

CANTATAS

from the Georgian Drawing Room

Presented by **CONCERT ROYAL**
featuring Margarett Ashton, soprano



THE ENGLISH CHAMBER CANTATA

More than four hundred chamber cantatas written in England during the eighteenth century survive in early editions in the British Library and other collections. It is difficult to understand why these attractive works, many written by eminent composers of the day, have been so neglected by modern performers.

According to Sir John Hawkins' *History of Music* (1789), "*That elegant species of vocal composition, the cantata, was invented by Carissimi, an Italian*". Charles Burney, however, claims that "*the term cantata (was first) used for a short narrative poem in the Musiche varie a voce sola of Signor Bendetto Ferrari da Reggio, printed in Venice in 1638.*"

Pepusch, whose "Six English Cantatas" were published by Walsh in 1710, claimed that they were "*The first Essays of the Kind, written for the most part several Years ago, as an Experiment of introducing a sort of composition which had never before been naturalised in our Language*".

Early English cantatas with their Italianate recitatives and da capo arias gave composers an opportunity to work in the Italian operatic style. Indeed, each cantata is, in effect, a miniature opera. Fanciful plots, invariably based on classical mythology, are played out in the timeless dream world of Arcadia, the home of pastoral poetry and song. Here, nymphs and shepherds, inevitably engaged in amorous pursuits, lived an idyllic life of innocence and simplicity. These chamber cantatas, set for a small number of performers, enabled a little of the drama, if not the spectacle, of the opera house to be enjoyed in the eighteenth century drawing room.

The cantatas included on this recording demonstrate considerable variety. John Eccles' "Love Kindl'd" is little more than a song while the examples by Arne and Burgess are extended works, with the solo singer expected to take several parts as well as acting as narrator. The enterprising, anonymous librettist who combined Albinoni's music with an English text managed to suit the words exactly to the music. Generally, texts tend to be somewhat trivial, "*calculated rather to entertain the Fancy rather than improve the Understanding*" (Hawkins). Throughout history, however, an important role of popular music has been to portray a naive, idealistic and escapist view of the world.

With the assistance of an award from the Arts Council of Great Britain, the research and performance of examples of these unique and entertaining cantatas from Georgian England has been an important part of *Concert Royal's* recent activity.

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Recording Engineer: Ralph Dagleish, Huntcliff Recording Services

Artistic Producer: Peter Harrison

Executive Producer: Stephen Sutton

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ALEXIS (1710) – Dr Johann Christoph Pepusch

recitative: Alexis turns to music to ease his broken heart.

*See! from the silent grove Alexis flies and seeks with ev'ry pleasing art
to ease the pain which lovely eyes created in his heart;
to shining theatres he now repairs to learn Camilla's moving airs,
Where thus to Musick's pow'r the swain address'd his prayers.*

aria:

*Charming sounds that sweetly languish! Musick O compose my anguish!
Ev'ry passion yields to thee.
Phoebus quickly then relieve me, Cupid shall no more deceive me,
I'll to sprightlyer joys be free.*

recitative: Apollo remembers how music failed to ease the pain following his unrequited love for Daphne.
*Apollo heard the foolish swain, he knew when Daphne once he lov'd,
how weak t'assuage an am'rous pain his own harmonious art had prov'd,
And all his healing herbs how vain,
Then thus he strikes the speaking strings, preluding to his voice and sings.*

aria: Apollo sings that music is the voice of love and that only reunion can soothe the pain of separation.
*Sounds tho' charming cann't relieve thee. Do not shepherd then deceive me.
Musick is the voice of love.
If the tender maid believe thee, soft relenting, kind consenting
Will alone thy pain remove.*

LOVE KINDL'D IN A BREAST TOO YOUNG (1710) – John Eccles

recitative:

*Love kindl'd in a breast too young is but a wand'ring, but a fleeting passion.
In riper years it grows more strong, when reason seconds inclination.*

aria (andante): Strephon's love for Celia proves to be merely a passing fancy when
"charming" Flavia comes along!

*Young Strephon did on Celia dote, his tend'rest vows were all for her,
Yet soon his vows were all forgot when charming Flavia did appear,
So tender plants by milder rays are cherish'd and preserv'd 'till noon,
But soon their fading bloom decays when shin'd on by a warmer sun.*

UNDER YE GLOOMY SHADE (1720) – Tommaso Albinoni

recitative: The downfall of Philoclea is described.

