



September



'Following the recording armed only with Handel's score, the ear is continually delighted by a series of remarkable instrumental combinations'

David Thresher is entertained by a large-scale Handelian recreation

Handel

Timotheus, oder Die Gewalt der Musik, HWV75
(arr Mozart, K591, and Mosel)

Roberta Invernizzi *sop* Werner Gûra *ten*
Gerald Finley *bass* Chorus of the Gesellschaft der
Musikfreunde, Vienna; Concentus Musicus Wien /
Nikolaus Harnoncourt

Sony Classical © 2 88883 70481-2 (103' • DDD • T/T)
Recorded live at the Musikverein, Vienna,
November 28 & 29, 2012

This is a recording which ticks so many worthwhile boxes that it's difficult to know where to begin. It's a great souvenir of a grand occasion, for sure; it's a recording of a work that's perhaps performed less often than a number of other similar pieces by Handel; to my knowledge, it's the only one currently available that presents the work in Mozart's 1790 arrangement; and it's a score whose eventfulness plays admirably to Harnoncourt's individual brand of theatricality.

Timotheus, though? Well, thereby hangs a tale. What we hear in terms of musical substance is to all intents and purposes *Alexander's Feast, or The Power of Musick*, the pastoral ode first performed at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, in the Lenten season of 1736. The libretto (based on Dryden)

was translated into German in 1766 by CW Ramler, who saw *Timotheus* as the protagonist and thus adopted his name for the new libretto's title. It was this German version that Mozart used when he updated the instrumentation for performance in Vienna in 1790 by Gottfried van Swieten's Gesellschaft der Associierten Cavaliere; and it was Mozart's version that was performed at the inaugural concert in 1812 of Vienna's Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde (Society of the Friends of Music). This recording comes from a performance marking the bicentenary of that concert.

Why update Handel's score? The feeling was that Handel's instrumentation, based largely upon oboes and violins, often in unison, was too austere for the tastes of Viennese connoisseurs half a century on. And anyway, such early-18th-century techniques as *clarino* trumpet-playing (think of 'The trumpet shall sound' in *Messiah*) had fallen out of fashion and were no longer practised. So not only did Mozart adapt Handel's music to the performance style of the day but he also updated the sound world, relocating the innocence of Handel's pastoral baroque in the sophisticated milieu of the European Enlightenment. It was natural that Mozart's adaptation should have

been used for the 1812 performance but its conductor, Ignaz Franz von Mosel, 'touched up' Mozart's score, further enriching the woodwind-writing and even adding a bass drum for added depth (and volume): watch out for it when the chorus join in the aria 'Bacchus, ever fair and young', and fear for your speakers! Harnoncourt prepared his performance materials for the 2012 concert from Mosel's score and parts, still in the possession of the Gesellschaft.

Mosel had a cast of somewhere around 600-700 musicians on stage, singing and playing to an audience of around 2500. Harnoncourt doesn't muster quite so many – the booklet doesn't enumerate but says there were 'as many players as could be accommodated' in the Musikverein, along with 100 chorus singers – but the right effect is achieved, the richness of Mozart's scoring amplified by the use of wind choirs and massed brass. You hear it right from the very first note, Mozart's characteristic woodwind-writing providing a luxurious cushion for Handel's jagged rhythms, and again when the clarinets enter at the first chorus – a sound Handel couldn't have imagined in 1736 but which seems so right in this context. Following the recording armed only with Handel's score, the ear is