Temple in Jerusalem will be built anew, and humbly accepts their jubilant thanks, presented in a chorus rich in coloratura passages.

Uwe Kraemer

Translation: J & M Berridge



THE MASTERWORKS

CD 1

1. Overture 6'08

ACT I

2. Recitativo Nitocris: Ach, unstet eitles Los 4'41
3. Aria Nitocris: Du, Gott der Höh' 3'39
4. Recitativo Nitocris, Daniel: Das Schicksal Babylons 1'28
5. Aria Daniel: Wehklage nicht im eitlen Schmerz 4'27
6. Choir: Da seht, wie Persiens junger Held 2'35
7. Recitativo Gobrias, Cyrus: Uns gilt ihr Hohn 1'35
8. Aria Gobrias: Gebeugt von unheilbarem Schmerz 3'19
9. Aria Cyrus: Still' der eitlen Tränen Flut 2'26
10. Recitativo Cyrus, Gobrias: Ermanne dich 4'06
11. Aria Gobrias: O schau den Wüstling 3'19
12. Recitativo Cyrus: Befremdet's dich denn so 0'18
13. Aria Cyrus: Du Gott! Der, mir nur fern bekannt 2'38
14. Recitativo Cyrus: Freunde, habt Zuversicht 0'49
15. Choir: Die Reiche stehn in Gottes Rat 3'07
16. Aria Daniel: O Heil'ges Buch 7'49
17. Choir: Singt, Himmel singt 4'08

Total time: 56'30



THE MASTERWORKS

CD 2

1. Aria Belsazar: Ein freudig Fest 4'49
2. Recitativo Belsazar, Nitocris: Für euch, o Freunde 1'00
3. Aria Nitocris: Das falbe Laub 5'05
4. Recitativo Belsazar: Dies ist die Sitte 1'50
5. Choir of the Jews: Verwirf', o Herr 3'05
6. Recitativo Nitocris, Belsazar: Sie reden wahr 1'31
7. Duet Nitocris, Belsazar: O meines Lebens Lust 5'45
8. Choir of the Jews: Allmählich steigt Jehovas Zorn 4'44

ACT II

9. Choir: Seht, wie schnell der Euphrat flieht 6'29
10. Recitativo Cyrus: Ihr seht es, Freunde 0'48
11. Aria Cyrus: erstarrt, so nah den Feind zu seh'n 4'28
12. Choir: Voran, voran 0'32
13. Choir: Ihr schützenden Götter 2'56
14. Aria Belsazar: Kränzet den Becher rings im Kreis 3'04
15. Choir: Helft unserm Herrn 1'57
16. Recitativo Belsazar: Ruft meine Weisen 0'20
17. Sinfonia 1'47
18. Recitativo & choir: Ihr Weisen 1'12
19. Choir: O Missgeschick 1'41

Total time: 53'06



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George Frideric Handel

Belsazar

**Oratorio in three acts for soloists,
choir & orchestra**

Sung in German

Belsazar, King of Babylon: **Peter Schreier, tenor**

Nitocris, mother of Belsazar: **Renate Frank-Reinecke, soprano**

Cyrus, Persian King: **Ute Trekel-Burckhardt, alto**

Daniel, a Jewish prophet: **Gisela Pohl, alto**

Gobrias, Assyrian: **Hermann Christian Polster, bass**

Arioch: **Joachim Vogt, tenor**

A messenger: **Günther Beyer, bass**

BERLINER SINGAKADEMIE

KAMMERORCHESTER BERLIN,

Dietrich Knothe

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