*Under ye gloomy shade of a dark sullen grove, fair Philoclea sat complaining of her love,
The faithless perjur'd Damon who not long before had rifl'd all her charms and ransack'd all her store,*

And thus the lovely nymph, to ease her tortur'd breast, in soft melodious notes her misery express'd.

aria (largetto): Philoclea remembers happier days and laments her lost love.

*Ah how happy were ye days whilst I and Damon fondly strove
how we might most each other please and best improve our time and love.
But now those happy days are gone, Damon too is with them flown, wretched I am left alone.*

recitative: Philoclea describes the moment of downfall.

*The lonely rover by his artful wiles, his false deceitful words and treacherous smiles
Too soon, alas, found out ye way to move my heart to pity first and then to love.
I took the viper to my glowing breast and on my maiden's treasures let him feast;
Ten thousand kisses on my lips he fix'd, as many oaths he with his kisses mix't
that he was ever mine. But what he swore he now forgets and thinks of me no more.*

aria (allegro): Philoclea strongly advises others in a similar predicament to ignore the advances of Damon.

*Virgins if your peace you prize, if your quiet you'd prolong,
Shun Damon's bright alluring eyes and more his soft deluding tongue.
Trust his oaths and you're undone, he vows to all he's true to none,
His ends obtained the lover's gone.*

PASTORA (1757) – Nicolo Pasquali

recitative:

*On fam'd Arcadia's flow'ry plains, the gay Pastora once was heard to sing.
Close by a fountain's crystal spring, she warbled out her merry strains.*

aria (allegro): Pastora explains to the shepherds how best they can please her.

*Shepherds wou'd you hope to please us, you must ev'ry humour try.
Sometimes flatter, sometimes tease us, often laugh and sometimes dye;
Soft denials are but trials, you must follow when we fly.*

recitative: Damon expresses his love for Pastora.

*Damon, who long ador'd this sprightly maid yet never durst his love relate
Resolved at last to try his fate.
He sigh'd, she smil'd, he kneel'd and pray'd, she frown'd, he rose and walk'd away,
But soon returning look'd more gay, and sung and danc'd, and on his pipe a cheerful eccho play'd.*

aria (allegro): An amorous chase ensues. Pastora is pleased to discover that Damon can “run as fast as she.”

*Pastora fled to shady grove, Damon view'd her and pursued her, Cupid laugh'd and crown'd her love.
The Nymph look'd back well pleas'd to see that Damon run as fast as she.*

THE ISLAND OF BEAUTY (1710) — Dr Johann Christoph Pepusch

recitative: Venus looks benevolently on Britain.

As beauty's Goddess from the ocean sprung ascending o'er the waves

She cast a smile on fair Britannia's charming isle and rais'd her tuneful voice and thus she sang.

aria:

Britain hail, all hail to thee fairest Island in the sea, thou my favourite land shalt be

Cyprus too shall own my sway and dedicate to me its grove,

Yet Venus and her train of loves will with happier Britain stay.

recitative:

Britannia heard the notes diffusing wide,

She saw ye pow'r whom Gods and men adore approaching nearer with ye tide,

And in rapture loudly cried, O welcome to my shore.

aria:

Lovely isle so richly blest! Beauty's palm is thine confesst.

Thy daughters all the world outshine; No, No, nor Venus' self is so divine.

BELINDA AND EURILLO (1732) — Henry Carey

aria (vivace): Belinda prefers the pleasures of hunting to the attention of Eurillo.

Regardless of her sighing swain, Belinda ranges o'er the plain.

Diana like, with pointed spear she swift pursues the tim'rous deer.

While waving in the ambient air, dishevll'd flows her silken hair.

She breathes Ambrosia all around and to her voice the gladsome vales resound.

aria (siliciano): Eurillo pleads with Cupid to release him from Belinda's spell.

Great God of love disarm her, recall thy fatal darts;

Let not one tyrant charmer engross so many hearts.

But Ah! who dares behold her 'tis well thou hast no eyes,

For could'st thou once behold her, thyself must be her prize.

recitative: Cupid accedes to Eurillo's request.

Thus sang Eurillo while the scornful fair past by but with so negligent an air,

As left him in the anguish of despair.

The God of love in pity to his grief recall'd his shaft and gave the swain relief,

Set him at liberty and bade him range, who thus exalted in the happy change.

aria (allegro): Eurillo rejoices in his new found freedom.

Since the Nymph I love disdains me and scorns my deep despair,

Gentle Cupid now unchains me to enjoy a kinder fair.

Some think it mighty treasure a stubborn heart to gain,

But their's be all the pleasure, for it is not worth the pain.

