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CORO

§ The Sixteen Edition

Samson

George Frideric Handel

The Sixteen

The Symphony of Harmony and Invention

HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

THOMAS RANDLE

MARK PADMORE

LYNDA RUSSELL

LYNNE DAWSON

CATHERINE WYN-ROGERS

MICHAEL GEORGE

JONATHAN BEST

§ The Sixteen

SAMSON

An Oratorio in 3 Acts by
GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL
(1685 - 1759)

The Sixteen

The Symphony of Harmony
and Invention

Harry Christophers

SOLOISTS

Samson
Thomas Randle *(tenor)*

Israelite man, Philistine man
Mark Padmore *(tenor)*

Dalila
Lynda Russell *(soprano)*

Israelite woman, Philistine woman, Virgin
Lynne Dawson *(soprano)*

Micah
Catherine Wyn-Rogers *(alto)*

Messenger
Matthew Vine *(tenor)*

Manoa
Michael George *(bass)*

Harapha
Jonathan Best *(bass)*

For many years Handel's Samson was every British choral society's antidote to Messiah. However, over the past two or three decades it has been neglected, probably for no other reason than sheer cost. I hope that our performances and this recording rectify that neglect.

From its first performance in 1742, Samson was an immediate success; indeed the ever-cynical Horace Walpole said, "Handel has set up an oratorio against the operas and succeeds." For me, it is simply one of the most complete works by this great man, for he responds to an exquisite libretto with a score full of elaborate instrumental colouring and sumptuous vocal writing. One of the most outstanding aspects of the work is that Handel composed it within a month of completing Messiah. Two masterpieces in quick succession is some feat.

Samson opens with a festival and closes with an elegy. Its finale is rightly established as one of the most famous arias of all time: "Let the bright Seraphim in burning row/Their loud, uplifted angel-trumpets blow."

Harry Christophers

G.F. HANDEL (1685-1759)
SAMSON

In 1739 at least two Miltonic projects were urged upon Handel by a circle of wealthy supporters including Jennens, the philosopher James Harris and the 4th Earl of Shaftesbury. One was a setting of lines chosen from the two contrasted poems L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, an idea first proposed by Harris and further worked on by Jennens, who added a concluding section of his own (Il Moderato)at Handel's request. The other was Samson, the seed of which seems to have been sown at a gathering in Lord Shaftesbury's London home on 23 November 1739. On the following day Shaftesbury reported to Harris (in a letter recently discovered in the Earl of Malmesbury's archive):

"*I never spent an evening more to my satisfaction than I did the last. Jemmy Noel read through the whole poem of Sampson Agonistes and whenever he rested to take breath Mr Handel (who was highly pleas'd with the Piece) played I really think better than ever, & his Harmony was perfectly adapted to the Sublimity of the Poem.*"

Clearly Milton's Samson Agonistes made a profound impression on Handel, but he may however have been wary of taking on another tragic subject so soon after Saul.

Nevertheless Handel in the season of 1740-41 returned once more to Italian opera, but with disastrous results: the new operas (Imeneo and Deidamia) achieved only five performances all together. He composed Messiah between 22 August and 14 September 1741, and immediately went on to compose most of Samson, finishing on 29 October. The score (for his normal orchestral forces) was not then complete, however, indicating that he did not expect to perform it until he returned to London from Dublin. This was indeed the case: he took up the score again in the autumn of 1742, revising and completing it by 12 October. The oratorio was first performed at Covent Garden Theatre on 18 February 1743, with John Beard as Samson, Susannah Cibber (fresh from success in Handel's Dublin concerts) as Micah and the comedy actress Kitty Clive as Dalila. It had remarkable success with seven further performances being given.

Milton's poem was suited to treatment in oratorio form as much by its form as its subject. It is written as a tragic drama, though Milton never intended it for the stage, and covers the last day in the life of the great Hebrew warrior, tricked by the Philistine woman Dalila (Samson's wife, in Milton's version) into giving away the secret of his strength, and now the blinded prisoner of the Philistines, held in chains in a public square in Gaza. The action consists of various confrontations

between Samson, his Israelite supporters (including his father Manoa) and his enemies, including the seductive Dalila and the arrogant champion Harapha. Following the precedent of ancient Greek drama, the climax - Samson's destruction of temple of the Philistine - takes place off-stage and is related by a messenger. The task of adapting the lengthy poem for musical setting was given to Newburgh Hamilton, who had helped Handel with Alexander's Feast.

The static nature of the action was no inhibition to Handel, for whom the depiction of character and the expression of feeling were the most important considerations. A particular asset was the presence of the peoples of the two nations, giving him excellent opportunity to portray them in contrasting styles of choral music. The Philistines appear consistently as a hedonistic race: their music has been an exuberant quality, often exploiting dance rhythms and coloured by horns and trumpets. A more exalted style, often contrapuntal and looking back to older ecclesiastical forms, is reserved for the Israelites, though they too get their trumpets in the optimistic final chorus, CD3 (22). Both groups are pitted against each other to great effect at the end of Act 2, CD2 (28).

