



'Lord, our Master': Richard Egarr and his forces record the opening chorus of the St John Passion at the church of St Jude-on-the-Hill, London

sure sense of colour in this most kaleidoscopic of Handel's mature scores: there are masterly contributions from trumpets and timpani, solo horn and rippling carillon in music for L'Allegro, and flute, cello and organ in serenely gorgeous passages for Penseroso. The soloists are excellent vocally and stylistically, and deliver Milton's poetry with sympathetic sweetness: the clean-voiced Maria Keohane is a routinely lovely Penseroso (the middle section of 'Sweet bird' when she ecstatically describes walking 'unseen...to behold the wand'ring moon' is breathtaking), whereas Julia Doyle's affectionate lightness, Benjamin Hulett's amiable mellifluousness and Andreas Wolf's outgoing proclamations form a perfect trio of L'Allegro voices. Whether generating the giddy excitement of 'populous cities' or extolling the pleasure of 'calm, peace and quiet', evoking hunting hounds and horn 'echoing shrill' or

venerating the studious cloisters and 'pealing organ' of an ancient cathedral, Neumann achieves the most consistently convincing all-round interpretation of Handel's delectable ode yet recorded.

**David Vickers**

*Selected comparisons:*

*Gardiner (11/80<sup>8</sup>, 7/85<sup>8</sup>) (WARN) 2564 69620-8*

*King (10/99) (HYPE) CDA67283/4*

*Nelson (12/00) (VIRG) 545417-2*

**Handel**

**Serse**

**Anna Stéphany** *mez* ..... **Serse**  
**Rosemary Joshua** *sop* ..... **Romilda**  
**David Daniels** *countertenor* ..... **Arsamene**  
**Hilary Summers** *contr* ..... **Amastre**  
**Joëlle Harvey** *sop* ..... **Atalanta**  
**Andreas Wolf** *bass-bar* ..... **Elviro**  
**Brindley Sherratt** *bass* ..... **Ariodate**  
**Early Opera Company / Christian Curnyn**  
 Chandos Chaconne ™ © CHAN0797  
 (166' • DDD • S/T/I)



'One of the worst that Handel ever set to music', ran a contemporary verdict

on the libretto of *Serse*, whose 'mixture of tragic-comedy and buffoonery' fazed London audiences in 1738. History, of course, has had its revenge. Today the very qualities that puzzled its original hearers – the lightly ironic, occasionally farcical tone, the fluid structure (many short ariosos, relatively few full-dress *da capo* arias) – have made *Serse* one of Handel's most attractive operas for stage directors and audiences alike. There are episodes of high seriousness, above all in the magnificent sequence of Act 2 arias beginning with *Serse's aria di bravura* 'Se bramate'. But much of the invention has an airy melodiousness, whether in the dulcet