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Les perles

## Le Tamerlano qu'il vous faut

118 vues ★★★★★

Une nouvelle version du *Tamerlano* de [Georg Friedrich Haendel](#) vient de sortir chez [Naïve](#). C'est une fois de plus une initiative du contre-ténor [Max-Emanuel Cencic](#) et de Parnassus Arts Productions à qui nous devons notamment la re-crédation du magnifique [Artaserse](#) de [Leonardo Vinci](#) (maintenant [disponible aussi en DVD](#)) et d'un [Alessandro](#) de Haendel multi récompensé.

Pourquoi une nouvelle version de *Tamerlano* dont il existe déjà plusieurs enregistrements, alors que d'autres opéras baroques sont encore inédits ? Quand on y regarde bien, peu de versions se rapprochent de la distribution vocale choisie par Haendel. Les versions de [Malgoire en 1984](#) et de Gardiner en 1991 sont les seules dans lesquelles les deux rôles de Bajazet et d'Andronico soient tenus par des contre-ténors (des castrats à l'origine). Par ailleurs, Max-Emanuel Cencic, qui a chanté sur scène *Tamerlano* et *Andronico* en compagnie de certains des chanteurs choisis ici, souhaitait concrétiser ce travail scénique par un enregistrement. Les chanteurs sont accompagnés par l'ensemble [Il Pomo d'Oro](#) dirigé par [Riccardo Minasi](#), partenaires de Cencic dans le récital [Venezia](#).

*Tamerlano* est un drame lyrique créé en le 31 octobre 1724 au King's Theater de Londres, la même année que le célèbre [Giulio Cesare in Egitto](#), donné quelques mois plus tôt dans le même lieu. L'opéra reprend un thème assez utilisé à une époque où les turqueries étaient en vogue, la mort tragique du sultan turc Bajazet, vaincu par le souverain mongol Tamerlano. Vient s'y greffer une intrigue amoureuse : Tamerlano, fiancé à Irène est épris d'Asteria fille de Bajazet qui aime et est aimée d'Andronico. Des ruses de Tamerlano, des quiproquos, des suspicions de trahison, des jalousies, comme souvent l'intrigue est assez compliquée même si l'issue finale est connue : le suicide de Bajazet.

L'originalité de l'opéra réside dans le choix de tessiture de Bajazet, le rôle principal (et non Tamerlano comme le titre le laisserait penser, nuance assez courante à l'époque). **Bajazet est un ténor et non un castrat, ce qui est plutôt rare dans l'opéra baroque en général et chez Haendel en particulier, qui réservait plutôt cette voix aux oratorios.** Le rôle fut écrit pour Francesco Borosini, célèbre ténor italien qui avait déjà fait fureur en interprétant ce personnage dans le *Bajazet* de [Francesco Gasparini](#) dont Haendel s'est inspiré. Il est ici incarné par [John Mark Ainsley](#), ténor baroque et mozartien notamment, qui sait allier la souplesse vocale, la diction impeccable, à l'intensité dramatique voulues par le rôle. Il est à la fois noble et très émouvant.

Le rôle de Tamerlano était écrit pour le castrat Senesino, créateur de *Giulio Cesare*. C'est ici [Xavier Sabata](#), qui a su donner de l'épaisseur à ce personnage indécis et futile, violent et cruel, superbe vocalement bien sûr. Haendel avait choisi la soprano Francesca Cuzzoni, créatrice de Cleopatra pour Asteria, fille de Bajazet, ici interprétée par [Karina Gauvin](#), qui a d'ailleurs elle aussi chanté Cleopatra. La soprano canadienne dit y retrouver certaines caractéristiques de Cleopatra qui correspondent à la voix de la Cuzzoni. Un rôle dramatique mais qui demande aussi beaucoup d'agilité vocale et nécessite une voix à la fois légère et sombre, tout à fait Karina Gauvin. Max-Emanuel Cencic est Andronico, autre rôle clé de l'intrigue, et la mezzo-soprano roumaine [Ruxandra Donose](#) prête sa voix sombre et chaude au personnage d'Irène qui parviendra à reconquérir le cœur de Tamerlano. Seule légère faiblesse à la distribution : le baryton russe Pavel Kudinov (Leone, ami d'Andronico), dont la voix au timbre certes magnifique manque parfois de légèreté dans les vocalises, mais c'est du détail.

**Que dire sinon qu'excepté cette infime réserve le choix des voix est impeccable, chacun donnant à son rôle la couleur et l'émotion qui convient, en harmonie avec les autres protagonistes.** Ricardo Minasi et Il Pomo d'Oro savent se mettre en avant ou se faire plus discrets selon les besoins, dynamiser les airs ou devenir aériens. Les trois parties orchestrales d'introduction sont un petit délice.

**Même si vous avez déjà une version du *Tamerlano*, précipitez-vous sur ce dernier enregistrement ! Je suis sûre que vous ne regretterez pas car c'est LA Version !**

[Tamerlano de Haendel chez Naïve.](#)

[L'opéra sera donné en version de concert à l'Opéra Royal de Versailles le samedi 5 avril. réservez ici !](#)

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Votre note : ★★★★★

06 April 2014

CD REVIEW: Georg Friedrich Händel – TAMERLANO (X. Sabata, M.E. Cenčić, J.M. Ainsley, K. Gauvin, R. Donose, P. Kudinov; Naïve V 5373)



GEORG FRIEDRICH HÄNDEL (1685 – 1759): *Tamerlano*, HWV 18 (1731 version)—[Xavier Sabata](#) (Tamerlano), [Max Emanuel Cenčić](#) (Andronico), [John Mark Ainsley](#) (Bajazet), [Karina Gauvin](#) (Asteria), [Ruxandra Donose](#) (Irene), [Pavel Kudinov](#) (Leone); [Il pomo d'oro](#); [Riccardo Minasi](#), conductor [Recorded at the Villa San Fermo, Convento dei Pavoniani, Lonigo, Vicenza, Italy, in April 2013; Naïve V 5373; 3CD, 193:18; Available from [Amazon](#), [fnac](#), [Presto Classical](#), and major music retailers]

The musical genius and theatrical savvy of Georg Friedrich Händel were never on more eloquent form than in 1724, when the finest of his talents were engaged by the composition of three of his most memorable scores for the London stage: *Giulio Cesare*, *Rodelinda*, and *Tamerlano*. A setting of a libretto by Nicola Francesco Haym that explores a theme familiar to 18th-Century Britons via plays by Christopher Marlowe and Nicholas Rowe, the last of these was premiered by one of the finest casts assembled for the first nights of any of Händel's operas: the alto castrati Andrea Pacini and Senesino as Tamerlano and Andronico, soprano Francesca Cuzzoni as Asteria, tenor Francesco Borosini as Bajazet, contralto Anna Vincenza Dotti as Irene, and bass Giuseppe Maria Boschi as Leone. The complex, oft-distorted history of the Tartar Emir Timur fascinated artists both in Händel's time and beyond, the character having been depicted on the operatic stage in Vivaldi's pasticcio *Bajazet*, Mysliveček's *Il gran Tamerlano*, and, via Carlo Gozzi's 1762 play, Puccini's *Turandot* [in which the kindly old man whose grief for Liù proves so critical to the opera's resolution is largely a product of Puccini's imagination], but Händel's portrait of the petulant, power-mongering conqueror is surely the most vivid that 21st-Century observers are likely to encounter. Only a misguided historian would go to the opera in search of factual verisimilitude, but the listener with an open heart who spends an evening with *Tamerlano* will encounter reservoirs of sentiment rare for music of the 18th Century. Händel's Tamerlano is hardly the bold warrior and political fox of history, but he is a fascinating creature whom an alert singer can endow with charisma and magnetism. It is the trio of the suffering Asteria, her noble but flawed father Bajazet, and her ardent lover Andronico who emerge from Händel's score as people of genuine passions, however. They are pawns in Tamerlano's games, and they know it, but they play their parts with unwavering integrity. A modern criticism of Händel's operas is that their characters do not 'live' as those in the scores of Verdi and Puccini do, that Cleopatra and Cesare do not make love in tones as obviously sensual to 21st-Century ears as those of Gilda and the Duca di Mantova and that Bertarido does not lament the inconstancy of conjugal devotion and fidelity with the fervor of Filippo II. This is to misunderstand the special qualities of Händel's music, however. This recording of *Tamerlano*, spearheaded by [Parnassus Arts Productions](#) and benefiting from the affectionate scholarship of [Giovanni Andrea Sechi](#), puts the perfervid emotions of the opera's sextet of characters into an appropriately stylish context, but this is not a performance in which singers impersonally pursue historically-informed perfection. They are people reacting to one another, defying danger, daring to love and to hope to be loved. They are master musicians, but ultimately it is not technical skill that lingers in the memory: it is the mercurial splendor of Händel's score; or, more hauntingly, the splendor with which it is sung.