There are similar, though more personalised, contrasts between the individual characters. Samson, whether in resigned or angry mood, always maintains an heroic dignity. His aria 'Total eclipse', CD1 (14), reflecting on his blindness, had special poignancy for Handel and his audiences in revivals of the oratorio after 1753, when the composer himself had become blind. The feelings of Manoa are also well caught, especially in his deceptively simple yet most touching final aria, 'How willing my paternal love', CD3 (12). Dalila is a delicious and memorable portrait of the well-practised seducer; Harapha's famous aria 'Honour and arms' neatly encapsulates the cowardly braggart, CD2 (18). The role of Micah, male in name but written for female voice, is mostly created from the anonymous 'Chorus' in Milton's poem, and is thus less well-defined as a character. Nevertheless, he has one of Handel's most noble solos in 'Return, oh God of hosts', CD2 (4), powerfully extended by the entry of the chorus at the point where a conventional da capo repeat might be expected. The fine integration of solo, choral and orchestral music in the lament for Samson's death (incorporating a version of the Dead March in Saul, Handel having abandoned his first idea of a march with trombones) is also impressive and movingly sustains the elegiac mood, CD3 (16).

Samson was one of Handel's most popular oratorios and he often made changes to it in its many revivals. Even during its first run it was thought too long, with the result that cuts were made both before and shortly after the first performance, particularly in the recitatives. For the present recording the original 1743 text has mostly been restored, and a previously unrecorded choral

setting of 'Let the bright seraphim' has been included in Act 3, CD3 (22). This appears among the fragments of Handel's autographs preserved in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, and though only four bars long is not a sketch, but a fully-scored passage ending on a half-close. No indication of its context is given, but it can only have been intended as a link between the second section of the aria 'Let the bright seraphim' and the following chorus, substituting for the expected da capo repeat, and takes that position here.

Anthony Hicks

THE SIXTEEN

Soprano
Ruth Dean, Carys Lane, Helen Groves
Carolyn Sampson, Rebecca Outram, Katie Pringle

Alto
Christopher Royall, Michael Lees,
Philip Newton, Andrew Giles

Tenor
Simon Berridge, Matthew Vine, David Roy
Andrew Carwood, Philip Cave, Simon Davies

Bass
Simon Birchall, Robert Evans
Timothy Jones, Michael McCarthy

Violin
David Woodcock (leader), Walter Reiter,
Claire Sansom, Stephen Jones, Theresa Caudle,
William Thorp, Fiona Huggett, Stefanie Heichelheim,
Pauline Smith, Miranda Fulleylove, Peter Lissauer

Viola
David Brooker, Nicola Akeroyd

Cello
Jane Coe, Helen Verney, Susan Sheppard

Bass
Peter Buckoke, Cecelia Bruggemeyer

Theorbo
Robin Jeffrey

Harpichord
Laurence Cummings

Organ
Paul Nicholson

Flute
Rachel Beckett, Uta Ikeda

Oboe
Anthony Robson, Cherry Forbes,
Gail Hennessey

Bassoon
Christopher Robson, Frances Eustace

Horn
Roger Montgomery, Martin Lawrence

Trumpet
Crispian Steele-Perkins, David Blackadder,
Robert Farley

Timpani
Benedict Hoffnung

THE SYMPHONY OF HARMONY
AND INVENTION

HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

CD1 ACT ONE

SCENE 1

Before the prison in Gaza

1 1 OVERTURE
Andante - Adagio - Allegro - Menuetto

Samson, blind and in chains. Chorus of the Priests of Dagon, celebrating his festival.

2 2 RECITATIVE: SAMSON
This day, a solemn feast to Dagon held,
Relieves me from my task of servile toil;
Unwillingly their superstition yields
This rest, to breathe heaven's air, fresh
blowing, pure and sweet.

3 3 CHORUS OF PHILISTINES
Awake the trumpet's lofty sound!
The joyful sacred festival comes round,
When Dagon king of all the earth is crown'd

4 4 AIR: PHILISTINE WOMAN
Ye men of Gaza, hither bring
The merry pipe and pleasing string,
The solemn hymn, and cheerful song:
Be Dagon prais'd by ev'ry tongue!

5 5 CHORUS OF PHILISTINES
Awake the trumpet's lofty sound!
The joyful sacred festival comes round,
When Dagon king of all the earth is crown'd.

6 6 AIR: PHILISTINE MAN
Loud as the thunder's awful voice,
In notes of triumph, notes of praise,
So high great Dagon's name we'll raise
That heav'n and earth may hear how we rejoice!

7 7 AIR: PHILISTINE WOMAN
Then free from sorrow, free from thrall,
All blithe and gay, with sports and play,
We'll celebrate his festival.

8 5 CHORUS OF PHILISTINES
Awake the trumpet's lofty sound!
The joyful sacred festival comes round,
When Dagon king of all the earth is crown'd.

