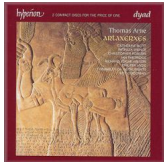


Thomas Arne – Artaxerxes (2009)

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Disc: 1 1. Artaxerxes: Overture: Poco piu che andante - Larghetto - Gavotta 2. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Recit: Still Silence Reigns Around (Mandane) 3. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Duettino: Fair Aurora, Pr'ythee Stay (Mandane, Arbaces) 4. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Recit: Alas, Thou Know'st That For My Love Of Thee (Arbaces) 5. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Air: Adieu, Thou Lovely Youth (Mandane) 6. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Recit: O Cruel Parting! (Mandane) 7. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Air: Amid A Thousand Racking Woes (Arbaces) 8. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Recit: Be Firm My Heart (Artabanes) 9. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Air: Behold, On Lethe's Dismal Strand (Artabanes) 10. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Recit: Stay, Artaxerxes, Stay (Semira) 11. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Air: Fair Semira, Lovely Maid (Artaxerxes) 12. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Recit: I Fear Some Dread Disaster (Semira) 13. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Air: When Real Joys We Miss (Rimenes) 14. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Recit: Ye Gods, Protectors Of The Persian Empire (Semira) 15. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Air: How Hard Is The Fate (Semira) 16. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Recit: Where Do I Fly? (Mandane) 17. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Air: Thy Father! Away, I Renounce The Soft Claim (Artabanes) 18. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Recit: Ye Cruel Gods, What Crime Have I Committed? (Arbaces) 19. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Air: Acquit Thee Of This Foul Offence (Semira) 20. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Recit: Appearance, I Must Own, Is Strong Against Me (Arbaces) 21. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Air: O Too Lovely, Too Unkind (Arbaces) 22. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Recit (Accomp): Dear And Beloved Shade Of My Dead Father (Mandane) 23. Artaxerxes: Act 1, Air: Fly, Soft Ideas, Fly (Mandane) 24. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Recit: Guards, Speed Ye To The Tower (Artaxerxes) 25. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Air: In Infancy, Our Hopes An Fears (Artaxerxes) 26. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Recit: So Far My Great Resolve Succeeds (Artabanes) 27. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Air: D disdainful You Fly Me (Arbaces) 28. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Recit: Why, My Dear Friend, So Pensive, So Inactive? (Rimenes) 29. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Air: To Sigh And Complain (Rimenes) 30. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Recit: How Many Links To Dire Misfortune's Chain! (Semira) 31. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Air: If O'er The Cruel Tyrant Love (Mandane) 32. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Recit: Which Fatal Evil Shall I First Oppose? (Semira) 33. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Air: If The River's Swelling Waves (Semira) Disc: 2 1. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Recit: Ye Solid Pillars Of The Persian Empire (Artaxerxes) 2. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Air: By That Belov'd Embrace (Arbaces) 3. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Recit: Ah Me! At Poor Arbaces Parting (Mandane) 4. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Air: Monster, Away! (Mandane) 5. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Recit: See, Lov'd Semira! (Artaxerxes) 6. Artaxerxes: Act 2, Air: Thou, Like The Glorious Sun (Artabanes) 7. Artaxerxes: Act 3, Arietta: Why Is Death For Ever Late (Arbaces) 8. Artaxerxes: Act 3, Recit: Arbaces! (Artaxerxes) 9. Artaxerxes: Act 3, Air: Water Parted From The Sea (Arbaces) 10. Artaxerxes: Act 3, Recit: That Front, Secure In Conscious Innocence (Artaxerxes) 11.