Under the direction of [Riccardo Minasi](#), the twenty-one instrumentalists of *Il pomo d'oro* deliver a performance that reverberates with energy, excitement, and feeling. The playing of [Maxim Emelyanychev](#) at the harpsichord and [Simone Vallorotonda](#) on theorbo, archlute, and Baroque guitar shapes a continuo remarkable for its responsiveness to the dramatic heartbeats of Händel's music. Vitality and momentum are maintained in *secco* recitatives, but Maestro Minasi and the players do not hesitate to linger over moments of greatest lyricism. The virtuosity of *Il pomo d'oro*'s playing is complemented by an inspiring sense of involvement in the performance. The intimacy of the recorded sound contributes to the consciousness of a collaborative artistic experience rather than a conventional performance in which singers, orchestra, and conductor are separate entities. There is an inviolable unity of purpose that permeates every moment of this performance, and the eloquence of Maestro Minasi's conducting and *Il pomo d'oro*'s playing, which want for nothing in period-appropriate stylishness but transcend inelastic adherence to dry academic concepts, fosters an environment in which Händel's exacting vocal lines seem the only natural means of communicating. Employing a recreation of the edition of the score that Händel created for the revival of the opera in London in 1731, when Senesino reprised his portrayal of Andronico and was joined by Campioli in the title rôle, the celebrated Anna Maria Strada del Pò as Asteria, Giovanni Battista Pinacci as Bajazet, Francesca Bertolli as Irene, and Antonio Montagnana as Leone, this recording exudes a continuity lacking in many performances of Händel's operas. Every delicacy of *Tamerlano* is embraced by Maestro Minasi, and the nuances of his approach are brought to life with sensitivity and tenderness by *Il pomo d'oro*.

If contemporary accounts of Boschi and Montagnana are credible, few basses in recent years have combined bravura technique and dramatic presence with the histrionic power of their 18th-Century forebears. Russian bass [Pavel Kudinov](#), who in 2010 sang Escamillo in Bizet's *Carmen* and Sarastro in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* at the Bolshoi, proves in his performance of Leone's music a worthy heir to the mantle of Boschi and Montagnana. A lively presence in recitatives, Mr. Kudinov gives robust accounts of Leone's arias. 'Amor dà guerra e pace' in Act Two is sung with wit and wonderfully burly tone. Borrowed from Händel's 1727 *Riccardo primo* and inserted into Act Three of the 1731 revival for Montagnana's benefit [ironically, the aria was originally composed for Boschi, who created the rôle of Isacio in *Riccardo primo*], 'Nel mondo e nell'abisso' tests Mr. Kudinov's coloratura prowess, and he displays admirable flexibility across the full range of the music. Rarely, Mr. Kudinov possesses both the requisite strength for Leone's musical character and an attractive voice. A

friend of emperors and princes, this Leone is a suitably noble gentleman, and the Irene of mezzo-soprano [Ruxandra Donose](#) is a seemly addition to his society. Like Mr. Kudinov, Ms. Donose has experience in a wide array of operatic rôles, and her mastery of *bel canto* facilitates an intuitive focus on placement of tone across the span of Irene's music. In Act One, Irene's aria 'Dal crudel che m'ha tradita' is bitingly sung by Ms. Donose, and throughout the performance she elegantly expounds the legitimacy of Irene's cause. Having been betrothed to Tamerlano, she has been set aside in favor of Asteria, and the initial failure of her pleas for preservation of her honor—delivered in disguise—inspires her to principled sparring on her own behalf. Both her aria 'Par che mi nasca in seno' and arietta 'No, che sei tanto costante' in Act Two are sung with firm, burnished tone, the righteousness of her quest for justice conveyed by the unwavering versatility of her singing. In Act Three, when Irene's crisis reaches its climax, Ms. Donose's singing of 'Crudel più non son io' rings with conviction and cunning. The walnut colorations of Ms. Donose's timbre are inherently regal, and Irene's music is an ideal fit for both the proportions of the voice and the best qualities of her technique, with only a handful of notes at the top of her range lacking authority.

Bajazet is one of the most captivating characters in Baroque opera. Stern, unyielding, proud to a fault, and even wrong-headed, his actions are justified to an extent by his royal pedigree and love for his daughter. He spits violence and vengeance for virtually the entire duration of his part, but an intelligent singer can instill the sensibilities of a broken man into his performance of the rôle. In this recording, tenor [John Mark Ainsley](#) is an uncommonly direct, emotionally candid Bajazet whose calm, unfeigned depiction of the character's paternal affection softens the cruelty of the part. This discernment is for naught if the music is not capably sung, and in this regard, too, Mr. Ainsley's performance is exceptionally effective. In Act One, his singing of 'Forte e lieto' and 'Ciel e terra armi di sdegno' boils with rage and indignation. The irony and subtle reflections that Mr. Ainsley communicates in 'A' suoi piedi' in Act Two are prickly but stirring, and the joy of a father reunited in spirit with his daughter floods his singing of the arietta 'No, no, il tuo sdegno.' His lines in the terzetto 'Voglio strage'—the sole holdover from the 1724 version of the score—are bold and defiant, matching the attitudes of Asteria and Tamerlano. The agony of the accompagnato 'E il soffrire, d'onestade, o Numi' gives way to a tremendous paroxysm of determination in 'Empio, per fatti guerra,' which Mr. Ainsley sings with tempestuous spirit and invulnerable virtuosity, his intonation remaining admirably fleet at top speed. The restraint with which Mr. Ainsley shapes his performance of Bajazet's suicide scene, one of the most original innovations of Händel's score, gives the character's death the aura of genuine tragedy. The poise of his delivery of the accompagnato 'Fremi, minaccia; mi rido,' the grandiose 'Oh sempre avversari Dei' the touching arioso 'Figlia mia, pianger, no' and 'Tu, spietato, il vedrai' sets his performance apart from every other Bajazet on records, and his portrayal of the complicated, confounding man is ultimately magisterial and moving. As dramatic artistry, Mr. Ainsley's Bajazet is the work of a great actor. Musically, his compact timbre has never sounded lovelier, and his vocalism is the work of a great singer.