9 8 RECITATIVE: SAMSON
Why by an angel was my birth foretold,
As in a fiery column ascending
From off the altar, in my parent's sight?
Why was my nurture order'd and prescrib'd,
As of a person, separate to God,
If I must die, betray'd and captiv'd thus,
The scorn and gaze of foes? Oh cruel thought!
My griefs find no redress! They inward prey,
Like gangren'd wounds, immedicable grown.

10 9 AIR: SAMSON
Torments alas! are not confin'd
To heart or head or breast!
But will a secret passage find
Into the very inmost mind,
With pains intense opprest,
That rob the soul itself of rest.

SCENE 2

Enter Micah and Israelites, observing Samson.

11 10 RECITATIVE: MICAH (APART)
O change beyond report, thought, or belief!
See, how he lies with languish'd head, unpropt,
Abandon'd, past all hope! Can this be he?
Heroic Samson? Whom no strength of man,
Nor fury of the fiercest beast, could quell!

Who tore the lion, as the lion tears the kid!
Ran weaponless on armies clad in iron,
Useless the temper'd steel, or frock of mail!

12 11 AIR: MICAH
O mirror of our fickle state!
In birth, in strength, in deeds how great!
From highest glory fall'n so low,
Sunk in the deep abyss of woe!

13 12 RECITATIVE
Samson (*apart*)
Whom have I to complain of but myself,
Who Heaven's great trust could not in silence keep,
But weakly to a woman must reveal it!
Oh glorious strength! Oh impotence of mind!
But without wisdom, what does strength avail?
Proudly secure, yet liable to fall?
God (when he gave it) hung it in my hair,
To show how slight the gift.
But, peace, my soul!
Strength was my bane, the source of all my woes,
Each told apart, would ask a life to wail.

Micah (*to Samson*)
Matchless in might! Once Israel's glory,
now her grief!
We come, (thy friends well known) to visit thee!

Samson
Welcome, my friends! Experience teaches now,
How counterfeit the coin of friendship is,
That's only in the superscription shown.
In the warm sunshine of our prosp'rous days,
Friends swarm; but in the winter of adversity,
Draw in their heads: though sought, not to be
found.

Micah
Which shall we first bewail, thy bondage,
or lost sight?

Samson
Oh loss of sight! Of thee I most complain!
Oh worse than beggary, old age, or chains!
My very soul in real darkness dwells!

14 13A AIR: SAMSON
Total eclipse! No sun, no moon,
All dark amidst the blaze of noon!
Oh glorious light! No cheering ray,
To glad my eyes with welcome day!
Why thus depriv'd Thy prime decree?
Sun, moon, and stars are dark to me!

15 13B RECITATIVE: MICAH
Since light so necessary is to life,
That in the soul 'tis almost life itself,
Why to the tender eye is sight confin'd,
So obvious and so easy to be quenched?
Why not, as feeling, through all parts diffus'd,
That we might look at will through ev'ry pore?

16 14 CHORUS OF ISRAELITES
Oh first created beam! And thou great word:
'Let there be light!'- and light was over all;
One heav'nly blaze shone round this earthly ball;
To thy dark servant, life, by light afford!

17 15 RECITATIVE
Samson
Ye see, my friends, how woes enclose me round:
But had I sight, how could I heave my head
For shame? Thus, for a word, or tear, divulge
To a false woman God's most secret gift,
And then be sung, or proverb'd for a fool!

Micah
The wisest men have err'd, and been deceiv'd
By female arts. Deject not then thyself,
Who hast of griefs a load: Yet men will ask,
Why did not Samson rather wed at home?
In his own tribe are fairer or as fair.

Samson
Oh that I had! Alas, fond wish, too late!
That specious monster, Dalila, my snare!
Myself the cause, who, vanquished by her tears,
Gave up my fort of silence to a woman.

Micah
Here comes thy rev'rend sire, old Manoa,
With careful steps, and locks as white as down.

Samson
Alas! Another grief that name awakes.

SCENE 3

Enter Manoa

18 16 RECITATIVE

Manoa
Brethren and men of Dan, say, where is my son,
Samson, fond Israel's boast? inform my age!

Micah
As signal now in low dejected state,
As in the height of pow'r - see where he lies!

19 17 RECITATIVE: MANOA
Oh miserable change! Is this the man,
Renown'd afar, the dread of Israel's foes?
Who with an angel's strength their armies duell'd,
Himself an army! - Now unequal match
To guard his breast against the coward's spear!

20 18 RECITATIVE: ISRAELITE MAN
Oh ever failing trust in mortal strength!
And oh, what not deceivable and vain in man!

21 19 AIR: ISRAELITE MAN
God of our fathers, what is man?
So proud, so vain, so great in story!
His fame a blast, his life a span,
A bubble at the height of glory!
Oft he that is exalted high,
Unseemly falls in human eye.

