

= Rinaldo (opera) =

Rinaldo (HWV 7) is an opera by George Frideric Handel , composed in 1711 , and was the first Italian language opera written specifically for the London stage . The libretto was prepared by Giacomo Rossi from a scenario provided by Aaron Hill , and the work was first performed at the Queen 's Theatre in London 's Haymarket on 24 February 1711 . The story of love , war and redemption , set at the time of the First Crusade , is loosely based on Torquato Tasso 's epic poem *Gerusalemme liberata* (" Jerusalem Delivered ") , and its staging involved many original and vivid effects . It was a great success with the public , despite negative reactions from literary critics hostile to the contemporary trend towards Italian entertainment in English theatres .

Handel composed Rinaldo quickly , borrowing and adapting music from operas and other works that he had composed during a long stay in Italy in the years 1706 ? 10 , during which he established a considerable reputation . In the years following the premiere , he made numerous amendments to the score . With its spectacular vocal and orchestral passages , Rinaldo is regarded by critics as one of Handel 's greatest operas . Of its individual numbers , the soprano aria " *Lascia ch'io pianga* " has become a particular favourite , and is a popular concert piece .

Handel went on to dominate opera in England for several decades . Rinaldo was revived in London regularly up to 1717 , and was a revised version in 1731 ; of all Handel 's operas , Rinaldo was the most frequently performed during his lifetime . After 1731 , however , the opera was not staged for more than 200 years . Renewed interest in baroque opera during the 20th century led to the first modern professional production in Handel 's birthplace , Halle , Germany , in 1954 . The opera was mounted sporadically over the following thirty years ; after a successful run at New York 's Metropolitan Opera in 1984 , performances and recordings of the work have become more frequent worldwide . The opera 's tercentenary in 2011 brought a modernized production at the Glyndebourne Festival .

= = Background = =

Handel began to compose operas in Hamburg , where he spent the years 1703 ? 06 ; his principal influences were Johann Mattheson and Reinhard Keiser . At that time , German opera as a genre was still not clearly defined ; in Hamburg the term *Singspiel* (" song @-@ play ") rather than opera described music dramas that combined elements of French and Italian opera , often with passages of spoken German dialogue . The music was , in the words of historian Donald Jay Grout , " tinged with the serious , heavy formality of Lutheran Germany " . The first of Handel 's early works in the German style was *Almira* , a considerable success when it was premiered on 8 January 1705 . Over the next three years Handel composed three more operas in the German style , but all of these are now lost . However , fragments of the music from these works have been identified in later operas .

In autumn 1706 Handel went to Italy . He stayed for long periods in Florence , Rome , Naples and Venice , making frequent visits to the opera houses and concert halls . He obtained introductions to leading musicians , among them Arcangelo Corelli , Alessandro and Domenico Scarlatti , and Agostino Steffani , and met numerous singers and performers . From these acquaintances Handel learned the essential characteristics of Italian music , in particular (according to Dean and Knapp) " fluency in the treatment of Italian verse , accurate declamation and flexible harmonic rhythm in recitative , ... drawing the necessary distinction between vocal and instrumental material and , above all , the release of [his] wonderful melodic gift " . Handel 's first Italian opera , *Rodrigo* , showed an incomplete grasp of Italian style , with much of Keiser 's Hamburg influence still evident ; it was not a success when premiered in Florence , in late November or early December 1707 . He followed this by a lengthy visit to Rome , where opera performances were then forbidden by papal decree , and honed his skills through the composition of cantatas and oratorios . In Rome , Handel met Cardinal Vincenzo Grimani , a diplomat and spare @-@ time librettist ; the result of this meeting was a collaboration which produced Handel 's second Italian opera , *Agrippina* . After this work 's triumphant premiere at the Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo in Venice , on 26 December 1709 , Handel became , says biographer P. H. Lang , " world famous and the idol of a spoiled and

knowledgeable audience " .