Countertenor [Xavier Sabata](#) offers a more pragmatic Tamerlano than many performances enjoy. The puerile hotheadedness of the man is conveyed with rollicking assertiveness, but there is an alluring reactivity in Mr. Sabata's performance. Tamerlano is the sort of part that is perfect for his dynamic singing, and he makes splendid impressions in every line of his rôle. The arias 'Vuò dar pace' and 'Dammi pace' in Act One are sung colorfully (and it is interesting to note that such a bellicose man sings so frequently of peace), and Mr. Sabata's performance of 'Bella gara che faranno' in Act Two is richly suggestive. Vocally, Mr. Sabata does his most impressive singing in the aria that demands nothing less, the barnstorming 'A dispetto d'un volto ingrato' in Act Three. The insurmountable virtuosity with which he negotiates his music's divisions, both in 'A dispetto d'un volto ingrato' and throughout the opera is phenomenal, and he manages to sound self-congratulatory, dangerous, and strangely sexy without forcing or distorting his wonderful voice. There are a few instances of 'hootiness,' particularly in the vicinity of register breaks, but he cleverly uses these to his advantage, casting the cloak of villainy over occasional unlovely sounds. He seems to be having a truly rip-roaring time, and he creates a Tamerlano who sounds as though he might cut his rival's throat on a whim but would show him a grand time before wielding the blade.

For the past decade, Canadian soprano [Karina Gauvin](#) has been one of the reigning divas of Baroque repertoire, but none of her recordings more completely exhibits the expanse of her gifts than this performance of Asteria. From her first utterance, she projects the girl's shattered innocence, and the moxie with which she adapts her vocalism to the shifting fortunes of her character is outstanding. Her singing of Asteria's first aria, 'S'ei non mi vuol amar,' crackles with indignation, and the suppressed heartbreak in her performance of 'Deh, lasciatemi il nemico' leaps from the radiant sound of her voice in coloratura passages. The piquancy of Ms. Gauvin's singing of 'Non è più tempo no' never fully disguises Asteria's overwhelming love for Andronico, and the coruscating but never disfiguring sadness that emits from her singing of 'Se potessi un di placere' at the end of Act Two shimmers in her assured, gorgeous vocalism. The great aria 'Cor di padre' is sung by Ms. Gauvin with incomparable beauty of tone and depth of feeling that stops time. No less unanswerable is the passion that courses through her singing of the arioso 'Folle sei, se lo consenti.' Musically and dramatically, the zenith of Ms. Gauvin's performance is the duet with Andronico, 'Vivo in te,' in which her voice intertwines with that of her Andronico with unmistakable sensuality. It is perhaps the greatest affirmation of unalterable love in any of Händel's operas, and Ms. Gauvin ascends to an apogee of expression that transcends the accurate singing of notes: were it possible to distill the whole essence of love into sound, it could be not be more potent than in Ms. Gauvin's singing in 'Vivo in te.' In every phrase that she sings in this performance, her voice remains rounded and arrestingly beautiful, and her ornamentation is both restrained and refined.

In 'Vivo in te,' the singing of countertenor [Max Emanuel Cenčić](#) soars into the heavens in tandem with that of Ms. Gauvin, and he inhabits this exalted plane of articulation throughout the performance. Atypically for a rôle composed for Senesino, whose grasp of Händel's most challenging bravura music was acknowledged by even the most critical of his contemporaries, the nucleus of Andronico's music is comprised of concentrated outpourings of profound emotion. Mr. Cenčić's singing of 'Bella Asteria' glows with adoration, and the conflicting heartbreak and yearning in 'Benché mi sprezz' course through his pained but composed performance. The certitude of his account of 'Cercò invano di placere' awakens untold streams of endearment, and the sheer electricity of his delivery of the daunting 'Piu d'una tigre altero' is startling. Even here, Mr. Cenčić's technique is untroubled by the most exorbitant of Händel's demands, and he is more careful here than in almost any of his previous recordings to ally his ornaments to the scope of the text. The intensity of his singing of the arietta 'No, che del tuo gran cor' depicts the sincerity of his connection with Andronico's plight, and the quiet disenchantment that glistens beneath the surface of his performance of 'Se non mi rendi il mio tesoro' engages sympathy for his character's unrelenting anguish in a way that alters perceptions of the opera as a whole. It is likely that Senesino achieved this, but his voice cannot have given greater pleasure than Mr. Cenčić's. The latter's voice is a wonder of nature and careful training, as Senesino's surely was, and Mr. Cenčić is an artist who is never content to accept conventions unquestioningly. In truth, it is the extraordinary beauty of his voice that becomes conventional in this performance of *Tamerlano*, and he finds in Andronico a rôle that calls upon the best of his artistry and receives it.

There are in the long history of recording opera so few instances of performances undertaken solely for studio microphones stripping away artifice, disinterest, and coldness and getting at the hearts of composers' scores. This recording of *Tamerlano* was bolstered by preparations for a production that will be heard in several cities, but it was what might be termed a musical preemptive strike. The most troublesome aspect of many studio recordings is the antiseptic pseudo-perfection: the singers simply seem to not be listening to each other. This *Tamerlano* is the rare recording that plays out as a genuine performance of an opera rather than a concert presentation of arias. It is very much a team effort, but the accomplishment that makes this recording special not just as a performance of Händel's *Tamerlano* but as a milestone in recorded opera is that Karina Gauvin and Max Emanuel Cenčić embody an Asteria and Andronico whose tribulations are as ravishing and redeeming as Aida's and Radamès's, Brünnhilde's and Siegfried's, or the Marschallin's and Octavian's. It is a performance of an opera composed 290 years ago that sounds bewilderingly new.

Posted by [Joseph Newsome](#) at [02:45](#)  
<http://www.voix-des-arts.com/2014/04/cd-review-georg-friedrich-handel.html>

## Pas besoin de remaniement par Christophe Schuwey



Plutôt rare jusque-là, *Tamerlano* avait été propulsé sous le feu des projecteurs en 2008 : Placido Domingo prenait le pari d'y chanter Bajazet, et avait conquis un public qui ne s'attendait pas à le trouver aussi convaincant dans le répertoire baroque. Peu repris depuis lors par les grandes maisons d'opéra, ce chef-d'œuvre de Händel retrouve le chemin du public grâce à une nouvelle intégrale au casting flamboyant, et doublée d'une tournée qui passera notamment par Versailles, Cologne et Hambourg. Pareille entreprise rend l'auditeur exigeant : le résultat est-il à la hauteur des moyens mis en œuvre ?

Le premier coup de baguette de **Riccardo Minasi** chasse d'emblée bien des doutes : il y a un véritable drame qui se noue, et ce, dès l'ouverture. Soignant la ligne tout en gardant l'effet percutant des accords, le chef épouse avec un véritable brio la rhétorique haendelienne. Chaque intervention d'un instrument, chaque phrase musicale sont autant de prises de parole dans l'immense et grandiose dialogue que constitue cette partition. L'orchestre Il Pomo d'oro sait en un clin d'œil se faire interlocuteur puis commentateur, et circule entre ces rôles avec une précision qui révèle les reliefs d'une musique nécessitant une attention soutenue. Ajoutons à cela une maîtrise parfaite des enchaînements entre les récitatifs et les airs, et l'on obtient la recette d'une action qui ne s'essouffle jamais.