22 20 RECITATIVE: MANOA
The good we wish for, often proves our bane.
I pray'd for children, and I gain'd a son,
And such a son, as all men hail'd me happy;
But who'd be now a father in my stead?
The blessing drew a scorpion's tail behind;
This plant (select and sacred for a while
The miracle of all) was in one hour
Ensnar'd, assaulted, overcome, led bound,
His foes' derision, captive, poor and blind!

23 21 AIR: MANOA
Thy glorious deeds inspir'd my tongue
Whilst airs of joy from thence did flow
To sorrow now I tune my song,
And set my harp to notes of woe.

24 22 RECITATIVE: SAMSON
Justly these evils have befall'n thy son;
Sole author I, sole cause, who have profan'd
The mysteries of God; by me betray'd
To faithless parlies, feminine assaults!
To the false fair I yielded all my heart;
So far effeminacy held me yok'd
Her slave. Oh foul indignity! Oh blot
To honour and to arms!

Manoa
Worse yet remains:
This day they celebrate with pomps and sports,
And sacrifice to Dagon, idol God!
Who gave thee bound and blind into
their hands:
Thus is he magnified; the living God
Blasphem'd and scorn'd by that
idolatrous rout.

Samson
This have I done, this pomp, this honour brought
To idol Dagon; but to Israel shame, and
our true God disgrace.

25 23 RECITATIVE: SAMSON
My griefs for this
Forbid mine eye to close, or thoughts of rest.
But now the strife shall end: me overthrown,
Dagon presumes to enter lists with God,
Who, thus provok'd, will not connive, but rouse
His fury soon, and his great name assert;
Dagon shall stoop, ere long be quite despoil'd
Of all those boasted trophies won on me.

26 24 AIR: SAMSON
Why does the God of Israel sleep?
Arise with dreadful sound;
And clouds encompass'd round!
Then shall the heathen hear thy thunder deep.
The tempest of thy wrath now raise,
In whirlwinds them pursue,
Full fraught with vengeance due,
Till shame and trouble all thy foes shall seize!

27 25 RECITATIVE: MICAH
There lies our hope! True prophet may'st thou be,
That God may vindicate his glorious name;
Nor let us doubt whether God is Lord, or Dagon.

28 26 CHORUS
Then shall they know, that he whose name
Jehovah is, alone
O'er all the earth but One
Was ever the most high, and still the same.

29 27 RECITATIVE

Manoa
For thee, my dearest son, must thou meanwhile
Lie, thus neglected, in this loathsome plight?

Samson
It should be so.
To expiate my crime, if possible.
Shameful garrulity! Had I revealed the
secret of a friend:
Most heinous that! But impiously to blab
God's counsel, is a sin without a name!

Manoa
Be for thy fault contrite, oh my son,
To high disposal leave the forfeit due.
God may relent and quit thee, all his debt:
Reject not then the offer'd means of life.
Already have I treated with some lords
To ransom thee. Revenge is sated now
To see thee thus who cannot harm them more.

Samson
Why should I live?
Soon shall these orbs to double darkness yield.

28 RECITATIVE: SAMSON
My genial spirits droop, my hopes are flat;
Nature in me seems weary of herself
My race of glory run, and race of shame;
Death, invocated oft, shall end my pains,
And lay me gently down with them that rest.

30 29 AIR: MICAH
Then long eternity shall greet your bliss
No more of earthly joys, so false and vain!
Joys that are pure, sincerely good
Shall then o'ertake you as a flood
Where truth and peace do ever shine
With love that's perfectly divine.

31 30 CHORUS OF ISRAELITES
Then round about the starry throne
Of Him who ever rules alone,
Your heav'nly-guided soul shall climb:
Of all this earthly grossness quit,
With glory crown'd for ever sit,
And triumph over Death, and thee, oh time!

CD2 ACT TWO

The same scene. Samson, Manoa, Micah and Israelites.

1 31 RECITATIVE
Manoa
Despair not thus! You once were God's delight,
His destin'd from the womb
By him led on to deeds above the nerve of mortal arm;
Under his eye, abstemious you grew up,
Nor did the dancing ruby, outpour'd,
allure you from the cool crystalline stream.

Samson
Where'er the liquid brook or fountain
flow'd, I drank,
Nor envy'd man the cheering grape;
But what availed this temp'rance, not complete
Against another object more enticing?
I laid my strength in lust's lascivious lap.

Manoa
Trust yet in God! Thy father's timely care
Shall prosecute the means to free thee hence,
Meantime, all healing words from these,
thy friends, admit.

2 32 AIR: MANOA
Just are the ways of God to man,
Let none his secret actions scan;
Far all is best though oft we doubt,
Of what his wisdom brings about.
Still his unsearchable dispose
Blesses the righteous in the close.

3 33 RECITATIVE
Samson
My evils hopeless are! One pray'r remains:
A speedy death, to close my miseries.

Micah
Relieve thy champion, image of thy strength,
And turn his labours to a peaceful end!

