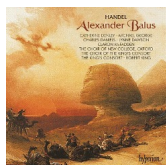


G.F.Handel - Alexander Balus (King) [1997]

Written by bluesever

Sunday, 05 February 2012 10:11 - Last Updated Friday, 06 December 2013 16:06

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Disc: 1 1. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Ouverture* 2. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Chorus Asiates* 3. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Recitative Alexander* 4. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Air Jonathan* 5. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Flourish Of Trumpets* 6. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Recitative Ptolomee* 7. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Air Ptolomee* 8. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Recitative Cleopatra* 9. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Air Cleopatra* 10. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Recitative Alexander* 11. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Air Alexander* [play](#) 12. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Chorus Asiates* 13. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Recitative Alexander* 14. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Air Alexander* 15. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Air Cleopatra* 16. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Recitative Cleopatra* 17. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Air Cleopatra* 18. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Recitative Aspasia* 19. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Air Aspasia* 20. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Recitative Cleopatra* 21. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Duet Cleopatra* 22. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Recitative Jonathan* 23. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Air Alexander* 24. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Recitative Jonathan* 25. *Alexander Balus: Act I: Air Jonathan* 26. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Air Alexander* 27. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Recitative Jonathan* 28. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Air Alexander* 29. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Recitative Sycophant Courtier* 30. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Air Alexander* 31. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Air Jonathan*

Disc: 2

1. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Chorus Israelites* 2. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Recitative Cleopatra* 3. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Air Cleopatra* 4. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Recitative Aspasia* 5. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Air Aspasia* 6. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Recitative Ptolomee* 7. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Air Ptolomee* 8. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Accompagnato Jonathan* 9. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Soli - Chorus* 10. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Recitative Alexander* 11. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Duet Alexander - Cleopatra* 12. *Alexander Balus: Act II: Chorus Asiates* 13. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Sinfonia* 14. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Recitative Cleopatra* 15. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Air Cleopatra* 16. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Recitative Alexander* 17. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Air Alexander* 18. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Recitative Jonathan* 19. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Air Alexander* 20. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Recitative Aspasia* 21. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Air Aspasia* 22. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Recitative Jonathan* 23. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Air Jonathan* 24. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Chorus Israelites* 25. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Recitative Ptolomee* 26. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Accompagnato Ptolomee* 27. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Air Ptolomee* 28. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Accompagnato Cleopatra* 29. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Recitative Messenger* 30. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Air Cleopatra* 31. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Recitative Second Messenger* 32. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Accompagnato Cleopatra* 33. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Air Cleopatra*

[play](#)

34. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Recitative Jonathan* 35. *Alexander Balus: Act III: Chorus Jonathan - Israelites*

Catherine Denley, mezzo-soprano (Alexander Balus) Michael George, bass (Ptolomee)
Charles Daniels, tenor (Jonathan) Lynne Dawson, soprano (Cleopatra) Claron McFadden,
soprano (Aspasia) Choir of New College Oxford Choir of The King's Consort The King's
Consort Robert King - director

Alexander Balus dates from 1747, by which time the threat from Bonnie Prince Charlie to the Hanoverian monarchy had been well and truly suppressed. It has only faint echoes of the anxious and defensive bellicosity that we find in Judas Maccabaeus, Joshua and especially The Occasional Oratorio. Mr impresario Handel and his librettist the Rev Morell were really back to business as usual following the jingoistic Occasional Oratorio, although it may be that they felt a commercial need to revert to greater militarism, and accordingly did so in Joshua, written just afterwards.

Morell's text is based on the First Book of Maccabees. It differs from most of the oratorios in keeping the chorus mainly to a role of setting the scene and summing up at the end of each act or scene, much as in Hercules. There is little overt drama or action until near the end of act II, but the golden flow of Handel's infinite musical inspiration keeps me mesmerised all the way. He displays a formidable box of instrumental tricks in Cleopatra's long aria 'Hark! Hark! He strikes the golden lyre', but this is only one in a glorious series of solos until a new note is introduced with the attempt by the Sycophant Courtier to sow discord, after which the general tone becomes not only more varied but more solemn. The chorus 'O calumny' that ends act II scene 1 is a very different proposition from the magnificent earlier choruses, and Jonathan's aria 'To God who made the radiant sun', and later Cleopatra's 'O take me from this hateful light' are among the most awesome that Handel or any man ever conceived.

The part of Balus is an alto part, sung here by Catherine Denley. She handles it very well indeed, but the really striking roles are those of the Israelite prince Jonathan and the Egyptian Ptolemy's daughter Cleopatra, superbly put across by Charles Daniels and Lynne Dawson. In fact all five principals are excellent, pure in tone and impeccable in intonation, and so are the three minor parts sung by members of the choir of the King's Consort. The choirs have boy trebles and altos, and their tone is strong, contributing due weight to Handel's choral writing, incomparably the greatest there can ever have been. The instrumentalists are eminent specialists performing to the peak of their talent, and the recorded sound, from 1997, is beyond criticism.

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As usual with Robert King's productions, he contributes his own admirable liner note, and both this and the libretto have translations into French and German. He does not actually tell us why the Israelite princes are invoking Mithra in the early stages of the work, but this theological aberration is explained and put right in the sublime aria for Jonathan that I mentioned above, in which Jehovah is restored to his rightful place.

We have the opportunity now to restore Handel to his rightful place also, and my bewilderment at how this supereminent musical creator ever sank below the horizon as he did is only matched by my relief at having lived through the age that is rectifying the matter. Before long my collection of his oratorios will be complete, and that is a project I would like to exhort as many as possible to join me in. There are 17 of them on my counting, which is the `best' I would not know how to assess, but if, say, 13 or 14 of them are equal first this would be one of the 13 or 14. --- DAVID BRYSON (Glossop Derbyshire England)

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