Pareil écrivain ne peut que servir les chanteurs, qui se mettent chacun pleinement au service de cet opéra, tant par le chant en lui-même, que dans la caractérisation de leur personnage. Honneur aux princesses : on aimerait pouvoir entendre au disque **Ruxandra Donose** dans d'autres grands rôles haendeliens ; en attendant, la chaleur de la voix, la richesse de l'instrument charme, émeut, et particulièrement dans « Par che mi nasca in seno » - peut-être qu'un peu plus de fragilité, parfois, ajouterait une dimension supplémentaire à l'interprétation. **Karina Gauvin**, familière des intégrales Haendel, sait être aussi resplendissante qu'élégiaque. Assoiffée de dire, elle est confondante de maîtrise dans chacun de ses airs, et construit d'immenses crescendos émotionnels, comme dans son « Deh lasciatemi ». Les quelques duretés occasionnelles n'en sont pas : il ne s'agit que de théâtre.

**Pavel Kudinov** sert Leone avec un instrument splendide, et l'on ne peut que goûter cette voix riche et autoritaire, mais on aurait pu souhaiter un peu plus de subtilité çà et là. Sans surprise, c'est un pur bonheur que de découvrir **John Mark Ainsley** interpréter Bajazet. Outre l'élégance et l'intelligence dont il est coutumier, il paraît ici particulièrement inspiré : sa palette expressive le mène à varier l'intention même des *da capo* et à nous les faire vivre comme la suite de l'air, plutôt que comme une reprise. Les vocalises, quant à elles, semblent toutes porteuses de sens, sans jamais qu'elles ne sacrifient à la beauté. Enfin, son suicide est un kaléidoscope hallucinatoire d'intentions et de couleurs. Une seule réserve : le roi semble fragile, et paraît s'abandonner à la mort dès le début de l'opéra – est-ce vraiment là le comportement d'un Bajazet ? Question de point de vue, et de goût...

Enfin, deux magnifiques contreténors brillent au firmament de cet enregistrement. **Max Emanuel Cenčić**, d'abord, qui outre sa compréhension profonde de la partition, possède ces inflexions inimitables. Mêlées à un instrument toujours aussi beau et équilibré, elles composent un personnage unique et emmène l'auditeur au cœur même de l'émotion. **Xavier Sabata**, ensuite, que l'on attendait évidemment dans le rôle de Tamerlano après l'aperçu proposé dans son récital *Bad guys*, et qui ne déçoit pas. On ne présente plus les qualités de sa voix, on remarquera en revanche qu'il traverse avec une délicieuse aisance le dangereux « A dispotto d'un volto ingrato ». De tous les personnages, c'est en outre celui qui se permet le plus d'effets théâtraux : les dents se serrent de colère, Tamerlano fulmine, pour notre plus grand plaisir.

Bien que le champ discographique soit moins concurrentiel que pour d'autres opéras de Haendel, il s'agit là sans conteste d'un *Tamerlano* de référence, profond, équilibré et enlevé. Souhaitons seulement que ce bel enregistrement soit une invitation pour d'autres chefs à aborder ce chef-d'œuvre : il y a beaucoup, encore, à en dire.

Georg Friederich HAENDEL

### Tamerlano

Dramma per musica en trois actes  
Livret de Niccolò Francesco Haym d'après  
Agostino Piovene  
Créé à Londres (King's theater), 31 octobre 1724.



**Tamerlano**  
Xavier Sabata  
**Andronico**  
Max Emanuel Cenčić  
**Bajazet**  
John Mark Ainsley  
**Asteria**  
Karina Gauvin  
**Irene**  
Ruxandra Donose  
**Leone**  
Pavel Kudinov

Il Pomo d'oro  
**Direction musicale**  
Riccardo Minasi

Enregistré en avril 2013 à la Villa San Fermo,  
Couvent de Pavoniani, Lonigo (Vicenza, Italie).

3 CD Naïve V 5373 – 3h13



## Andronico n'est pas une couille molle

par Bernard Schreuders

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Après l'orgie vocale du frivole *Alessandro*, Max Emanuel Cencic et sa société de production Parnassus Arts ont opéré un virage à 180 degrés en jetant leur dévolu sur *Tamerlano*, le plus sombre et le plus dense des opéras de Haendel. Son climat oppressant, sa relative austérité expliquent sans doute pourquoi il le cède en popularité à *Rinaldo* ou à *Giulio Cesare*, ouvrages qu'il égale pourtant, quand il ne les dépasse pas, du moins sur le plan théâtral. De fait, rien ne semble arrêter le compositeur dans sa quête de vérité dramatique. Non seulement, il prend de nombreuses libertés avec les codes de l'*opera seria*, mais il va jusqu'à sacrifier sa propre musique si elle s'avère préjudiciable à l'action. Le 5 avril dernier, toutefois, ce sont les aléas du concert qui auront privé le public de l'Opéra de Versailles d'un air d'*Asteria* et d'une scène de Leone, sacrifiés pour rattraper le retard provoqué par le malaise d'un spectateur que les pompiers ont dû évacuer.

Alors que d'ordinaire sopranos et contraltos se partagent les premiers rôles, Haendel destine Bajazet, la figure centrale de *Tamerlano*, à un ténor (Borosini), une voix infiniment moins prisée à l'époque. Il n'hésite pas non plus à remettre en cause tant la primauté que la structure canonique de l'*aria da capo*, parfois livré sans reprise ou dépourvu de contraste, la section B prolongeant la section A, et s'en émancipe en particulier dans la très shakespearienne agonie de Bajazet où un habile mélange de récitatifs secs, de récitatifs accompagnés et de brèves arias épouse au plus près l'extrême versatilité des états d'âme du sultan. Afin de

## George Frideric HAENDEL

### Tamerlano

Dramma per musica en trois actes, livret de Niccolò Francesco Haym d'après Agostino Piovene  
Créé au King's Theater, Haymarket, Londres, le 31 octobre 1724



Max Emanuel Cencic © Laidig

### Tamerlano

Xavier Sabata

### Bajazet

John Mark Ainsley

### Andronico

Max Emanuel Cencic

### Asteria

Sophie Karthäuser

### Irene

Ruxandra Donose

### Leone

Pavel Kudinov

Il Pomo d'Oro

### Direction musicale

Maxim Emelyanychev

Opéra de Versailles, samedi 5 avril 2014, 19h30

Versailles

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# Compte rendu, opéra. Versailles. Opéra Royal, le 5 avril 2014. Haendel : Tamerlano. Max-Emanuel Cencic. Il Pomo d'Oro



Après avoir subjugué le public de l'Opéra Royal mi-mars avec une reprise de la production phare de l'année 2012 de l'Opéra National de Lorraine, Artaserse, le contre ténor **Max-Emanuel Cencic** est revenu ce soir au Château pour la première de sa toute nouvelle production avec Parnassus ARTS Production (disque à venir) : **Tamerlano de Haendel**.

## Tamerlano de rêve

Disons le tout de suite, même si le temps lui donnera plus de rondeur et de fluidité, la distribution réunie pour le CD et ici, sa version concert, est tout simplement superlative.

La soirée a toutefois débuté par coup de théâtre qui aurait pu troubler musiciens et chanteurs si ces derniers n'avaient su réagir avec un grand professionnalisme, afin d'offrir au public une soirée inoubliable. Un spectateur victime d'un malaise a nécessité une interruption du concert, alors qu'il venait tout juste de commencer et l'intervention réactive et efficace des pompiers du Domaine, dont il faut saluer la présence active et le travail tout au long de l'année sur le site.

Donné pour la première à Londres au King's Theatre, le 31 octobre 1724, Tamerlano repose sur une histoire, qui se situe à une période plus récente, que les sujets antiques plus classiques dans le répertoire de cette époque. Le livret de Niccolò Francesco Haym s'inspire de celui qu'Agostino Piovene avait écrit en 1711 pour Gasperini. Livret qui trouve sa source dans une tragédie française que l'on doit à un auteur aujourd'hui totalement oublié et qui tenta de copier Racine, Jacques Pradon. L'action est resserrée autour de six personnages aux caractères profondément marqués. La véritable tragédie ici est portée non par Tamerlano, un ancien berger devenu un perfide et amer guerrier mais par le personnage de Bajazet, prisonnier du premier et dont la mort est le moment phare de l'opéra.

