

Georg Handel-Water Music-Fireworks (Gardiner) [2001]



01. Water Music- Variant In F Major 02. Suite No. 1 In F Major- I Overture- Largo -- Allegro
03. Ii Adagio E Staccato 04. Iii Allegro 05. Iv Andante 06. Iii [without indication] (Da Capo) 07.
V Presto 08. Vi Air 09. Vii Minuet 10. Vii Bourree; Ix Hornpipe 11. X [without indication] 12.
Variant In F Major 13. Suite No. 3 In G Major- Xvi [without indication] 14. Xvii Rigaudon; Xviii
[without indication] 15. Xix Menuet; Xx [without indication] 16. Xxi; Xxii [without indication] 17.
Suite No.2 In D Major- Xi Allegro 18. Xii Alla Hornpipe 19. Xiii Minuet 20. Xiv Lentement 21.
Xv Bourree 22. Music For The Royal Fireworks- I Overture 23. Ii Bourree 24. Iii La Paix 25.
Iv La Rejouissance 26. V Menuets I & Ii English Baroque Soloists John Eliot Gardiner

These two orchestral works by Haendel are his two most popular, and most recorded, instrumental works. Water Music was composed for a celebration on the Thames in 1717. While the overall work is clearly 'outdoor' music (with a strong presence of lush string arrangements, horns and trumpets), one of its three suites (the G major suite) is closer to chamber music, with its cohort of flutes and recorders.

This is noble, regal music, composed for one purpose: celebration. It is permeated with positive energy; even the slow movements show this. Composed in three suites, Water Music was played originally by '50 instruments of all sorts' on a barge floating down the Thames. Gardiner's recording includes two F major variants, and changes the order of the three suites, but the notes give no explanations concerning this. This historically-inspired performance, on original instruments, gives the listener the feeling of authenticity - this is far from the lush, over-arranged romantic versions that have been recorded endlessly in recent decades. The magnificent textures heard in this recording give the music everything it deserves.

The Music for the Royal Fireworks was written in 1749 for the celebrations of the peace at Aix-la-Chapelle. Martial music, opening with a fanfare of horns and resounding timpani, this is

an anthem to the glory of the King. While the original performance featured a large orchestra, with no fewer than 24 oboes, 12 bassoons, and an overwhelming amount of percussion instruments, Gardiner chooses here to record it with a much smaller group, 'as might have played at Haendel's repeat performances in concert form.'

The result is delightful. As with *Water Music*, the texture of this recording allows the listener fully to appreciate the details of the orchestration and arrangement. In the martial sections, such as the Overture, the horns ring out clear and sharp. In the slower sections, such as the beautifully pastoral movement entitled *La Paix* (Peace), or the Menuets, the orchestra shows a great deal of subtlety and emotion.

Definitely one of the best recordings of these two works, Gardiner's performances are precise, just and perfectly balanced. He manages to combine both the regal and noble elements of these works with the playful spirit that lies behind much of Haendel's music. The scale of his ensemble is just right for each work - neither too imposing no too limited. The sound, as with other recordings in this series, is impeccable. --- Kirk McElhearn, musicweb-international.com

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