This sudden recognition led to eager competition for Handel 's services . Among those most keen to employ him was Prince Georg Ludwig , the Elector of Hanover and future King George I of Great Britain . In June 1710 Handel accepted the appointment of Kapellmeister to Georg 's Hanover court , under terms that gave him considerable scope to pursue his own interests . On the basis of this freedom , in late 1710 Handel left Hanover for London , possibly in response to an earlier invitation from members of the English nobility . By 1711 , informed London audiences had become familiar with the nature of Italian opera through the numerous pastiches and adaptations that had been staged . The former Royal Academy of Music Principal , Curtis Price , writes that the popularity of these pieces was the result of a deliberate strategy aimed at the suppression of English opera . Handel 's music was relatively unknown in England , though his reputation from Agrippina was considerable elsewhere . A short " Italian Dialogue " he had written in honour of Queen Anne 's birthday was well received when performed at St James 's Palace on 6 February 1711 .

In London , by means which are not documented , Handel secured a commission to write an Italian opera for the Queen 's Theatre in the Haymarket (it became the " King 's Theatre " after King George I 's accession in 1714) . This theatre , designed and built by Sir John Vanbrugh , had become London 's main opera house ; its manager , Aaron Hill , intended to mount the first Italian opera written specifically for London and had engaged an all @-@ Italian company for the 1710 ? 11 opera season . Hill employed an Italian poet and language teacher , Giacomo Rossi , to write a libretto based on a scenario that Hill prepared himself . As his subject Hill chose Gerusalemme liberata , an epic of the First Crusade by the 16th @-@ century Italian poet Torquato Tasso ; the opera was called Rinaldo , after its main protagonist . Hill was determined to exploit to the full the opportunities for lavish spectacle afforded by the theatre 's machinery ; his aim , according to Dean and Knapp , was " to combine the virtuosity of Italian singing with the extravagance of the 17th century masque " .

= = Roles = =

= = Synopsis = =

Place : in and around the city of Jerusalem during the First Crusade

Time : 1099

Act 1

The Crusader army under Goffredo is laying siege to Jerusalem , where the Saracen king Argante is confined with his troops . With Goffredo are his brother Eustazio , his daughter Almirena , and the knight Rinaldo . As Goffredo sings of the coming victory , Rinaldo declares his love for Almirena , and Goffredo confirms that she will be Rinaldo 's bride when Jerusalem falls . Almirena urges Rinaldo to fight boldly and assure victory . As she departs , a herald announces the approach of Argante from the city . Eustazio surmises that the king fears defeat ; this seems to be confirmed when Argante , after a grandiose entrance , requests a three @-@ day truce to which Goffredo graciously assents . After Goffredo leaves , Argante ponders his love for Armida , the Queen of Damascus who is also a powerful sorceress , and considers the help her powers might bring him . As he muses , Armida arrives from the sky in a fiery chariot . She has divined that the Saracens ' only chance of victory lies in vanquishing Rinaldo , and has the power , she claims , to achieve this .

The scene changes to a garden , with fountains and birds , where Rinaldo and Almirena are celebrating their love . They are interrupted as Armida appears , and wrests Almirena from Rinaldo 's embrace . Rinaldo draws his sword to defend his lover , but a black cloud descends to envelop Armida and Almirena , and they are borne away . Rinaldo mourns the loss of his loved one . When Goffredo and Eustazio arrive they comfort Rinaldo , and propose they visit a Christian magician who may have the power to save Almirena . Rinaldo , left alone , prays for strength .

Act 2

A sea shore . As Goffredo , Eustazio and Rinaldo near the magician 's lair , a beautiful woman calls

from her boat , promising Rinaldo that she can take him to Almirena . Two mermaids sing of love 's delights , and urge Rinaldo to go in the boat . He hesitates , unsure what to do , and his companions attempt to restrain him . Angry at the abduction of his loved one , Rinaldo enters the boat , which immediately sails off . Goffredo and Eustazio are shocked at Rinaldo 's impulsiveness and believe that he has deserted their cause .