La fille du roi prisonnier, Asteria est amoureuse d'Andronico. Mais Tamerlano a jeté son dévolu sur la jeune fille, tandis que son amant, dans un premier temps accepte de devenir l'allié de ce nouveau roi lorsque celui-ci lui propose le trône de Byzance, se voyant au passage attribué la main d'Irène, jusqu'alors promise à Tamerlano.

Ce qui marque dans cet opéra de Haendel, et ce malgré la beauté des airs, c'est le sens dramatique déployé par le Caro Sassone. C'est une véritable perle noire, qu'il nous offre où les récitatifs accompagnés se multiplient pour mieux poser un sentiment étrange de profond désespoir, jusqu'au suicide de Bajazet. Et si le lieto fine intervient, il n'en souligne que plus fortement l'irréversible fatalité ou l'incroyable légèreté du destin.

C'est en version concert que Tamerlano nous a été donnée ce soir. Réunissant autour de lui, la distribution la plus idoine qui soit, Max-Emanuel Cencic, réussit une fois de plus à nous convaincre du premier de ses talents, et il en a beaucoup d'autres, celui d'un porteur de projets souvent inédits ou renouvelants notre regard sur les œuvres proposés et réunissant autour de lui un casting de rêve.

C'est au ténor anglais John Mark Ainsley que revient le rôle redoutable et le plus difficile écrit pour un ténor par Haendel de Bajazet. D'une grande justesse dramatique, la beauté de son timbre qui nous rappelle qu'il fût un magnifique Orfeo, donne au suicide de Bajazet tout le pathétique souhaité. Le dernier souffle du Roi est un murmure bouleversant.

Dans le rôle-titre du tyran, Tamerlano, Xavier Sabata traduit à merveille toute l'ambiguïté du rôle. Son timbre acidulé, son phrasé vif et clair, fait ressortir la palette de l'équivoque avec brio : mélange de perversité, de cynisme, dominateur et séducteur.

Dans le rôle d'Andronico, Max-Emanuel Cencic se montre d'une délicatesse et d'un charme incomparable. Dès son premier lamento, accompagné par un violoncelle virtuose, il nous fait ressentir, par la beauté de son timbre, ses graves au velours soyeux, les tourments d'un personnage qui n'ose aimer au grand jour et qui se laisse un temps fasciner par un tyran qui lui offre des rêves de gloire. Les vocalises, la technique ici prennent âme, celle d'un personnage dévoré par une sensibilité à fleur de peau.

La superbe basse russe Pavel Kudinov ferme ce quatuor masculin avec une fermeté, une assurance scénique et vocale, qui offre à Leone, rôle secondaire, une présence incontestable.

Le duo féminin est un duo harmonieux. Sophie Karthäuser donne à Asteria tout son héroïsme, qui cache ses failles par une fière constance. Vaillante dans les airs virtuoses, elle se montre touchante dans « Cor di padre ». Tandis que Ruxandra Donose est une Irène fascinante et déterminée, au timbre rond et chaud d'une grande beauté. La direction dansante, bondissante et enthousiaste d'un jeune chef russe que l'on découvre à cette occasion, Maxim Emelyanychev, galvanise l'ensemble italien Il Pomo d'Oro. Une bien belle soirée, magnifiquement servie par des interprètes sachant s'investir de tout leur cœur.

Versailles. Opéra Royal, le 5 avril 2014. George Frideric Haendel(1685 – 1759) : Tamerlano, opéra en trois actes sur un livret de Niccolò Francesco Haym d'après Agostino Piovene. Tamerlano, Xavier Sabata ; Androcino, Max-Emanuel Cencic ; Bajazet, John Mark Ainsley ; Asteria, Sophie Karthäuser ; Irène, Ruxandra Donose. Leone, Pavel Kudinov. Il Pomo D'Oro, Maxim Emelyanychev, direction.

Posté le **07.04.2014** par [Monique Parmentier](#)

Mot clés: [Haendel](#), [Max Emanuel Cencic](#), [Tamerlano](#).

## Handel's *Tamerlano* dazzles Versailles

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Par [Vesna Gerintes](#), 10 avril 2014

Handel wrote *Tamerlano* in 1724 while in London, completing it in a 20 day dash between composing *Giulio Cesare* and *Rodelinda*, two operas for which he is far better known. And though the libretto follows a standard Baroque opera pattern, with the inevitable sexual-political intrigues, ambiguity and attendant consequences at play in the private lives of famous historical personalities, in *Tamerlano*, everything seems unusual and drawn to extremes. *Tamerlano* is Handel's cruellest hero, the opera's catharsis sadder and more tragic than any he ever wrote and recitatives are longer and more numerous than in any other Handel opera.



John Mark Ainsley  
© John Mark Ainsley

It was performed 12 times after its première, and during that run Handel made many changes to the opera's structure and its cast. But the arrival of Italian tenor Francesco Borosini, who had already sung the title role in Handel's favourite opera, Gasparini's *Bajazet*, triggered perhaps the most important change; it is not known with certainty if it was because of Handel's fascination by Borosini's voice but, unusually for a tenor role at the time, *Bajazet*, the part Borosini played in Handel's *Tamerlano*, took much more dramatic space and became the opera's main role, paradoxically overshadowing the title character.

English tenor John Mark Ainsley sang *Bajazet*, the defeated Ottoman emperor, with subtlety and ease. He gave a convincing performance as an imperial father who preferred his own death rather than witness his daughter's humiliation, excelling in the long and demanding aria di sostenuto when he commits suicide by poison at the opera's climactic end. Ainsley executed the aria without excessive pathos by giving it adequate dramatic shape.



Xavier Sabata  
© Julian Laidig

Spanish countertenor Xavier Sabata, with his silky alto timbre, was excellent as the rough and ambiguous character of *Tamerlano*, the Asian conqueror who falls in love with Asteria, his prisoner *Bajazet*'s daughter. Sabata's vocal agility and natural expressivity was especially beguiling in one of the most beautiful of Handel's aria agitata "Dammi pace o volto amato" where his vocal subtlety and flawlessness in his middle range were especially moving.

Fellow countertenor Max Emanuel Cenčić wowed the the audience, not only by wearing a stunning *Roi Soleil* costume but also with his passionate, colourful depiction of the morally divided *Andronico*, a character written for great divo at the time, Senesino. Cenčić's vertiginous leaps from soprano to contralto range were brilliantly highlighted in the most memorable showcase of the piece, the aria "Più d'una tigre altero" which received well deserved cheers.

Soprano Sophie Karthäuser, as *Bajazet*'s daughter, offered the audience a proud and humiliated Asteria with her high precision and soft-edged coloratura. Bass Pavel Kudinov was remarkable as *Leone* by bringing the most out of this secondary role with his two arias. Ruxandra Donose, wearing a gorgeous red and black dress, stressed *Irene*'s importance through her excellent projection and well rounded mezzo timbre.

Young Russian conductor Maxim Emelyanychev led *Il pomo d'oro* with passion, drawing out the ensemble's virtuosity. Through his energetic leadership, he tailored a wealth of colourful gestures in absolute harmony with the contours of his colleagues' performance.

The concert performance ended with one of saddest Handel's choruses: "D'atra notte già mirasi a scorno" which left the audience almost in tears, but with enough energy to repeatedly cheer the excellent performers.

