



GIULIA FRASI: HANDEL'S LAST PRIMA DONNA

Ruby Hughes presents a remarkable musical portrait

SACD release: 2 March 2018

Chandos Records CHSA 0403 (recorded in surround sound)

The **Borletti-Buitoni Trust** has helped bring to fruition another interesting music project, this time for British soprano **Ruby Hughes** (2014 BBT award winner) who pays tribute to Handel's last prima donna, the Italian soprano Giulia Frasi. For her debut recording on the **Chandos** label Ruby has chosen a selection of celebrated music composed for Frasi by Handel from his last works *Susanna*, *Solomon*, *Theodora* and *Jephtha* plus other composers of the era whose works are much less familiar, including several modern premieres. The recording was made with the **Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment** conducted by **Laurence Cummings** and will be released on **2 March 2018**, in time for International Women's Day (8 March) and Ruby's recital *A Celebration of Frasi* on 7 April at the London Handel Festival.

Ruby Hughes has a particular affinity with music of the Renaissance and Baroque periods and, while exploring further her favourite Handel roles, she discovered that most of them had been composed for Frasi. Her investigation into the life and work of this Italian soprano, whose London career spanned over three decades, was aided by musicologist and Handel specialist **David Vickers**, whose research into Frasi's career helped Ruby choose the music for the album.

Giulia Frasi, noted for her remarkably clear, sweet voice and precise English diction, arrived in London as a young singer in 1742 to join Lord Middlesex's Italian Opera Company. She was soon noticed by Handel and from 1748 became the principal soprano in all his oratorios at Covent Garden until his death in 1759. Her star rose to the highest ranks of the London musical scene and she also worked for charitable causes, singing in the annual performances of *Messiah* at the Foundling Hospital (from 1750), the annual charity concerts at the King's Theatre in aid of the Fund for Decay'd Musicians and Their Families (later the Royal Society of Musicians), and nine consecutive meetings of the Three Choirs Festival.

In addition to working regularly for Handel, Frasi appeared in Italian operas by Galuppi, Porpora, Gluck, Hasse, Ciampi and Terradellas (a neglected period of London opera history) and she worked frequently with English composers, most notably Thomas Arne, William Boyce and Philip Hayes, and also under the co-direction of John Stanley and John Christopher Smith (Handel's joint successors of oratorio concert seasons at Covent Garden).

As well as possessing a voice similarly praised for its beauty and clarity, Ruby also has an empathy with the vividly dramatic roles Frasi championed - women reacting to distressing events with virtuous dignity and selflessness, such as the nobly blameless and chaste title-heroines in *Susanna* and *Theodora* and the valiant Iphis in Handel's last oratorio *Jephtha*. Besides roles of moral stoicism and pathos, another side to Frasi's dramatic colours is evident in roles of seductive temptresses in Arne's *Judgement of Paris* and Handel's *The Choice of Hercules*.

Ruby Hughes comments: "I have become utterly fascinated by Frasi, an ambitious and indomitable woman who so inspired Handel in his last years. I believe that, with this CD, we have captured the diversity of changing styles, tastes and activities in mid-eighteenth century musical culture as well as provided a remarkable insight into the career of Giulia Frasi."

Further press information:

Debra Boraston at **Borletti-Buitoni Trust** T. 01424 883307 M. 07989 434388
E. debra@henrymooresutdio.co.uk W. www.bbtrust.com

Martin Arnaud at Chandos Records T. 01206 225 215 M. 07899 956 585 E. marnaud@chandos.net

Notes to Editors

Giulia Frasi: Handel's Last Prima Donna

Ruby Hughes (soprano), Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment/Laurence Cummings

Chandos Records CHSA 0403 SACD Release date 2 March 2018 (recorded in surround sound)

Pre-order period of +/- 1 month when the album will also be available for download on the website <https://www.chandos.net>

Repertoire

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

1. *Susanna* "Crystal streams in murmurs flowing"

Vincenzo Ciampi (c1719–1762)

2. *Adriano in Siria* "Oh Dio, mancar mi sento"

3. *Il trionfo di Camilla* "Là per l'ombrosa sponda"

Thomas Arne (1710–1778)

4. *Artaxerses* "Why is death for ever late"

John Christopher Smith (1712–1795)

5. *Paradise Lost* Recitative: "Oh, do not, Adam"

6. *Paradise Lost* Aria: "It comes, it comes, it must be death"

7. *Rebecca* Recitative: "But see, the night with silent pace"

8. *Rebecca* Aria: "O balmy sleep"

Thomas Arne

9. *Alfred* "Gracious Heav'n, O hear me"

George Frideric Handel

10. *Theodora* Sinfonia

11. *Theodora* Recitative: "O thou bright sun!"

