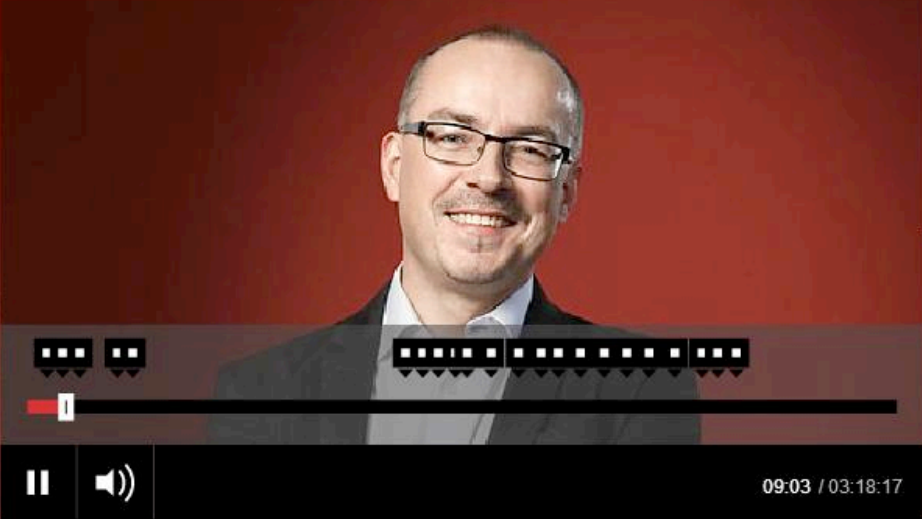


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- George Frideric Handel** 02:11

"Bel piacere è godere fido amor!", from Act III of *Agrippina* (Venice 1709)

Singer: **Mary Bevan**. Ensemble: London Early Opera. Director: Bridget Cunningham.
HANDEL IN ITALY, VOLUME 1. SIGNUM RECORDS. 8.
- George Frideric Handel** 02:16

"Et in terra pax", from *Gloria HMW deest*

Singer: **Sophie Bevan**. Ensemble: London Early Opera. Director: Bridget Cunningham.
HANDEL IN ITALY, VOLUME 1. SIGNUM RECORDS. 2.

Andrew McGregor: We've got more familiar Italian fare next perhaps, Handel in Italy...so this is formative Handel, the music on which he cut his teeth, mainly in Rome from 1707, absorbing Italian opera, and it's a family affair...

Anna Picard: It is a family affair, we get three Bevans: Mary, Sophie and Benjamin.

AM: And Handel's *Agrippina* to begin with...a significant early opera.

AP: *The significant early opera, I'd say...*

[Music]

AM: 'What a genuine pleasure it is to enjoy true love'...That's early Handel in Italy from the third act of *Agrippina*, Venice 1709, Poppea's aria there. Mary Bevan, she sounds absolutely lovely, and really nice accompaniment from London Early Opera directed by Bridget Cunningham.

AP: It's just splendid in every respect, lithe, characterful, they all know exactly what they're doing. It's funny, even though you've got this unison texture all the way through, that would reveal any doubt and any infelicity of tuning but they're just totally on top of it.

AM: Absolutely together as well. What do you think of the selection, is it a good introduction to Handel in Italy, because the notes are a very important part of this aren't they?

AP: I think the notes are very good, and it does make a good introduction, because we're coming from 1706, which...is when Handel went to Italy 'on his own bottom', meaning he funded himself and charmed the pants off these powerful cardinals and noblemen and amassed an extraordinary number of commissions, he laid down a stylebook for the rest of his composing career. Some of the music I think has not even been bettered in his later stuff, it's been equalled but not bettered. It's a short disc, it's only 43 or 45 minutes long, but it's a good snapshot, a snapshot with proper context.

AM: Any discoveries? Because there's a rare bass cantata here isn't there...

AP: Yes, I hadn't heard this before, 'Cuopre tal volta il cielo', the rest of it was reasonably familiar to me...excerpts from *Rodrigo*, *Agrippina*, *Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*, Sonata for a Harpsichord, there's one speculative inclusion, which the director Bridget Cunningham – she's directing from the harpsichord – admits that we cannot know whether or not it was actually written in Italy or whether it pre-dated Handel's journey. If it did pre-date it then he really understood the local style...This is the Gloria which I think was only discovered in 2000 and I believe there's only been one recording prior to this one and that was with Emma Kirkby. Cunningham suggests that it is possible that the Gloria was performed by Margherita Durastanti, who was Handel's first Mary Magdalen, in the church at the country estate of Il Marchese Ruspoli or by one of the Roman virtuosic castrati, because it does go very very high, I think up to a Bb or B.



We have Sophie Bevan, who is the sister of Mary who we just heard, and she sings with this beautifully warm feminine sound, and you do very much hear stylistic similarities to other parts of what we now think of as being the Carmelite Vespers, specifically the antiphons 'Salve Regina' and 'Haec est Regina Virginum', so whether it predated that and informed them or it comes from the same time, it almost doesn't matter, what Sophie has – and the orchestra too – is a sense of prayerful-ness, without any sense of prim-ness.

[Music]

AM: Well I want that to continue. 'Et in Terra Pax' from a Gloria by Handel which may be from around the time of his first Italian expedition, sung by Sophie Bevan with London Early Opera. Handel in Italy Vol. 1, it says on the cover, so Anna will you be looking forward to future instalments? I think I know the answer.

AP: Oh I will be, yes. I'd like them to be perhaps a little more generous in terms of the amount of music included. I think also that the playing is so beautifully focussed when the orchestra is playing, I notice that there's a million names from the London Handel Festival here, perhaps they could be a little more outgoing in the orchestral numbers.

AM: It's a lovely sound as well, good recording. It's a recent release from Signum Classics.