OPERNNETZ, 10\_04\_2014

<http://www.opernnetz.de/>

## Konzertante Barockoper



**Köln** - Händels selten gespielte Oper *Tamerlano* wird am 4. Mai an der Oper Köln konzertant aufgeführt. Die [Produktion](#) wurde von der Kölner Oper eingekauft. Mit von der Partie ist [Max Emanuel Cencic](#) als Andronico. Miriam Rosenbohm hat den Countertenor unter anderem zu *Tamerlano* befragt (5'29).



# THE INDEPENDENT

## ON SUNDAY



### CLASSICAL

#### IL POMO D'ORO

#### HANDEL/TAMERLANO

NAIVE

The Turko-Mongol herdsman Timur the lame or Tamburlaine means little to modern audiences. But in Handel's day the virtuous Tamerlano represented the Protestant William of Orange; his captive, Bajazet, the immoderate Catholic Louis XIV. Indeed the first performance of *Tamerlano* commemorated William's arrival in England.

Today, without its subtext, this is a typically Handelian stride through firm judgement, familial loyalty and bitter-sweet redemption. Sung by counter-tenors Xavier Sabata, strident in the title role, Max Emanuel Cenčić as a sweeter-voiced lover, John Mark Ainsley, superb as Bajazet, and Karina Gauvin as his daughter, it's a treasure chest of music seldom heard. **Claudia Pritchard**





# THE SUNDAY TIMES

CLASSICAL

ALBUM  
OF THE  
WEEK

## HANDEL

Tamerlano

Cast, *Il Pomo d'Oro*, cond Minasi

*Naïve V 5373*

Tamerlano is one of Handel's greatest operas, and certainly his darkest and most tragic, ending as it does with the on-stage suicide of the titular antihero's antagonist, the Ottoman emperor Bajazet. Yet it has fared less well in the theatre and on disc than its popular predecessor, *Giulio Cesare*, perhaps because its characters seem utterly obsessed with their honour and status, and bent on revenge. Tamerlano and Bajazet are mirror images in their implacable hatred of each other, with the latter's death, harrowing as it is, the inevitable outcome. The cast lined up for this latest recording – of Handel's rarely heard 1731 version, for which he made minor alterations for new singers, including a magnificent bravura aria for the supporting bass role, Leone – is without a weak link. Xavier Sabata's



bad-boy manner captures the unstable mood swings of the Mongol ruler, while Max Emanuel Cencic's sweeter-toned countertenor is near-ideal for Andronico, his ally and rival for the love of Bajazet's daughter Asteria (the ever stylish Karina Gauvin). If John Mark Ainsley's commanding Bajazet is the great performance here, the entire set makes the strongest case yet for this masterpiece on disc, ideally paced by Riccardo Minasi, pictured, and his splendid period band. **HC**

# Xavier Sabata, Yann Robin, Maurice Bourbon

*le mercredi 16 avril 2014*



Yann Robin ©Jean Radel - Maurice Bourbon - Xavier Sabata ©Julian Laidig

## **Aujourd'hui Lionel Esparza reçoit le compositeur Yann Robin, le contreténor Xavier Sabata et le chef Maurice Bourbon.**

L'oeuvre de **Yann Robin** Φτερά Da R sera créée au Louvre le 18 avril 2014. Retrouvez **Xavier Sabata** au disque dans *Tamerlano* paru chez Naïve et le dernier disque de **Maurice Bourbon** avec la Chapelle des Chantres consacré aux messes de Josquin Desprez ainsi que les volumes précédents sont disponibles.

### **PROGRAMMATION MUSICALE**

♫ **Georg Friedrich Haendel**

Extraits de *Tamerlano*

Xavier Sabata, Max Emanuel Cencic, John Mark Ainsley, Karina Gauvin, Ruxandra Donose  
Il Pomo d'oro

Dir : Riccardo Minasi

<http://www.planethugill.com/2014/04/handel-tamerlano.html>

Thursday, 24 April 2014

Handel - Tamerlano



Handel *Tamerlano*: Ainsley, Gauvin, Cencic, Il Pomo d'Oro, Minasi: naive  
Reviewed by Robert Hugill on Apr 24 2014  
Star rating: 5.0

**Stupendous new recording of one of Handel's greatest operas**

With any new recording of Handel's *Tamerlano*, my eye (and ear) goes first to the role of Bajazet and this new recording of Handel's 1724 opera has [John Mark Ainsley](#) in the role and on very strong form. John Mark Ainsley is joined on the disc by star counter-tenor [Max Emanuel Cencic](#) as Andronico, [Xavier Sabata](#) in the title role, [Karina Gauvin](#) as Asteria, [Ruxandra Donose](#) as Irene and Pavel Kudinov as Leone with [Riccardo Minasi](#) directing [Il Pomo d'Oro](#) on [naive](#).

The opera concerns Mongol prince Tamerlano who has defeated the Turkish sultan Bajazet and imprisoned him and his daughter Asteria. The plot is essentially a closed box one as also in the palace are the Greek prince Andronico and also Princess Irene. Andronico and Asteria are secretly in love, and Irene is betrothed to Tamerlano, though he has reneged on his promise as he has fallen for Asteria. The results are to a certain extent typical opera seria with noble protagonists being put through the mill in a series of awkward situations. But there is more to it than that.

Without the tenor Francesco Borosini there would be no *Tamerlano* as we know it. The star tenor's arrival in London on 12 September 1724 caused Handel to radically re-write the role of Bajazet in the opera. 18th century operatic convention did not allow a tenor to play an heroic role, but Handel did the next best thing by vastly expanding the complex role of Bajazet. Handel increased the number of his arias and gave him an on-stage death scene, something highly daring for its time.

The title role was written for the company's second'uomo, alto castrato Andrea Pacini, with star castrato Senesino singing Andronico. Thus an opera which could reasonably be called Bajazet, has as its title role what is effectively the third man in the company.

Perhaps because of the complex tenor part, Handel only revived *Tamerlano* once, in 1731. Usually Handel the impresario was extremely cavalier with the work of Handel the composer, cutting and re-shaping to the detriment of the work simply to suit the cast and circumstances of the revival. But Handel took much care over the revival, keeping the arias and simply adding one (based on one from *Riccardo Primo*) for the minor character of Leone, and cutting the recitative significantly, but sympathetically. He cut nothing from the throne room scene (the longest stretch of recitative Handel wrote) and removed little from the supper scene. The result is a highly compact version of the opera which Riccardo Minasi has chosen to record. Handel's only oddity in the 1731 revival was to remove the terzetto, and Minasi has sensibly decided to include this item as it makes for a far better balance to the dramaturgy of the opera's second act.

Senesino for all his technical prowess had a voice with a relatively narrow compass. Max Emanuel Cencic is one of the new breed of counter-tenors with a significant upward extension so it is slightly surprising to find him as Andronico. But in the credits in the CD booklet, Cencic is listed as one of the executive producers and has co-credit for the artistic concept and cast, so presumably Andronico is a role that he wanted to sing.

And he does so truly admirably, displaying little in the way of gear changes and offering us an admirably even-toned voice throughout the range. Andronico is a bit of a wimp at first (Senesino specialised in 'pathetic' roles (in the sense of evoking pathos) though there always had to be an heroic aria for him. Here Cencic is finely pathetic and is highly moving in his aria which closes act one, then Tamerlano has managed to manoeuvre him into an unenviable position. And Cencic brings out some fabulous passagework in the showy simile aria in the middle of act two. It was clearly designed to allow Senesino to show off, and so does Cencic!

