

SALZBURG WHITSUN FESTIVAL
Artistic Director: Cecilia Bartoli



‘I have a very special love for Handel’

Salzburg Whitsun Festival
7 – 10 June 2019

‘Voci celesti – heavenly voices’: with this title, the Salzburg Whitsun Festival dedicates itself to the commemoration of the great castrato voices. Their legendary art transcends its era and still fascinates today, inspiring critical engagement with this extraordinary phenomenon – notwithstanding the considerable human sacrifice that underpins it.

For more about the 2019 festival, please read our interview with CECILIA BARTOLI.



Cecilia Bartoli © Kristian Schuller / Decca

Ms. Bartoli, for the Whitsun Festival 2019 you’ve chosen to focus on the phenomenon of castrati – a grim tradition that was kept up for centuries but never called into question. Why did you decide this year to take on this topic, and the music written for castrato voices?

This subject has been on my mind for a long time and I regularly come back to it; ten years ago, I tackled it with my CD 'Sacrificium'. Already then I was asking myself whether it was entirely proper to celebrate these extraordinary artistic, aesthetic and sensual experiences, which came about through great sacrifices. Indeed, I think it's important to have a discussion about the history of the castrati and their suffering. Many of the most important composers of the 18th century created music of extraordinary beauty and passion for these 'heavenly' voices. It wouldn't be right to forget their legacy or, equally, their distress.

You're fond of returning to George Frideric Handel – in Salzburg we've heard you as Cleopatra in *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* and as Ariodante. This year it's Alcina. How would you describe your relationship with Handel?

Handel wrote every single note with love and passion. This is why people to this day are still deeply moved by his works. He kindles feelings in us and that's exactly what music is for. He's able to lead the listener to another world: a magical world. I adore Handel and would even go so far as to say that I have a very special love for him – even if we are separated by three hundred years...

Why did you choose *Alcina* as an opera? And what is it that particularly draws you to the role of Alcina?

She is a temptress, an exacting sorceress, a fierce, intense, alluring lover. A woman who enjoys great happiness and whose love causes her to suffer desperately, and indeed even loses her magical powers because of it. This strong woman goes on a journey that takes her through highs and lows. The role is extraordinarily wide-ranging and among the most demanding that Handel wrote. The role of Ruggiero is also remarkable. This was written for the star castrato Giovanni Carestini and will be performed in Salzburg by my fantastic colleague, the countertenor Philippe Jaroussky.

Alcina sustains an impressive level of variety throughout the entire opera. It takes on magic, heroism, romantic entanglements, and contains comic elements. It is therefore a typical baroque opera that draws on many themes from Ariosto's epic poem 'Orlando Furioso'. An incredibly exciting mixture of baroque and epic, with many terrific ways of staging the work.

We'll encounter a few familiar faces – Damiano Michieletto has already directed at the Salzburg Whitsun Festival, having staged Rossini's *La Cenerentola* in 2014, and the conductor will be Gianluca Capuano, who recently conducted *Ariodante* in 2017. What is it that you value about working with these artists?

It's always nice to work together with artists that you've known well for a long time. Damiano Michieletto's wonderful *Cenerentola*, which our audience in Salzburg responded to with so much enthusiasm, of course contained several 'magical' elements. I'm very curious to see how he'll make use of these magical elements in a baroque opera. Michieletto most certainly has the fertile imagination that such a work requires. And with Gianluca Capuano and the 'Musiciens du Prince – Monaco' at our side, we can once more look forward to a superb and faithful interpretation of the music on historical instruments. This year I'm once again supported by unique musicians.

Handel's *Ariodante* and *Alcina* as well as Porpora's *Polifemo* are direct fruits of the rivalry between the two composers in London in 1735.

For the first time since their respective premieres in 1735, you've chosen to place Handel's opera in direct comparison to Nicola Porpora's competing work *Polifemo*. Porpora was Farinelli's teacher and a rival of Handel and Hasse. Still, do the two composers share any common characteristics? And do you think the audience will once again pick up on the idea that they were competing with one another?

The 1734/35 season in London was surely a magnificent one: Nicola Porpora was with the Opera of the Nobility in the King's Theatre, while Handel was with the competing company in the newly built Covent Garden – too much for the London music market to bear. Fierce competition developed between Handel and Porpora over spectator numbers. The rivalry between these two composers may have been financially unsustainable, but in retrospect it was a blessing, as both felt compelled to outdo themselves. The fruits of this rivalry are Handel's *Ariodante* and *Alcina*, as well as Porpora's *Polifemo*: glorious operas!

Just as was done in London, we will also directly juxtapose them. Of course, we no longer expect them to compete, but rather to complement each other, as both the operas are brilliant Baroque works with virtuoso solo parts. While Anna Maria Strada and Carestini enthralled Handel's audience in 1735 with the most difficult arias the composer had ever written, the most famous castrato of the time, Farinelli, stood on the stage of the King's Theatre and apparently brought the people in the audience to the point of fainting. I'm delighted to be bringing this unique Baroque legacy to Salzburg and thereby promoting a musical reconciliation between the two composers (both of whom would certainly turn in their graves if they knew about it...).