4 34 AIR: MICAH
Return, oh God of hosts! Behold
Thy servant in distress!
His mighty griefs redress
Nor by the heathen be it told.

35 CHORUS AND MICAH
To dust his glory they would tread,
And number him amongst the dead.

SCENE 2

Samson, Micah. Enter Dalila, attended by her virgins.

5 36 RECITATIVE
Micah
But who is this, that so bedeck'd and gay
Comes this way sailing like a stately ship?
With all her streamers waving in the winds,
An odorous perfume her harbinger,
A damsel train behind? 'Tis Dalila, thy wife.

Samsom
My wife? My traitress! Let her not come near me!

Micah
She stands, and eyes thee fix'd with head decli'd
(Like a fair flow'r surcharg'd with dew) she weeps
Her words address'd to thee, seem tears dissolv'd
Wetting the borders of her silken veil.

Dalila
With doubtful feet, and wav'ring resolution,
I come, Oh Samson!, dreading thy displeasure
But conjugal affection led me on,
Prevailing over fear and tim'rous doubt;
Glad if in ought my help or love could serve,
To expiate my rash, unthought misdeed.

Samson
Out thou hyaena! 'Twas malice brought thee here!
These are the arts of women false like thee,
To break all vows, repent, deceive, submit,
Then with instructed skill again transgress.
The wisest men have met such bosom snakes,
Beguil'd like me, to ages an example.

Dalila
I would not lessen my offence, yet beg
To weigh it by itself. What is it then
But curiosity? A small female fault -
Greedy of secrets, but to publish them.
Why would you trust a woman's frailty then,
And to her importunity your strength!
A mutual weakness mutual pardon claims.

Samson
How cunningly the sorceress displays
Her own transgressions, to upbraid me mine!
I to myself was false, ere thou to me:
Bitter reproach, but true. The pardon, then
I to my folly give, take thou to thine!

6 37 AIR: DALILA
With plaintive notes and am'rous moan,
Thus coos the turtle left alone.
Like me, averse to each delight,
She wears the tedious widow'd night.
But when her absent mate returns
With doubled raptures then she burns.

7 38 RECITATIVE
Dalila
Alas! Th'event was worse than I foresaw;
Fearless at home of partners in my love,
'Twas jealousy did prompt to keep you there
Both day and night, love's prisoner, wholly mine.

Samson
Did love constrain thee? No! 'Twas raging lust!
Love seeks for love; thy treason sought my hate.
In vain you strive to cover shame with shame;
Once joined to me, though judged your country's foe,
Parents and all, were in the husband lost.

8 39 AIR: SAMSON
Your charms to ruin led the way,
My sense deprav'd, my strength enslav'd;
As I did love, you did betray.
How great the curse! How hard my fate
To pass life's sea with such a mate!

9 40 RECITATIVE: DALILA
Forgive what's done, nor think of what's past cure.
From forth this prison-house come home to me
Where with redoubled love and nursing care,
(To me glad office!) my virgins and myself
Shall tend about thee to extremest age.

10 41 DUET: DALILA AND VIRGIN
My faith and truth, oh Samson, prove,
But hear me, hear the voice of love!
With love no mortal can be cloy'd,
All happiness is love enjoy'd.

42 CHORUS OF VIRGINS
Her faith and truth, oh Samson, prove,
But hear her, hear the voice of love!

11 43 AIR: DALILA
To fleeting pleasures make your court,
No moment lose, for life is short!
The present now's our only time,
The missing that our only crime.

42 CHORUS OF VIRGINS
Her faith and truth, oh Samson, prove,
But hear her, hear the voice of love!

43 AIR: DALILA
How charming is domestic ease!
A thousand ways I'll strive to please.
Life is not lost, though lost your sight;
Let other senses taste delight.

42 CHORUS OF VIRGINS
Her faith and truth, oh Samson, prove,
But hear her, hear the voice of love!

12 44 RECITATIVE
Samson
Ne'er think of that! I know thy warbling charms
Thy trains, thy wiles, and fair enchanted cup:
Their force is null'd; where once I have been caught,
I shun the snare; these chains, this prison-house,
I count the house of liberty to thine.

Dalila
Let me approach, at least, and touch thy hand.

Samson
Not for thy life, lest fierce remembrance wake
My sudden rage to tear thee limb from limb.
At distance I forgive: depart with that.
Now triumph in thy falsehood, so farewell!

Dalila
Thou art more deaf to pray'rs than winds or seas;
Thy anger rages an eternal tempest.
Why should I humbly sue for peace, thus scorn'd,
With infamy upon my name denounc'd?
When in this land I ever shall be held
The first of womankind, living or dead;
My praises shall be sung at solemn feasts,
Who sav'd my country from a fierce destroyer.

13 45 DUET
Dalila
Traitor to love! I'll sue no more
For pardon scorn'd, your threats give o'er!