I have to confess that when I first heard Karina Gauvin as Asteria, I thought that she sounded a little too mature with slightly too much beat in her voice. But Asteria is a complex character, not a little girl, and Gauvin's approach works. In her aria at the beginning of act two when she dismisses Andronico telling him he has missed his moment and she is going to marry Tamerlano, you realise that Gauvin really does mean business. We know, but Andronico does not, that Asteria plans to murder Tamerlano on their wedding night.

Ruxandra Donose as Irene, Bajazet's betrothed, gets the relatively short straw in terms of arias. But Donose is an experienced Handelian and brings style and a rich-toned voice to bear. She also has a notable role to play in the drama, which she does well. Irene is supported by Leone, a role which was expanded in the 1731 version, so that we get to her Pavel Kudinov in two arias. That is a great treat, as Kudinov has a fabulous dark dark voice, with focus and brilliance in the passagework.

here, Ainsley sings with power and flexibility adding some lovely dark tones in the lower passages. The act two aria, *A suo piedi* when Bajazet sees Asteria at Tamerlano's feet sees Ainsley on powerful form, with a lovely sense of line, complemented by fiercely focused violins in the orchestra. This is a commanding performance, Ainsley's Bajazet is far more a king than the temperamental and strutting Tamerlano.

The only real fault I can find with Xavier Sabata's Tamerlano is that his voice sounds a little too like that of Max Emanuel Cencic, though Sabata is adept at bringing an edge of temper to his performance. Unfortunately for act one and the first part of act two he often sounds merely petulant. Partly this is Handel's fault as all of Tamerlano's irrationally threatening behaviour takes place during the recitatives and the arias are often just bluster.

The whole dramatic tenor of the performance changes with the throne room scene that concludes act two. This long, dramatic scene needs a group of great singing actors sympathetic to opera seria's style. And here there drama fairly crackles, capturing the wonderful tension of the scene.

Bajazet has a dramatic accompagnato (vividly done by Ainsley) in the middle of the scene, but the basis is pure recitative. Ainsley brings a darkly brilliant edge to his tone, complementing Sabata's petulantly imperious Tamerlano. When Asteria draws a dagger, Gauvin is fully Ainsley's equal bringing a thrilling edge to her tone and capturing vividly the drama. As the drama develops and particularly in the 1724 terzetto, Sabata's Tamerlano is really vile (in just the right way!).

The scene (and act) closes with the stupendous moment when Asteria faces Bajazet, Andronico and Irene in turn, asking whether she is still unworthy/unfaithful. Each responds with a different, powerful, arietta and the act concludes with Asteria's aria *Se potessi* (Minasi has refrained from tinkering here thankfully, and stayed with Handel's final thoughts). The aria is quite simple, but Gauvin sings it with a real depth of feeling, highly pointing the words and with a good strength of characterisation.

Things stay at this level in the final act, with the supper scene where Asteria tries to poison Tamerlano, and Bajazet's death scene.

The act opens with Asteria's *Cor di Padre* which Handel originally placed at the end of act two. Here it makes a very strong beginning with Gauvin giving a deeply felt performance and making complete sense of the aria's placing, in terms of Asteria's reaction to Bajazet's providing her with poison.

The drama in act two fairly crackles too both in recitative and aria. And here we do have a chance to hear Tamerlano displaying vigorous anger in the aria *A dispetto d'un volto ingrato* on learning of Asteria's love for Andronico. And the duet for the two lovers, when they both think they are doing to die *Vivo in te* is a lovely piece, movingly sung here by Gauvin and Cencic.

Irene's complex response to events (she still loves Tamerlano!) is a toe-tappingly vigorous aria *Crudel piu non son io*, which is vigorously sung by Donose. And this version we get to hear Kudinov's fabulously dark voices Leone in *Nel mondo e nell'abisso* the aria Handel inserted in 1731.

Max Emanuel Cencic is wonderfully urgent in Andronico's aria, *Se non mi rendi il mio tesoro* in which he reinforces to Tamerlano his love for Asteria. This leads directly into the terrific scene in which Asteria tries to poison Tamerlano, but is prevented by Irene. Really powerful stuff which culminates in Gauvin's performance in the accompagnato *Padre amante* and her intense and questioning aria *Folle sei*. Tamerlano orders Asteria to be raped by his slaves with Bajazet watching. Bajazet responds with *Empio per fatti guerra* in which Ainsley is vividly incisive with a lovely edge to his tone but still fine passagework. Ainsley really uses the music here, and though he digs deep you never sense him stretching the vocal line. This mood continues into Bajazet's death scene where Ainsley uses both words and music to tremendous effect.

Gauvin's own tone, in Asteria's dialogue with her father, has a striking edge which cuts like a knife. Bajazet's final aria *Figlia mia* sees Ainsley touching and very moving. In his final accompagnato, Ainsley makes Bajazet's emotions turn on a pins, by turns striking like a whiplash or very tender.

There is essentially nowhere to go after this scene, and Handel cut a lot here for 1731. Handel's concluding coro is one of the most sombre that he wrote, here finely sung by all concerned.

Throughout Minasi and Il Pomo d'Oro complement the singers with highly characterised playing. Minasi seems fond of very strongly accented effects, but in the context of the high tension score this works well.

I have yet to see a live performance which really brings this wonderful score to life but on this disc, Ainsley, Cencic, Gauvin and company really make Handel's drama crack and sear as it should.

The CD booklet includes a short article by David Vickers, synopsis and full text and translations. One small annoyance, the list of tracks does not include the page number in the libretto, so finding your way is annoying.

Handel's *Tamerlano* is one of his greatest works and perhaps still under appreciated. Its history on disc has been patchy and only with George Petrou's 2007 recording did we get the composer's original intentions on disc in a good modern recording. Here we have the 1731 revision, in a performance of such cracking emotion that it deserves to be heard.

**George Frideric Handel (1685 - 1759) - Tamerlano (1724/1731) [193.00]**

Tamerlano - Xavier Sabata (counter-tenor)

Andronico - Max Emanuel Cencic (counter-tenor)

Bajazet - John Mark Ainsley (tenor)

Asteria - Karina Gauvin (soprano)

Irene - Ruxandra Donose (mezzo-soprano)

Leone - Pavel Kudinov (bass)

Il Pomo d'Oro

Riccardo Minasi (conductor)

Recorded April 2013 at the Villa San Fermo, Convento die Pavoniani, Lonigo, Vicenza, Italy  
naive V5372 3 CD's

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Posted by [Robert Hugill](#) at 7:56 am

## BUSQUE ESTE DISCO

Händel: *Tamerlano*

Xavier Sabata, Max Emanuel Cencic, Karina Gauvin, John Mark Ainsley, Ruxandra Donose, Pavel Kudinov, cantantes  
 Il Pomo d'Oro  
 Riccardo Minasi, director  
 Naïve V5373

## Un *Tamerlano* para el siglo XXI

De las óperas de Händel podríamos decir que *Tamerlano* es uno de los títulos que mayor acogida han tenido en tiempos modernos junto a *Giulio Cesare*, *Rodelinda* y *Agrippina*. Varias, y muy respetables, son las versiones discográficas que, hasta el día de hoy, han aparecido en el mercado. Desde los míticos directos de Janet Baker y Sir Anthony Lewis, a las brillantes grabaciones de Trevor Pinnock y John Eliot Gardiner, pasando por el DVD de Plácido Domingo en el Teatro Real.

Ahora, el sello Naïve lanza al mercado uno de sus proyectos estrella para este 2014. Un *Tamerlano* de lenguaje renovado que se aleja de discursos historicistas arcaizados y dota a la música de Händel de un halo de brillo y libertad.