In Armida 's palace garden , Almirena mourns her captivity . Argante joins her and , overcome by her beauty , confesses that he now loves her . He promises that as proof of his feelings he will defy Armida 's wrath and secure Almirena 's freedom . Meanwhile , Rinaldo is brought before the triumphant Armida . As he demands that Almirena be set free , Armida finds herself drawn to his noble spirit , and declares her love . When he angrily rejects her she uses her powers to assume Almirena 's form , but Rinaldo suspects trickery , and departs . Armida , resuming her own appearance , is furious at her rejection yet retains feelings of tender love . She decides on another attempt to ensnare Rinaldo , and transforms herself back into Almirena 's shape , but then encounters Argante . Believing her to be Almirena , Argante repeats his earlier promises of love and freedom . Swiftly resuming her own form , Armida denounces his infidelity and vows vengeance . Argante defiantly confirms his love for Almirena and declares that he no longer needs Armida 's help . She departs in a fury .

Act 3

A mountainside , at the magician 's cavern . Goffredo and Eustazio are told by the Magician that Almirena is being held captive in Armida 's palace at the mountain @-@ top . Ignoring the magician 's warning that they will need special powers , the pair set off for the palace but are quickly driven back by Armida 's monsters . The magician then gives them magic wands that transcend Armida 's power , and they set off again . This time they overcome the monsters , but as they reach the gates of the palace it disappears , leaving them clinging to a rock in the midst of a stormy sea . They climb the rock and descend out of sight .

In the palace garden Armida prepares to kill Almirena . Rinaldo draws his sword , but Armida is protected from his wrath by spirits . Suddenly Goffredo and Eustazio arrive , but as they touch the garden with their wands it disappears , leaving them all on an empty plain with the city of Jerusalem visible in the distance . Armida , after a last attempt to kill Almirena , also disappears as Rinaldo strikes her with his sword . The remaining four celebrate their reunion , while Goffredo announces that the attack on Jerusalem will begin the next day .

In the city , Argante and Armida , in danger from a common enemy , become reconciled and prepare their troops for battle . Goffredo 's army advances , and battle finally commences . After a struggle for supremacy , Jerusalem falls to Goffredo ; Argante is overcome and captured by Rinaldo , while Armida is taken by Eustazio . Rinaldo and Almirena celebrate their love and forthcoming marriage . Armida , accepting her defeat , breaks the wand which is the source of her evil power and together with Argante embraces Christianity . Goffredo expresses his forgiveness to his beaten foes and sets them free , before victors and vanquished join in a chorus of reconciliation .

Revisions , 1717 and 1731

The opera was frequently revised , most particularly in 1717 and in 1731 ; modern performances are usually a conflation of the versions available . Up to and including 1717 , these changes had no significant effect on the plot . In the 1731 version , however , in Act 2 Armida imitates Almirena 's voice rather than assuming her appearance , and Argante declares his love to Almirena 's portrait rather than to her face . In Act 3 the marches and the battle scene are cut ; Armida and Argante remain unrepentant and vanish in a chariot drawn by dragons before the conclusion .

= = Compositional history = =

In a letter dedicating the new opera to Queen Anne , Hill wrote of his choice of story : " I could not chuse a finer Subject than the celebrated story of Rinaldo and Armida " . He had , however , exercised " a Poet 's Privilege " , to render Tasso 's work suitable for the stage . This " privilege " moved the opera 's story a long way from Tasso 's original . Hill invented a new heroine , Almirena , to provide the main love interest with the hero Rinaldo , and the relationship between Rinaldo and

Armida scarcely figures in the opera . Likewise , the affair between Argante and Armida is Hill 's creation , as are the conversions to Christianity , the latter possibly a sop to English susceptibilities . Rossi was required to turn the elaborate scenario into verses , a relatively light task which , he said , was " the delivery of a few evenings " . Nevertheless , Rossi complained that Handel hardly gave him time to write : " To my great wonder I saw an entire Opera set to music by that surprising genius , with the greatest degree of perfection , in two weeks " . Price argues that Rossi 's role was beyond that of a mere versifier , quoting Hill 's words of praise for Rossi in the preface to the libretto , which suggest that Rossi was the senior partner in the birth of the libretto . Price also points to the likely influences on the structure of Rinaldo from two British semi @-@ operas ? George Granville 's The British Enchanters , and Purcell 's King Arthur . The transformations of characters to others ' shapes , Price contends , is likely derived from John Dryden 's play Amphitryon .