CAELIA (1749) – Henry Burgess, jnr.

recitative: Caelia reposes in a sylvan setting with Cupid in attendance.

*Beneath a sylvan bower's cool retreat like Beauty's Queen the lovely Caelia sat
With ev'ry grace and ev'ry charm arrang'd, whilst wanton Cupid round the fair one play'd.*

aria (allegro moderato):

*Myrtles and twining woodbines form'd the bow'r, round roses bloom'd and ev'ry fragrant flow'r.
The Zephyrs stealing through the verdant gloom danc'd on her lips and scatter'd sweet perfume.*

recitative: Strephon, a shepherd, arrives. He believes Caelia to be the goddess Venus.

*By chance conducted thither Strephon came, he saw and took her for the Cyprian dame
(For sure the Nymph the Goddess well express'd), and thus his fancied Deity address'd.*

aria (andante affettuoso): Strephon expresses his love for Venus (Caelia).

*Propitious Goddess Queen of love, delight of men and Gods above,
Bright Venus, thou, who canst't inspire sublimest thoughts and tender soft desire,
Thou rul'st the sky, the sea and plain, the God, the hero and the swain.
All living Souls thy pow'r obey, all nature owns thy universal sway.*

recitative: Cupid delights in Strephon's innocent mistake.

*While thus the Shepherd sung young Cupid play'd and wanton'd sportive round the charming maid,
Now breathless panting on her bosom lyes, now mocks the shepherd's passion in her eyes,
Well pleas'd he laughed to see the swain's surprise and smiling thus replies.*

aria (allegro): Cupid points out Strephon's error and suggests that Caelia's beauty, which would even move Adonis, makes her a more than suitable candidate for his attention anyway.

Foolish shepherd leave thy pray'r, pray'r that Venus does not hear.

Venus to her Isle confin'd, Caelia governs all mankind.

See in Caelia's charms would move coy Adonis' self to love.

Her adore, mistaken swain, Cupid will reward thy pain.

CYMON AND IPHIGENIA – Dr Thomas Arne

recitative: Iphigenia sleeps in a leafy grove. Cymon, a rustic, arrives.

*Near a thick grove whose deep embow'ring shade seem'd most for love and contemplation made,
A crystal stream with gentle murmur flows, whose flow'ry banks are formed for soft repose.
Thither retired from Phoebus' sultry ray and lull'd in sleep, fair Iphigenia lay.*

*Cymon, a clown who never dream't of love, by chance was stumping to the neighb'ring grove;
He trudg'd along not knowing what he sought and whistled as he went for want of thought.
But when he first beheld the sleeping maid, he gap'd, he Star'd, her lovely form survey'd,
And while in artless voice he softly sung, Beauty and Nature thus informed his tongue.*

aria (andante moderato): Cymon expresses his love.

*The stream that glides in murmurs by, whose glassy bosom shews the sky, completes the rural scene,
But in this bosom charming maid, all heav'n is sure displayed, too lovely Iphigene.*

recitative: To Cymon's consternation, Iphigenia wakes.

She wakes and starts, poor Cymon trembling stands, down falls the staff from his unnerved hands.

Bright excellence, said he, dispel all fear, where honour's present sure no danger's near.

Half rais'd, with gentle accents she replies, O Cymon, if it's you I need not rise,

Thy honest heart no wrong can entertain. Pursue thy way and let me sleep again.

The clown transported was not silent long, but thus with ecstasy pursued his song.

aria (andante moderato):

The jetty locks that careless break in wanton ringlets down thy neck, thy love inspiring mien,

Thy swelling bosom, skin of snow and taper shape enchant me so, I die for Iphigene.

recitative: Iphigenia, impressed by Cymon's performance, suggests they meet again the next day.

Amazed she listens, nor can trace from whence the former clod is thus inspired with sense;

She gazes, finds him comely, tall and straight, and thinks he might improve his awkward gait;

Bids him be secret, and next day attend at the same hour to meet his faithful friend.

Thus mighty Love could teach a clown to plead, and Nature's language surest will succeed.

air (andante): Love elevates the human soul.

Love's a pure, a sacred fire, kindling gentle chaste desire.

Love can rage itself control, and elevate the human soul.

Depriv'd of that our wretched state had made our lives of too long date,

But blest with beauty and with love, we taste what angels do above.

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Julia Black (violin by Nathaniel Cross, London, 1725)

John Treherne (harpsichord by Feldberg after Benjamin Slade, 1725)