Siguiendo la última versión que Händel hizo del título en 1731, el director Riccardo Minasi ofrece una lectura sobria, que huye de elementos superfluos y da la misma importancia a la orquesta que a las voces. Para ello, se ha apoyado en Il Pomo d'Oro, conjunto que pese a su juventud se ha convertido en uno de los referentes actuales en la interpretación histórica gracias a la frescura lograda en los álbumes de debut de los contratenores Franco Fagioli y Xavier Sabata.

Precisamente, Sabata es el encargado de encabezar el reparto de este disco. Sus dotes como *Tamerlano* ya apuntaban maneras en su disco *Bad Guys* donde, entre otras arias de Händel, pudimos escuchar *Vo' dar pace a un'alma altiera*. Aquí ha terminado de dar cuerpo al personaje, que ha armado de una humanidad inédita y de una redondez vocal ciertamente impactante. Xavier Sabata resuelve aspectos que nunca antes habían sido transmitidos con tanto gusto y elegancia en este título, como el impecable trabajo en los

recitativos, que dejan de ser un mero trámite entre arias para cobrar vida y asumir el verdadero rol narrativo para el que fueron escritos. De timbre aterciopelado y redondo, en el aspecto vocal el contratenor catalán marca un antes y un después en la concepción del personaje de *Tamerlano*. Su línea de canto es tremendamente natural, auténtica, y no busca convencer mediante virtuosismos forzados, sino que presenta un trabajo realizado a partir de la psicología del personaje y de su propia experiencia como intérprete. Esto es palpable en su interpretación sincera, inteligente y que fluye por sí misma, con las arias *Vo' dar pace a un'alma altiera* y *A dispeto d'un volto ingrato* como su mejor baza.

El papel de *Andronico* llega a manos de Max Emanuel Cencic. El archiconocido contratenor croata, que ya demostró sus valías como intérprete handeliiano con su premiada grabación de *Alessandro*, repite colaboración artística con Sabata para hacer frente a un personaje que le viene como anillo al dedo. Con una absoluta riqueza en los armónicos, una propensión innata para el legato y unas habilidades técnicas para dotar al personaje de constante interés, el *Andronico* de Cencic brilla durante sus distintas intervenciones. Dignas de mención son su visión de las arias *Più d'una tigre altero* y *Benché mi sprezzì*, así como el dueto junto *Asteria Vivo in te, mio caro bene*.

En este sentido, tampoco podemos obviar el elocuente discurso de Karina Gauvin como

*Asteria*. La soprano canadiense sorprende una vez más con la calidez de su instrumento y un fiato que jamás rompe la línea de canto, extendiéndose a lo largo y ancho de la partitura con excelente comodidad.

Bajazet es el veterano John Mark Ainsley. El tenor británico, reputado intérprete de barroco y de Mozart, opta por hacer del emperador otomano un personaje de vocalidad flexible, sin coloraturas marcadas ni *attaccate* y preferencia por la homogeneidad melódica, lo que acentúa la tónica de brillante sobriedad que encontramos en el conjunto de este trabajo.

La desechada Irene es la mezzo Ruxandra Donose, imponente instrumento de gran personalidad y versatilidad, que seduce al oyente desde el primer momento y tiene en la aria *Par che mi nasca in seno* y en la arieta semi declamada *Non, che sei tanto costante*, dos de los momentos más inspirados de la ópera.

El extraordinario bajo ruso Pavel Kudinov cierra el apartado vocal con su consistente Leone, amigo de *Tamerlano* y *Andronico*, cuya aria *Nel mondo e nell'abisso* presenta un surtido de obstáculos técnicos que el intérprete supera con ahinco y con naturalidad. Y es que la naturalidad es la tónica que impera en esta versión, que deja que la música ande libre y se adentre, con un discurso humano y terrenal, en los rincones más recónditos del corazón. ■



# G.F. Händel TAMERLANO / Lohnende Neuaufnahme

by D. Zweipfennig | 16. April 2014 13:00



**[1] G.F. Händel TAMERLANO - Lohnende Neuaufnahme von Händels Klassiker mit Sabata, Ainsley und Cencic / naïve**

Diesmal legt die barocke Zauberwerkstatt Parnassus keine Opernrarität wie Artaserse von Vinci vor, sondern die mit Giulio Cesare 1724 entstandene Oper Tamerlano, deren Held eigentlich Bajazet heißt und spätestens seit Plácido Domingos Rollenaneignung in Madrid (2008) auch einem breiteren Publikum bekannt sein dürfte.

Von den halben Dutzend Aufnahmen, die existieren, wurden nur 2 im Studio produziert. Daher ist diese von Dirigenten **Riccardo Minasi** sorgfältig redigierte Edition, die auf Händels Fassung von 1731 beruht, für Liebhaber barocker Musik mehr als willkommen. Zumal auf der vom Label naïve jüngst veröffentlichten Aufnahme ganz vorzüglich aufgespielt und gesungen wird.

Wie immer im Kosmos der Opera seria geht es auf Basis einer historischen, antiken oder literarischen Ausgangskonstellation um Liebes- und Machtkarusselle, so ein wenig wie in Schnitzlers Reigen, halt im 18. Jahrhundert angesiedelt. Nach einer der beachtlichsten dramatischen Szenen in Händels Werk, in der der Sultan Bajazet Selbstmord begeht, natürlich nicht ohne in einem langen Monolog die Furien anzurufen, ihn an Tamerlano zu rächen, gibt es am Ende eine große Verzeihung und damit nur ein semi Happy End.

Wie schon zu Händels Zeiten der Royal Academy of Music steht und fällt der Erfolg mit einer handverlesenen Schar an erstklassigen Interpreten. Hießen diese in London Pacini, Senesino oder Cuzzoni, so fanden sich im Studio Xavier Sabata, Max Emanuel Cencic und Karina Gauvin ein, um die Rollen des Tamerlano, des Andronico und der Asteria mit neuem Leben zu erfüllen. Ob in den Rezitativen oder Arien, die illustre Sängerschar schärft die Charaktere mit unverkennbarem Klang und affektgeladenem Ausdruck. Besonders darf sich der Barockafficionado an lupengenaue Verzierungen, individuell timbrierten Stimmen und schwungvollen Phrasierungen im Einklang mit dem lebendigen Händelswing des Orchesters Il Pomo d'Oro unter dem Dirigent Riccardo Minasi freuen. Man kann sich nun trefflich streiten, ob der formidable Countertenor Xavier Sabata die Rolle des Bösewichts Tamerlano nicht ein Quentchen zu wohlklingend singt. Und ob Max Emanuel Cencic mit seiner vor allem in der Kontraaltlage immer ausladender werdenden Stimme nicht besser als Zornpinkel Tamerlano besetzt wäre. Beide sind auf jeden Fall am Zenit ihres Könnens und damit tragende Säulen in der Spitzen-Interpretation Alter Musik. Die kanadische Sopranistin Karine Gauvin ist sowieso eine Klasse für sich.

Besonderes Lob gebührt nicht zuletzt John Mark Ainsley für seine hervorragende Interpretation des Bajazet und Ruxandra Donose für ihre üppig gesungene Irene. Der schwarze Bass des Pavel Kudinov als Leone ergänzt eine Besetzung ohne Schwachstellen.

In Wien wird das Publikum im Theater an der Wien am 25. September 2014 Gelegenheit haben, das Werk in einer konzertanten Aufführung mit beinahe identer Besetzung wie die CD Einspielung zu hören. Hingehen und staunen.