Handel 's speed of composition was assisted by his inclusion of arias and other numbers from his earlier Italian works , among them " Bel piacere " and " Basta che sol " from Agrippina , " Sibillar gli angui " from the dramatic cantata Aci , Galatea e Polifemo , and the mermaids ' song " Il vostro maggio " from the cantata Arresta il passo . Almirena 's aria " Lascia ch 'io pianga " had appeared in the oratorio Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno . The suitability of some of these insertions has been questioned by later commentators ; Dean and Knapp cite Argante 's " Sibillar gli angui " , with its references to the hissing snakes of Alecto and the howls of Scylla , as " ludicrously inappropriate " to accompany the king 's grand Act 1 entrance . Many other numbers ? Dean and Knapp estimate two @-@ thirds of the arias ? were adapted and partly recomposed from earlier sources .

In the years between the 1711 premiere and the 1717 revival , Handel made various adjustments to the score and the vocal parts , often to accommodate the requirements of new singers . Details of these changes are difficult to establish since the performing librettos and scores for these years no longer exist . For 1717 , more significant revisions were made ; the role of Eustazio was merged with that of Goffredo , and Argante 's part was rewritten to accommodate an alto voice . Thus in this revival all the principal parts were sung in high voice ranges . Handel 's revisions for the 1731 revival were even more radical , since they not only affected individual musical numbers but involved alterations in the plot . The production was advertised " With New Scenes and Cloathes " , but many of the changes involved reducing or eliminating the pyrotechnics and special effects that had characterised the original production . The only significant new music in the 1731 production is a long accompanied recitative for Rinaldo , though other numbers are changed or cut . Goffredo becomes a tenor , Armida a contralto , the Herald and the Magician become basses . Dean and Knapp summarise the 1731 revisions as " a striking illustration of the seeming vandalism with which Handel could treat his works in revival " .

= = Performance history and reception = =

= = = Early performances = = =

The 19th @-@ century music critic George Hogarth wrote of Rinaldo that " [t] he romantic interest of the subject , the charms of the music , and the splendour of the spectacle , made it an object of general attraction " . Its premiere at the Queen 's Theatre on 24 February 1711 , possibly under Handel 's direction , was a triumphant success . A further 12 performances were immediately scheduled ; at the end of the run , popular demand was such that two more were added . Notwithstanding this enthusiasm , the financial strains of such a grand production led to legal actions against Hill from unpaid craftsmen . Nine days after the premiere the Lord Chamberlain 's Office revoked the impresario 's licence . Under Hill 's successors the opera was played at the theatre in most seasons until 1716 ? 17 , by which time it had totalled 47 performances , far more than any other opera at the Queen 's .

The public 's general enthusiasm for the opera was not shared by the writers Joseph Addison and Richard Steele , who used the pages of their new journal , The Spectator , to pour scorn and ridicule on the work . Addison may have been motivated by his own failure , a few years previously , to

establish a school of English opera with Rosamund , on which he had collaborated with the composer Thomas Clayton . It was absurd , he wrote , that theatre audiences should be exposed to entire evenings of entertainment in a foreign tongue : " We no longer understand the language of our own stage " . Addison did , however , praise the singing of Nicolo Grimaldi , the celebrated alto castrato known as " Nicolini " , in the title role . Steele compared the production unfavourably to a Punch and Judy show , particularly criticising certain bungled scene changes and the poor quality of effects such as thunder and lightning . Hogarth made light of such comments : " Notwithstanding the influence which the Spectator influenced over the taste and manners of the age , its attacks ... seem to have had little effect in turning people from the entertainment " .

Some sources have suggested that the opera was performed in Dublin in March or April 1711 , though according to Dean and Knapp there is no record of such an occasion . In November 1715 a version mainly in German was performed in Hamburg . This production , based on a translation by the playwright Barthold Feind , proved to be very popular and was revived in the city on numerous occasions during the 1720s . A pastiche of the opera , with additional numbers by Leonardo Leo , was presented by Leo at the Royal Court in Naples in 1718 , with Nicolini singing his original role .

