



A CHAMPION FOR DAVID:
Alan Curtis recorded after
conducting a stage production



HANDEL

Rodelinda
Simone Kermes,
Marijana Mijanović
Archiv 477 5391 (3 discs)
BBC Music Direct £29.99

'Of available recordings this set has the edge, for its greater dramatic urgency and richer characterisation'
Proms 2005



HANDEL

Admeto, re di Tessaglia
René Jacobs, James
Bowman, Jill Gomez
Virgin Veritas 5613692
BBC Music Direct £22.99

'Recitative is lively, vocal decorations sound spontaneous, period instruments are played with zest and polish'
August 1998



HANDEL

Rodrigo
Gloria Banditelli,
Sandrine Piau
Virgin 545 8972
BBC Music Direct £19.99

'Under Curtis's lively direction, the dramatic tension builds up splendidly'
August 1999

Q&A ALAN CURTIS

DANIEL JAFFÉ talks to the conductor about bringing *David* to dramatic life

I understand that you were inspired to look at Conti's *David* by a reference in a musical book.

Well many years ago I saw a citation by the musicologist, Arnold Schering, of this recitative and aria sung by Saul, and it looked to me like a really astonishing piece. It depicts fury and madness in a very original way, in a way uncommon in Baroque music. And the rest of the piece, although more conventional, is still very original. I've come to know quite a bit more music by Conti since then, and I still think it's probably his masterpiece. It also has a very good libretto. The dialogue is really quite realistic and it gets to the essence of the story in a very concentrated way.

It feels like an intimate version of the story Handel set as *Saul*. Are there illuminating parallels between these two works? I actually think Handel got the idea of doing his oratorio *Saul* through his admiration of

Conti's *David*, just as it seems likely he was inspired by his friend, Domenico Scarlatti's opera *Tolomeo* for his opera on that subject. But although there are many parallels between those works, Handel chose not to borrow from them – unlike with so many other works – partly because he respected what they were; whereas a lot of things he did borrow were ideas from composers that were very much inferior to him, but he could see potential in those ideas that the originator couldn't see.

In 2003 you staged a costumed performance of *David* in Florence. Do you see this, then, as a quasi-operatic work? It's called an 'Azione sacra': the word 'action' implies staging or movement at least. I think certainly this oratorio is much more dramatic than most, and with strong personalities that could be taken in a very dramatic way in an operatic context. It's an 'Azione sacra' that deserves to be staged.



VIVALDI

Motezuma
Vito Priante,
Marijana Mijanović
Archiv 477 5596 (3 discs)
BBC Music Direct £24.99

'Il Complesso Barocco is on excellent form as indeed is Vivaldi himself in a rewarding score'
April 2006

to describe music taming 'anger', if not 'vipers and serpents'.

Furio Zanasi as Saul is outstanding. Long before his wild 'Scena', his first aria is already highly charged with leaps beyond an octave and wildly varying tempos, casting doubts on his sanity as jealousy overcomes him. If sheer passion sometimes distorts intonation, it's a gamble worth taking. He's powerfully characterised and vocally magnificent, thrilling but controlled in his ferocious anger – huge leaps of 'giant steps' and upward runs to 'scale heights' are splendidly done.

When Curtis first revived *David* in Florence, it was staged with costumes, scenery and action. Though this 'staged' conception might have gained from recording with surround-sound perspective, sound quality is excellent – spacious and with thoughtful placing of characters across the spectrum. Quite simply, a revelation.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SOUND ★★★★★