Samson
Traitress to love! I'll hear no more
The charmer's voice, your arts give o'er!

SCENE 3

46 RECITATIVE
Micah
She's gone ! A serpent manifest; her sting
Discover'd in the end.

Samson
So let her go!
God sent her here to aggravate my folly.

14 47 AIR: MICAH
It is not virtue, valour, wit,
Or comeliness of grace,
That woman's love can truly hit,
Or in her heart claim place;
Still wav'ring where their choice to fix,
Too oft they choose the wrong:
So much self-love does rule the sex,
They nothing else love long.

15 48 RECITATIVE: SAMSON
Favour'd of Heaven is he, who finds one true,
How rarely found! - his way to peace is smooth.

16 49 CHORUS
To man God's universal law
Gave power to keep the wife in awe,
Thus shall his life be ne'er dismay'd,
By female usurpation sway'd.

SCENE 4

17 50 RECITATIVE
Micah
No words of peace, no voice enchanting fear,
A rougher tongue expect; here's Harapha,
I know him by his stride and haughty look.
Enter Harapha and Philistines

Harapha
I come not, Samson, to condole thy chance;
I am of Gath, men call me Harapha:
Thou know'st me now. Of thy prodigious might
Much have I heard, incredible to me!
Nor less displeas'd that never in the field
We met, to try each other's deeds of strength:
I'd see if thy appearance answers loud report.

Samson
The way to know, were not to see, but taste

Harapha
Ha! Dost thou then already single me?
I thought that labour and thy chains had tam'd
thee.
Had fortune brought me to that field of death,
Where thou wrought'st wonders with an ass's jaw,
I'd left thy carcass where the ass lay thrown.

Samson
Boast not of what thou would'st have done, but do.

Harapha
The honour certain to have won from thee
I lose, prevented by thy eyes put out;
To combat with a blind man, I disdain.

18 51 AIR: HARAPHA
Honour and arms scorn such a foe
Though I could end thee at a blow;
Poor victory, to conquer thee,
Or glory in thy overthrow!
Vanquish a slave that is half slain?
So mean a triumph I disdain.

19 52 RECITATIVE: SAMSON
Put on your arms,
Then take for spear your weighty
weaver's beam,
And come within my reach!

20 53 AIR: SAMSON
My strength is from the living God
By Heav'n free-gifted at my birth,
To quell the mighty of the earth
And prove the brutal tyrant's rod;
But to the righteous peace and rest,
With liberty to all opprest.

21 54 RECITATIVE
Harapha
With thee! A man condemn'd, a slave enroll'd,
No worthy match to stain the warrior's sword!
Samson
Cam'st thou for this, vain boaster? Yet take heed!
My heels are fetter'd but my hands are free.
Thou bulk, of spirit void! I once again,
Blind and in chains, provoke thee to the fight!
Harapha
Oh Dagon! Can I hear this insolence,
To me unus'd, not rend'ring instant death?

22 55 DUET
Samson
Go, baffled coward, go,
Lest vengeance lay thee low,
In safety fly my wrath with speed!
Harapha
Presume not on thy God,
Who under foot has trod
Thy strength and thee, at greatest need.

23 56 RECITATIVE: MICAH
Here lie the proof: if Dagon be thy God,
With high devotion invocate his aid;
His glory is concern'd. Let him dissolve
Those magic spells that gave our hero strength
Then know whose God is God; Dagon,
of mortal make,
Or that Great One whom Abram's sons adore.

24 57 CHORUS OF ISRAELITES
Hear, Jacob's God, Jehovah, hear!
Oh save us, prostrate at thy throne!
Israel depends on thee alone,
Save us, and show that thou art near!

25 58 RECITATIVE: HARAPHA
Dagon, arise! Attend thy sacred feast!
Thy honour calls, this day admits no rest.

26 59A AIR: PHILISTINE MAN
To song and dance we give the day,
Which shows thy universal sway.
Protect us by thy mighty hand,
And sweep this race from out the land!

27 59B CHORUS OF PHILISTINES
To song and dance we give the day,
Which shows thy universal sway.
Protect us by thy mighty hand,
And sweep this race from out the land!

28 60 CHORUS OF ISRAELITES
AND VIRGINS,
Dalila, Samson, Harapha and Manoa
Fix'd in his everlasting seat,
Jehovah/Great Dagon rules the world in state.
His thunder roars, heav'n shakes and earth is aghast;
The stars with deep amaze,
Remain in steadfast gaze
Jehovah/Great Dagon is of Gods the first and last.

CD3 ACT THREE

Samson, Micah, Harapha and the Chorus of Israelites.

1 61 RECITATIVE
Micah
More trouble is behind; for Harapha
Comes on again, speed in his steps and look.
Samson
I fear him not, nor all his giant brood.
Enter Harapha
Harapha
Samson, to thee our Lords thus bid me say:
This day to Dagon we do sacrifice
With triumph, pomp, and games: we
know, thy strength
Surpasses human race: come then, and show
Some public proof to grace this solemn feast.
Samson
I am Hebrew, and our law forbids
My presence at their vain religious rites.
Harapha
This answer will offend; regard thyself.
Samson
Myself! My conscience and internal peace!
Am I so broke with servitude, to yield
To such absurd commands? To be their fool,
And play before their God? I will not come.
Harapha
My message, given with speed, brooks no delay.