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Artaxerxes: Act 3, Air: Tho' Off A Cloud, With Envious Shade (Artaxerxes) 12. *Artaxerxes: Act 3, Recit: My Son, Arbaces - Where Art Thou Retir'd? (Artabanes)* 13. *Artaxerxes: Act 3, Air: O Let The Danger Of A Son (Rimenes)* 14. *Artaxerxes: Act 3, Recit (Accomp): Ye Adverse Gods! (Artabanes)* 15. *Artaxerxes: Act 3, Air: O, Much Lov'd Son, If Death (Artabanes)* 16. *Artaxerxes: Act 3, Recit: Perhaps The King Releas'd Arbaces (Mandane)* 17. *Artaxerxes: Act 3, Air: Let Not Rage Thy Bosom Firing (Mandane)* 18. *Artaxerxes: Act 3, Recit: What Have I Done! Alas, I Vainly Thought (Semira)* 19. *Artaxerxes: Act 3, Air: 'Tis Not True, That In Our Grief (Semira)* 20. *Artaxerxes: Act 3, Recit: Nor Here My Searching Eyes Can Find Mandane (Arbaces)* 21. *Artaxerxes: Act 3, Duetto: For Thee I Live, My Dearest (Arbaces, Mandane)* 22. *Artaxerxes: Act 3, Recit: To You, My People, Much Belov'd, I Offer (Artaxerxes)* 23. *Artaxerxes: Act 3, Air: The Soldier, Tir'd Of War's Alarms (Mandane)* 24. *Artaxerxes: Act 3, Recit: Behold My King, Arbaces At Thy Feet (Arbaces)* 25. *Artaxerxes: Act 3, Chorus: Live To Us, To Empire Live*

Christopher Robson

(Artaxerxes) Ian Partridge (Artabanes) Patricia Spence (Arbaces) Richard Edgar-Wilson (Rimenes) Catherine Bott (Mandane) Philippa Hyde (Semira) The Parley of Instruments Roy Goodman (conductor) Recording details: March 1995 The Warehouse, Waterloo, London, United Kingdom

Thomas Arne was one of the great survivors of eighteenth-century theatrical life: in his early twenties he put on an unauthorized production of *Acis and Galatea* that prodded Handel into taking English seriously as a language for theatrical works. It should therefore come as no surprise that in the three years from 1759 he has three smash hits of his own, each an original masterpiece that effectively created a new genre.

Artaxerxes, the second of these, was the first attempt to set a full-blown opera seria libretto in English.

The story of the rebellious captain of the guard's attempts to usurp the Persian throne in the fifth century BC had captured the attention of several composers, but Arne's opera particularly successful because it was an excellent vehicle for great singing. Mandane's spectacular aria 'The Soldier, tir'd of War's Alarms' remained a show-piece for sopranos through much of the nineteenth century and has never entirely dropped out of the repertory.

When Haydn saw *Artaxerxes* in 1791 he was delighted with it and reportedly said he 'had no idea we had such an opera in the English language'. --- hyperion-records.co.uk

Written in 1762, Arne's English opera seria enjoyed a success which endured till the score was lost in the fire which destroyed the Theatre Royal in 1808. In a first recording, Roy Goodman directed a performance based on an edition by Peter Holman and welcomed in Gramophone by Stanley Sadie. Now a second attempt has been made, by Ian Page, conductor of the Classical Opera Company, with scholar and Gramophone critic Duncan Druce co-opted to work on the finale. In this version the opera was revived in 2009 at Covent Garden and equipped for a new lease of life as the work of the leading English composer of the time writing at the height of his powers.

The new recording improves on Roy Goodman's fine original in several respects. The orchestral playing has rather more colour, especially in the prominent woodwind and brass sections; the dance melodies (the Overture's Gavotte, for instance) are more shapely and overall there is more sense of fun. In the leading role of Mandane, Goodman has the wonderful Catherine Bott, but the more brilliant tone of Elizabeth Watts combines with her more vivid treatment of words (try her first aria, "Fly, soft ideas") and the more forward recorded sound to make a stronger impression. Bott's more scrupulous articulation of triplets in the famous "The soldier tir'd of war's alarms" yields to Watts's triumphant upper notes, while the ruthless virtuosity of her "Monster away!" carries all before it. The other leading role sung by a woman is the hero, Arbaces, strongly cast in both recordings. Patricia Spence is warm and vibrant in the earlier version but I find the Australian Caitlin Hulcup still more attractive (and does anyone else, I wonder, hear something in her tone reminiscent of Marian Anderson?). No bass in the opera, incidentally, but admirable work by all the other voices.

Of the alternative finales the new one is the more interesting piece of music, though Peter Holman's solution of a chorus borrowed from Arne's *Comus* works perfectly well. It is not textual differences and difficulties of this kind that the listener is likely to find troublesome, however, but rather the more elementary problem of ascertaining one's whereabouts in the story. Not that this is a particularly complicated plot compared with most in Handel. But I seemed to spend a disproportionate amount of time and energy discovering which "A" is which (in a cast of six, there are three of them – Artaxerxes, Arbaces and Artabanes) and what exactly each of them is up to. --- John Steane, gramophone.co.uk

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