

## George F. Handel - Apollo e Dafne - Silete venti (2000)

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Silete Venti, HWV 242 1. *Symphonia: Silete veneti* 00:05:51 2. *Aria: Dulcis amor* 00:06:46  
3. *Accompagnato: O fortunata anima* 00:00:37 4. *Aria: Date certa* 00:09:13 5. *Alleluia*  
00:03:05 Apollo e Dafne, HWV 122 6. *Recitative: La terra e liberata!*  
(The earth is freed!) (Apollo) 00:00:46 7. *Aria: Pende il ben dell'universo* (The well - being of  
the universe) (Apollo) 00:03:48 8. *Recitative: Ch'il superbetto Amore* (Let proud little Cupid)  
(Apollo) 00:00:32 9. *Aria: Spezza l'arco e getta l'armi* (Break your bow and throw away your  
arrows) (Apollo) 00:02:52 10. *Aria: Felicissima quest'alma* (Most fortunate is this soul) (Dafne)  
00:06:31 11. *Recitative: Che voce! Che belta!* (What a voice! What a beauty!) (Apollo, Dafne)  
00:01:00 12. *Aria: Ardi, adori, e preghi in vano* (You desire, adore and beseech in vain)  
(Dafne) 00:03:27 13. *Recitative: Che crudel!* (How cruel!) (Apollo, Dafne) 00:00:14 14. *Duet:*  
*Una guerra ho dentro il seno* (A war rages in my breast) (Dafne, Apollo) 00:01:54 15.  
*Recitative: Placati al fin, o cara* (Calm yourself, O dear one) (Apollo) 00:00:21 16. *Aria: Come*  
*rosa in su la spina* (Like the rose on its stem) (Apollo) 00:03:21 17. *Recitative: Ah! ch'un Dio*  
*non dovrebbe* (Ah! A God should love nothing) (Dafne) 00:00:21 18. *Aria: Come in ciel*  
*benigna stella* (As Neptune's star in heaven) (Dafne) 00:03:46 19. *Recitative: Odi la mia*  
*ragion!* (Hear my reason!) (Apollo, Dafne) 00:00:24 20. *Duet: Deh! lascia addolcire quell'aspro*  
*rigor* (Pray! Soften your unbending severity) (Apollo, Dafne) 00:02:36 21. *Recitativo: Sempre*  
*t'adorero!* (I shall always adore you!) (Apollo, Dafne) 00:00:22 22. *Aria: Mie piante correte* (My  
feet run) (Apollo) 00:03:16 23. *Aria: Cara pianta, co'miei pianti* (Dearest laurel, with my tears)  
(Apollo) 00:06:49 Russell Braun  
(Baritone) Karina Gauvin (Soprano) Les Violons du Roy Bernard Labadie (Conductor)

Handel wrote his solo voice cantatas knowing that he had the most accomplished singers at his disposal, real virtuosos for whom no embellishment or high-speed flourish would be an obstacle. During his roughly four-year stay in Italy he wrote something like 100 cantatas and it was near the end of his sojourn that he began *Apollo e Dafne*--a work for soprano and baritone based on a theme from Greek mythology having to do with divine arrogance and unrequited love, desperate passion and the ultimate dominion of eternal purity. Handel was inspired to write his own eternal music for this story--music that he used and re-used in later works. No one could ever accuse Handel of not knowing a good tune (especially when he wrote it) nor of failing

to get the maximum mileage out of it. In what amounts to a mini-opera he effectively dramatizes the story and gives each singer music that is both dazzling and lyrical, and as melodically aristocratic and agreeable as any composer ever conceived.

Chances are excellent that Handel would have heartily approved of the singers on this disc--and would have killed for an orchestra as technically accomplished and musically and stylistically informed as Les Violons du Roy. As I've said before: before you talk about Tafelmusik, the English Concert, New London Consort, or Les Arts Florissants, you should get to know this Quebec-based ensemble, in most respects the equal or superior of any of the world's chamber orchestras. Conductor Bernard Labadie is among the few contemporary conductors worthy of attention for virtually anything he directs--no jet-setting, fly-by-night projects ever cross his schedule, and you can be sure that he never presides over a performance that's beneath a personal standard that gives preeminence to the dictates of the score, supported by the highest artistic principles. For this he chooses performers that most precisely suit the work at hand and coaxes performances that sound absolutely natural and unforced yet astonishingly accurate and eloquent. (His St. Matthew Passion last spring in Toronto with Les Violons ranks among the most sublime performances I've ever heard--of anything.)

Karina Gauvin is an outstanding singer whose voice possesses that desirable combination of easy listenability and an almost frightening agility that allows her to keep us enthralled while she tosses off amazing runs and gentle expressive passages with equal authority. Russell Braun makes a perfect partner, believable both in his opening bravado and his later resignation. There's some terrific music here, and all concerned make it memorable and eminently repeatable, from Gauvin's heartbreakingly tender first aria "Felicissima quest'alma" (Happy is this spirit), her character's sweet innocence depicted in Handel's scoring for flute and pizzicato strings, spiced with Sylvain Bergeron's theorbo accents, to Apollo and Dafne's spirited duet "Una guerra ho dentro il seno" (My heart is consumed with turmoil) and Apollo's final plaint for his beloved--one of Handel's most compelling, profoundly emotional settings. The sound couldn't be better. It comes from the orchestra and recording team's considerable experience with the near-perfect acoustics of the François-Bernier Concert Hall at Quebec's Le Domaine Forget. Whether your interest is Handel, Baroque music, vocal music, or just plain great music, don't miss this one. ---David Vernier, ClassicsToday.com, arkivmusic.com

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