2 62 AIR: HARAPHA
Presuming slave, to move their wrath
For mercy sue,
Or vengeance due
Dooms in one fatal word thy death.
Consider, ere it be too late,
To ward th'unerring shaft of fate.

3 63 RECITATIVE
Micah
Reflect then, Samson, matters now are strain'd
Up to the height, whether to hold, or break.
He's gone, whose malice may inflame the Lords.
Samson
Shall I abuse this consecrated gift
Of strength, again returning with my hair,
By vaunting it in honour to their God,
And prostituting holy things to idols?
Micah
How thou wilt here come off surmounts my reach;
'Tis Heaven alone can save both us and thee.

4 64 CHORUS OF ISRAELITES
With thunder arm'd great God, arise!
Help Lord, or Israel's champion dies!
To thy protection this thy servant take,
And save, oh save us for thy servant's sake!

5 65 RECITATIVE
Samson
Be of good courage; I begin to feel
Some inward motions, which do bid me go.
Micah
In time thou hast resolv'd; again he comes.
Enter Harapha

Harapha
Samson, this second summons send our Lords,
Art thou our captive, slave and public drudge,
Yet dare dispute thy coming when we send?
Haste thee at once; or we shall engines find
To move thee, though thou wert a solid rock.

Samson
Vain were their art if tried; I yield to go,
Not through your streets be like a wild
beast trail'd.

Harapha
You thus may win the Lords to set you free.

Samson
In nothing I'll comply that's scandalous
Or sinful by our law. Brethren, farewell!
Your kind attendance now, I pray, forbear,
Lest it offend to see me girt with friends.
Expect of me you'll nothing hear impure,
Unworthy God, my nation, or myself.

Micah
So may'st thou act as serves his glory best.

Samson
Let but that spirit (which first rush'd on me
In the camp of Dan) inspire me at my need;
Then shall I make Jehovah's glory known
Their idol gods shall from his presence fly,
Scatter'd like sheep before the God of Hosts.

6 66 AIR: SAMSON
Thus when the sun from's wat'ry bed,
All curtain'd with a cloudy red,
Pillows his chin upon an orient wave;
The wand'ring shadows ghastly pale,
All troop to their infernal jail,
Each fetter'd ghost slips to his sev'ral grave.

7 67 RECITATIVE: MICAH
With might endued above the sons of men,
Swift the lightning's glance His errand execute,
And spread His name amongst the
heathen round!

8 68 AIR: MICAH
The Holy One of Israel be thy guide,
The Angel of thy birth stand by thy side!
To fame immortal go,
Heav'n bids thee strike the blow.
The holy one of Israel is thy guide.

69 CHORUS OF ISRAELITES
To fame immortal go,
Heav'n bids thee strike the blow.
The holy one of Israel is thy guide.

SCENE 2
Micah, Manoa and Chorus of Israelites.

9 70 RECITATIVE
Micah
Old Manoa, with youthful steps, makes haste
To find his son, or bring us some glad news.

Manoa
I come, my brethren, not to seek my son,
Who at the feast does play before the Lords;
But give you part with me, what hopes I have
To work his liberty.

10 71 AIR: PHILISTINE MAN
(at a distance)
Great Dagon has subdued our foe
And brought their boasted hero low,
Sound out his pow'r in notes divine,
Praise him with mirth, high cheer and wine!

72 CHORUS OF PHILISTINES
(at a distance)
Great Dagon has subdued our foe
And brought their boasted hero low,
Sound out his pow'r in notes divine,
Praise him with mirth, high cheer and wine!

11 73 RECITATIVE
Manoa
What noise of joy was that? It tore the sky.

Micah
They shout and sing, to see their dreaded foe
Now captive, blind, delighting with his strength.

Manoa
Could my inheritance but ransom him,
Without my patrimony having him
The richest of the tribe.

Micah
Sons care to nurse
Their parents in old age; but you - your son!

12 74 AIR: MANOA
How willing my paternal love
The weight to share
Of filial care,
And part of sorrow's burden prove!
Though wand'ring in the shades of night,
Whilst I have eyes he wants no light.

13 75 RECITATIVE
Micah
Your hopes of his deliv'ry seem not vain,
In which all Israel's friends participate.

Manoa
I know your friendly minds, and…

76 SINFONIA
A symphony of horror and confusion

77 RECITATIVE: MANOA
Heav'n! What noise!
Horribly loud, unlike the former shout.

78 CHORUS OF PHILISTINES
(at a distance)
Hear us, our God! Oh hear our cry!
Death! Ruin! Fall'n! No help is nigh,
Oh, mercy, Heav'n we sink, we die!