In addition to the operas and concerts, you're augmenting the program with a movie and, for the first time, a panel discussion. What makes these additional items important to you?

Many subjects are brought together by classical music and especially opera: theatre, literature, music, history, social critique, even medicine – and much more besides. Because of this, it's also highly interesting to look at music and opera through different lenses. And so this year, alongside the two opera productions and five concerts, there will be a showing of 'Farinelli il Castrato', Gérard Corbiau's legendary, flamboyant film, and a panel discussion chaired by the music critic Jürgen Kesting. The panel will include Jochen Kowalski, the musicologist Corinna Herr, and the medical doctor Bernhard Richter. When we concern ourselves with a subject as difficult as that of the castrati, it's important to consider their art from all the various perspectives.

What do you think the voices of the castrati sounded like? The only insight we have today is the recording of Alessandro Moreschi, who was likely the last castrato of the Sistine Chapel, and who died in Rome in 1922.

The practice was for boys to be castrated early in order to prevent the hormonal change that causes the voice to break. This was a gruesome act – especially if you consider that thousands of castrati in a given generation failed to develop the appropriate talent for a big

career. They remained maimed for life, were scorned by society, became impoverished, and whiled away their days either in choirs or by turning to prostitution.

Only a select few went on to have careers, but these became highly educated: they received instruction from the very best teachers, and not just from singing teachers and composers. They were given a wide-ranging general education, with the result that they belonged to the most cultured of their contemporaries – Farinelli later became a powerful minister at the court of the Spanish king.

The castrati who became successful singers were in possession of exceptional musical and technical abilities: their voices must have been incredibly flexible.

Farinelli, for example, was said to have had a vocal range of over three and a half octaves. In addition, their large rib cages gave the castrati extensive respiratory volume, which in turn enabled them to produce notes and phrases of almost infinite length. The singers' voices also had a wide range of dynamics and a rich colour palette. The voices were technically so well trained and flexible that today we continue to be amazed at the breakneck virtuosity of the scores written for them.

But as beautiful as the voices must have been, it does not justify the suffering meted out to countless numbers of boys and men during that time. The mutilation of castrati makes the Baroque period one of the darkest chapters in the history of music. We hope that this programme will put the beauty and cruelty of that era at the centre of the festival. I look forward very much to all the discussions that will ensue adjacent to the stage.



Gianluca Capuano conducts Handel's *Alcina*

© Monika Rittershaus



Philippe Jaroussky sings *Alcina's* enchanted lover Ruggiero

© Marc Ribes

ROLEX

Rolex's commitment to the arts dates back to the 1970s when the New Zealand soprano Dame Kiri Te Kanawa became the brand's first Cultural Testimonee. This commitment has since been extended to many other leading artists, institutions and festivals. The partnerships include Cecilia Bartoli, Jonas Kaufmann and Plácido Domingo as well as the legendary Teatro alla Scala in Milan, London's historic Royal Opera House and the world-renowned Metropolitan Opera. In 2012, Rolex was delighted to incorporate the highly prestigious Salzburg Festival, as well as the Whitsun Festival directed by Cecilia Bartoli, into its cultural portfolio.



From left to right: Markus Hinterhäuser, Artistic Director of the Salzburg Festival
Cecilia Bartoli, Artistic Director of the Salzburg Whitsun Festival
Helga Rabl-Stadler, President of the Salzburg Festival
Photo: Julia Stix

Cecilia Bartoli was the first woman to become artistic director of the Salzburg Whitsun Festival upon her appointment in 2012. Since then she has set new benchmarks with both her ideas and her performances. Her contract as artistic director runs until 2021.

W H I T S U N 2 0 1 9 / O P E R A

George Frideric Handel (1685 - 1759)

ALCINA

Dramma per musica in three acts, HWV 34 (1735)

Libretto by an unknown author after the libretto to Riccardo Broschi's *L'isola di Alcina*, after Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*

New production in the Haus für Mozart

Fri 7 June (premiere) and Sun 9 June 2019 (2 performances)

Revival in summer:

8, 10, 13, 16 and 18 August 2019 (5 performances)

Gianluca Capuano Conductor
Damiano Michieletto Director
Paolo Fantin Sets
Agostino Cavalca Costumes

CAST

Cecilia Bartoli Alcina
Philippe Jaroussky Ruggiero
Sandrine Piau Morgana
Kristina Hammarström Bradamante
Christoph Strehl Oronte
Alastair Miles Melisso

Les Musiciens du Prince — Monaco
Bachchor Salzburg
Alois Glaßner Chorus Master

The complete programme for the Salzburg Whitsun Festival can be found at:
<https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/en/p/alcina-whitsun-festival>

Photo Service: <https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/presse/fotoservice>

Ticket Office: info@salzburgfestival.at

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