After 1716 ? 17 , Rinaldo was not seen on the London stage until 1731 , when it was revived in its revised form at the King 's Theatre . During these years Handel 's industry was such that he was producing a new opera for this theatre every nine months . The 1731 production of Rinaldo received six performances , bringing the London total for the work to 53 in Handel 's lifetime , the most for any of his operas . After 1731 Handel had fewer stage successes , and performances of his operas became rarer . Changes in taste and style combined , as Grout concludes , to " thrust [the operas] into ill @-@ deserved oblivion " , as a result of which Rinaldo was not staged anywhere for two hundred years .

= = = Modern revivals = = =

The first 20th @-@ century production of Rinaldo which can be specifically verified was a performance in London , in February 1933 , by pupils of the Hammersmith Day Continuation School , though Dean and Knapp mention a shortened version , in Czech , at the Prague Conservatory in 1923 . The first modern professional performance was at the Halle Opera House in June 1954 , under Horst @-@ Tanu Margraf , as part of the Handel Festival . On 17 May 1961 the Handel Opera Society , directed by Charles Farncombe , staged the work at London 's Sadler 's Wells Theatre , a production that was revived four years later . The first American performance was a concert version at Carnegie Hall on 27 March 1972 , given by the Handel Society of New York , with Stephen Simon conducting and Beverly Wolff as Rinaldo . The first staging of the opera in America was at the Houston Grand Opera under Lawrence Foster , in October 1975 , with Marilyn Horne in the title role , a part with which she would become particularly associated .

In July 1982 Horne sang the part alongside John Alexander 's Goffredo and Samuel Ramey 's Argante , in a National Arts Centre (NAC) production in Ottawa directed by Frank Corsaro . The performance , with Mario Bernardi conducting the NAC Orchestra , was applauded by Montreal Gazette critic Eric McLean for its fine music making and its displays of " architectural and sartorial splendour " . Eighteen months later , on 19 January 1984 Bernardi and Corsaro , with Horne , Ramey and Benita Valente from the Ottawa cast , brought the production to New York for the work 's debut at the Metropolitan Opera . The production was loaned to the Met for its centennial season by the National Arts Centre of Canada " in deep appreciation of the many years during which Canadians have enjoyed opera from the Met ? on tour , on radio and in New York " . Donal Henahan in The New York Times praised all the singers in turn , with a special mention for Valente 's " plaintive and affecting " rendering of the popular aria " Lascia ch 'io pianga " . But , says Henahan , " the loudest cheers of the night went at last to the choreographer , Eugene Collins , and an incredibly nimble corps of tumbling warriors " . After ten performances at the Metropolitan Opera House the production was taken in May to Washington , D.C. , and toured in the US before returning to New York in June for several outdoors performances .

From the mid @-@ 1980s onwards , performances of Rinaldo became more frequent worldwide . In

June 1989 it was staged at La Fenice in Venice , under John Fisher , again with Marilyn Horne . This production was criticised by critic and music scholar Stanley Sadie , in his review of the live recording , for straying too far from the composer 's original intentions , particularly in the rearrangement of material and the extent of cuts . Singers were , Sadie says , allowed too much freedom to ornament their vocal lines ; some of the cadenzas were " preposterous " . The opera reached Australia in 1999 , at the Sydney Opera House under Patrick Summers , and was performed there again in July ? August 2005 under Trevor Pinnock , with Michael Chance as Rinaldo . The new century saw a number of performances across Europe , including an appearance at the Göttingen International Handel Festival in 2004 , with Nicholas McGegan conducting Concerto Köln . This production was well received by the public , but was criticised by Jochen Breiholz of Opera News for poor staging , indifferent singing and a substandard performance from the orchestra .

Zurich Opera 's 2008 production , directed by Jens @-@ Daniel Herzog and conducted by William Christie , threw aside all convention by representing the action in a 21st @-@ century airport lounge and conference centre , with Rinaldo dressed in a double @-@ breasted navy blazer and needing a drink . " Characters go up and down on @-@ stage escalators , and the set spins to show various areas of the lounge and terminal . There is a dissection of a small , white furry animal , a large snake , some allusions to Bond girls and character transformations . The Christians pull guns on the Muslims at a signing ceremony " . It was , wrote Associated Press critic Ronald Blum , " outrageous ? and entertaining " . A concert version of Rinaldo was given at the 2009 Edinburgh Festival , by the Bach Collegium Japan conducted by Masaaki Suzuki , with the Japanese soprano Maki Mori as Almirena .