14 79 RECITATIVE
Micah
Noise call you this? An universal groan,
As if the world's inhabitation perish'd!
Blood, death and ruin, at their utmost point!

Manoa
Ruin indeed! Oh! They have slain my son!

Micah
Thy son is rather slaying them; that cry
From slaughter of one foe could not ascend.
But see, my friends,
One hither speeds, an Hebrew of our tribe.

SCENE 3
Enter a Messenger, an Israelite officer.

15 80 RECITATIVE
Messenger
Where shall I run, or which way fly the thoughts
Of this most horrid sight? Oh countrymen!
You're in this sad event too much concern'd.
Micah
The accident was loud, we long to know from whence.

Messenger
Let me recover breath; it will burst forth.
Manoa
Tell us the sum, the circumstance defer.
Messenger
Gaza yet stands, but all her sons are fall'n.
Manoa
Sad! Not to us: but now relate by whom.
Messenger
By Samson done.
Manoa
The sorrow lessens still,
And nigh converts to joy.
Messenger
Oh Manoa!
In vain I would refrain: the evil tale
Too soon will rudely pierce thy aged ear.
Manoa
Suspense in news is torture! speak them out.
Messenger
Then take the worst in brief - Samson is dead.
Manoa
The worst indeed! My hopes to free him hence
Are blasted all, but death, who sets all free,
Hath paid his ransom now.
Micah
Yet, ere we give the reins to grief, say first:
How died he? Death to life is crown, or shame.
Messenger
Unwounded of his enemies he fell,
At once he did destroy, and was destroyed.
The edifice, where all were met to see,
Upon their heads, and on his own he pulled.
Manoa
O lastly over-strong against thyself!
A dreadful way thou took'st to thy revenge:
Glorious, yet dearly bought!

Micah
In life and death, thou hast fulfill'd the
work for which foretold:
And now thou liest victorious, though self-kill'd,
Triumphant o'er a heap of slaughter'd foes,
More than thy life has slain. Let Israel now
The voice of lamentation raise and sing
A parting requiem to this honour'd soul.

16 81 AIR: MICAH
Ye sons of Israel, now lament;
Your spear is broke, your bow's unbent,
Your glory's fled!
Amongst the dead great Samson lies!
Forever, ever, closed his eyes.

82 CHORUS OF ISRAELITES
Weep Israel, weep a louder strain;
Samson, your strength, your hero, is slain!

17 83 RECITATIVE: MANOA
Proceed we hence to find his body, soak'd
In vile Philistine blood; with the pure stream,
And cleansing herbs, wash off the clodded gore,
Then solemnly attend him to my tomb,
With silent obsequies and fun'ral train.

18 84 DEAD MARCH

19 85 RECITATIVE AND AIR
Micah
The body comes; we'll meet it on the way
With laurels evergreen and branching palm;
Then lay it in his monument, hung round
With all his trophies, and great acts enroll'd
In verse heroic, or sweet lyric song.

Manoa
There shall all Israel's valiant youth resort
And from his memory inflame their breasts
To matchless valour, whilst they sing his praise.
Enter Israelites with the body of Samson.
Glorious hero, may thy grave
Peace and honour ever have
After all thy pains and woes,
Rest eternal, sweet repose!

20 86 CHORUS OF ISRAELITES AND ISRAELITE
Man and Woman
Glorious Hero, may thy grave
Peace and honour ever have!
An Israelite Woman
The virgins too shall on their feastful days
Visit his tomb with flow'rs and there bewail
His lot unfortunate in nuptial choice.
Chorus of Virgins
Bring the laurels, bring the bays,
Strew his hearse, and strew the ways!
An Israelite Woman
May ev'ry hero fall like thee
Through sorrow to felicity.
Chorus of Virgins
Bring the laurels, bring the bays,
Strew his hearse, and strew the ways!
Chorus of Israelites
Glorious hero, may thy grave
Peace and honour ever have;
After all thy pains and woes,
Rest eternal, sweet repose!

21 87 RECITATIVE
Manoa
Come, come! No time for lamentation now
No cause for grief: Samson like Samson fell,
Both life and death heroic. To his foes
Ruin is left; to him eternal fame.
Micah
Why should we weep or wail, dispraise or blame
Where all is well and fair to quiet us?
Praise we Jehovah then, who to the end
Not parted from him, but assisted still,
Till desolation fill'd Philistia's land,
Honour and freedom giv'n to Jacob's seed.

22 88 AIR: ISRAELITE WOMAN
Let the bright Seraphim in burning row
Their loud, uplifted angel-trumpets blow.
Let the Cherubic host, in tuneful choirs
Touch their inmortal harps with golden wires.

89 CHORUS OF ISRAELITES
Let the bright Seraphim in burning row
Their loud, uplifted angel-trumpets blow.
Let their celestial concerts all unite,
Ever to sound his praise in endless blaze of light.

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