12. *Theodora* Aria: "With darkness deep"

13. *Theodora* Sinfonia

14. *Theodora* Recitative: "But why are thou disquieted"

15. *Theodora* Aria: "Oh that I on wings could rise"

Philip Hayes (1738–1797)

16. *Telemachus* "Soon arrives thy fatal hour"

George Frideric Handel

17. *The Choice of Hercules* "There the brisk sparkling..."

18. *Jephtha* Recitative: "Ye sacred priests"

19. *Jephtha* Aria: "Farewell, ye limpid streams"

20. *Solomon* "Will the sun forget to streak"

Biographical notes

Ruby Hughes <http://www.rubyhughes.com>

- Began musical studies as a cellist graduating from London's Guildhall School of Music. Studied voice at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater, Munich and London's Royal College of Music.
- Prizes and awards include First Prize & Audience Prize at 2009 London Handel Singing Competition and Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award in 2014 when she was also shortlisted for a Royal Philharmonic Society Music Award.
- Former BBC New Generation Artist.
- Made her debut at Theater an der Wein in 2009 as Roggiero in Rossini's Tancredi, returning as Fortuna in L'Incoronazione di Poppea.
- In the UK has performed major roles with English National Opera, Garsington Opera, The Opera Group, Music Theatre Wales and Scottish Opera. Also appeared in Sir Jonathan Miller's acclaimed production of the St Matthew Passion at the National Theatre
- European performances include Euridice in L'Orfeo at Aix-en-Provence Festival, Sandrina L'infedelta delusa and Narcissa-Philemon und Baucis at the Musikfestspiele Potsdam Sanssouci and The Indian Queen at the Schwetzingen Festival.
- In concert, has sung under conductors including Laurence Cummings, Thierry Fischer, HK Gruber, Philippe Herreweghe, Rene Jacobs, Gianandrea Noseda, Marc Minkowski, Thomas Søndergård, John Storgårds, and Osmo Vanska.
- Has sung with ensembles such as Les Arts Florissants, Akademie für Alte Musik at the Berlin Philharmonie, B'Rock Belgium Baroque Orchestra, all the BBC Orchestras, Britten Sinfonia, Halle Orchestra, Manchester Camerata, OAE, Philharmonia Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln and Zurich Chamber Orchestra.
- Festivals include Bach Fest Leipzig, BBC Proms, Cheltenham, Edinburgh International, Marlboro, Lockenhaus, Manchester International, Spitalfields and West Cork.
- Has broadcast and recorded extensively covering a wide range of repertoire including works by Bach, Barber, Berg, Britten, Crumb, Handel, Haydn, Mahler, Maxwell Davies, Macmillan, Mozart, Schubert & Schumann.
- 2015: made her US debut in recital with Julius Drake at The Frick Collection, New York followed by Carnegie Hall recital debut in 2017, including a commission by Huw Watkins.
- 2016: released first solo recital disc 'Nocturnal variations', songs by Schubert, Mahler, Britten and Berg with pianist Joseph Middleton followed by 'Purcell Songs Realised by Britten' (both Champs Hill label).
- 2017: released 'Heroines of Love and Loss', a disc dedicated to 17th century women composers for the BIS label.

"Soprano Ruby Hughes has just released an album of 17th century songs by and about women, showing off her virtuosity and subtlety as a performer and unlocking the deeply personal, soulful heart of this rarely performed music. Hughes seems able to direct a winding, melisma-strewn phrase with total conviction and uncanny humanity. Her phrasing is full of delicious surprises: a little glissando, a whispering pianissimo, a diminuendo on an upward scale, a touch of breath to highlight the text's sensuality." Andrew Mellor, Opera Now Magazine : Heroines of Love & Loss

Giulia Frasi (fl. 1740–1774) probably studied in Milan, made her operatic debut at Lodi in 1740, proceeded to sing briefly in Alessandria (1740), Bergamo (1741) and Modena (1742), before she travelled to Britain to join Lord Middlesex's Italian opera company in 1742. Initially a second-rank singer performing minor roles, she participated in at least fourteen opera seasons at the King's Theatre on the Haymarket between 1742 and 1761. From the mid-1740s Frasi appeared increasingly frequently in concerts that led directly to her involvement in English oratorios, masques, odes and other such works, and from 1748 her Italian opera activities and concert engagements were concurrent to her employment by Handel as the principal soprano in all of his oratorio concerts at Covent Garden. After her last documented appearance in a concert at Hickford's Room on 16 May 1774, it is rumoured that she fled from her creditors to Calais, where she apparently died in abject poverty.

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