During the opera 's tercentenary year in 2011 , the Glyndebourne Festival mounted a new production directed by Robert Carsen , designed by Gideon Davey , and conducted by Ottavio Dantone with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment in the pit . The production is set in a school where Rinaldo is a student , initially the victim of bullying , who enters into the world of the Crusades . The Glyndebourne Festival Opera brought a semi @-@ staged version of this production to the 2011 Proms .

= = Music = =

The amount of recycled music in Rinaldo is such that Dean and Knapp call it an " anthology " of the best works from Handel 's Italian period . Sadie raises the question of whether the opera 's dramaturgy is affected by the small amount of music written for its particular situations . He also comments on the problems raised for scholars by the extensive revisions to the music that took place during Handel 's lifetime , but suggests that the available admixture creates interesting opportunities in the preparation of modern performing versions . The initial popular success of Rinaldo was assisted by the employment of virtuoso singers , in particular Nicolini in the title role . This part has remained in its original pitch , though in his various revisions Handel transposed the music of other leading roles to different voice types . Thus Goffredo had originally been an alto part , but in the 1717 revisions became a tenor ; the Magician was transposed from alto castrato to bass , and Armida from soprano to contralto .

The music , Lang says , flows " beguilingly " from the spacious overture ; the quieter , emotional passages are illustrated evocatively , while in the more spectacular moments Handel 's innovative use of brass is exciting and inspiring . The sudden blast of trumpets which announces the Act 3 March provides , say Dean and Knapp , " an effect of splendour and exhilaration that time has not dimmed " . The harpsichord solos which decorate " Vo ' far guerra " in Act 2 were originally improvised on the keyboard by Handel during performances , and were extremely popular . They were remembered and written down by William Babell , and published later as separate pieces . Lang believes that in spite of the borrowings , and the hasty manner in which the work was put together , Rinaldo is one of Handel 's great operas . According to Dean and Knapp , no Italian opera heard in London to that point had been supported by such " majestic " orchestral forces . Critic Anthony Hicks describes the music , overall , as both " varied and excellent " . Dean and Knapp 's

verdict is more equivocal . The music for the war and pageantry scenes , they say , is " brilliantly successful " , but in depicting the scenes concerned with magic , Handel misses the mark ; they suggest it was not until over 15 years later , with Admeto and Orlando , that he was able to represent the supernatural convincingly in music .

The opera begins in the key of F , and switches to G at the inception of the grove scene in Act 1 . Act 2 starts in E minor and ends in G. The final act begins and ends in B minor . According to Hicks the dominant character musically , except in Act 3 in which she barely sings , is Armida . Her entry cavatina " Furie terribili " gives , says Hicks , " an immediate impression of fiery passion " , an energy and intensity demonstrated in her Act 2 " Ah crudel " , and in her later vengeance aria which is the occasion of Handel 's harpsichord cadenzas . Armida 's Act 3 duet with Argante was the last duet with bass part that Handel wrote for 30 years . Of the other set pieces , Dean and Knapp highlight Rinaldo 's " Cara sposa " as an example of Handel 's growing confidence with aria forms . " Or la tromba " is praised for the brilliance of its orchestration : 4 trumpets , drums , strings & oboes ? the only aria Handel ever wrote for this combination . The melody for Almirena 's " Lascia ch 'io pianga " began its life as an Asian dance in Almira before appearing as an aria in the oratorio Il trionfo . From this simple tune and plain accompaniment Handel achieves an " intensely moving effect " in this , the best @-@ known of all the arias .

= = Arias and other musical numbers = =

= = = 1717 libretto and subsequent amendments = = =

The main musical numbers from the 1711 libretto are listed , together with changes and replacements from the two major revisions of 1717 and 1731 . Minor changes , transpositions , and alterations to recitative sections are not shown . New numbers introduced in 1717 and 1731 are listed separately . Other arias not listed may have been sung in Rinaldo during the years 1711 ? 17 , but in the absence of contemporary evidence from scores or librettos the extent of such changes cannot be accurately ascertained .