To find out more about The Sixteen, concert tours, and to buy CDs visit www.thesixteen.com

**Handel: Samson**
Randle, Padmore, Russell, Dawson, Wyn-Rogers, George, Best

"Powerful choral singing from The Sixteen and alert playing by the period-instrument band make this the most pleasurable Samson yet recorded."
THE SUNDAY TIMES (London)

**Handel: Messiah**
Sampson, Wyn-Rogers, Padmore, Purves

"What a winning combination: Handel's Messiah, the most popular oratorio ever written, sung by The Sixteen, the most richly sonorous of the early music choirs."
THE DAILY TELEGRAPH (London)

**Claudio Monteverdi**
Selva morale e spirituale Vol. II

"The approach of Harry Christophers is distinctive and revelatory, and he has surrounded the Mass by a well-chosen array of motets in praise of the Virgin Mary."
BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE

"These are some of the most spirited and individual performances of this repertory available."
BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE (on Vol. I)

**Palestrina – Volume 1**

The approach of Harry Christophers is distinctive and revelatory, and he has surrounded the Mass by a well-chosen array of motets in praise of the Virgin Mary.

BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE

"These are some of the most spirited and individual performances of this repertory available."

**Handel**
SAUL

Christopher Purves
Sarah Connolly
Robert Murray
Elizabeth Atherton
Joélle Harvey
Mark Dobell
Jeremy Budd
Stuart Young

The Sixteen
HARRY CHRISTOPHERS
Saul represents Handel’s first proper foray into oratorio. Opera in England had been replaced by this new genre but that did not deter Handel from preserving his sense of drama and his incredible insight into characters. He wanted to provoke thought and debate about moral issues and to inspire people through his music.

We recorded Saul in early January 2012, just over six weeks after we had performed it at the Barbican Hall in London. I recall a highly-charged performance which both audience and critics enthused at. There was a lovely comment by Neil Fisher in the Times: “if there was a whiff of nostalgia about this performance, it was because the star soloists, Christopher Purves and Sarah Connolly, once upon a time sang together in Christophers’ choir as bright young things”. I feel very proud that they were, at one time, part of The Sixteen and to think that today I have amongst the members of The Sixteen, such excellent singers as Mark Dobell, Jeremy Budd and Stuart Young who fulfil, so brilliantly, the roles of High Priest, Witch of Endor and Ghost of Samuel respectively.

One of the great attributes of Christopher Purves and Sarah Connolly is that they are text-led singers who inflect every word, every nuance and every mood. Chris’ almost Macbeth-like Saul and Sarah’s intensely radiant David are performances that the rest of us aim to aspire to. I have always impressed on my singers and instrumentalists that words are of the essence and that as a body of musicians we need to be constantly theatrical in our approach to Handel’s oratorios. The week we spent recording Saul was intense but so pleasurable. It was, quite simply, a privilege to witness Sarah’s rendition of ‘O Lord whose mercies numberless’ and Frances Kelly’s exquisite harp solo which followed, Chris’ spitting envy in ‘With rage I shall burst his praises to hear’, and then his portrayal of the tragic figure who accepts his wrong-doing but refuses to flee from the consequences in the dialogue which opens Act 3, ‘Wretch that I am’. There are so many great and magical moments – but Saul is great – it is full of exceptional music, extraordinary orchestration (replete with trombones, deep-sounding drum and perky carillon), extended choruses both profound and ebullient, symphonies, concerto movements for organ, recitatives which explore the varying moods of the characters, and the most stunning arias.

Our rendition would not have been possible without Anthony Hicks’ critical edition. Anthony was always the Handel scholar I called on for advice; sadly he died in 2010, and this is our tribute to his legacy. One of the conundrums of Saul, which he solved, is the part of David, usually said to be for counter-tenor, but Anthony was certain that it was written for the mezzo-soprano Marchesini, although it appears she was indisposed on the day of the first performance. Anthony wrote that: “She is named in the autograph as the soloist in ‘O fatal day’, where the vocal line reaches f#”. The assertion that the male singer called Russell who took over the role was a counter-tenor is based merely on the assumption that he sang the role at pitch; but there is no
independent testimony as to the nature of his voice, and his background as an actor/singer in ballad operas makes it likely he was an ordinary tenor who sung the part an octave down. In revivals, Handel returned the part to a mezzo-soprano.”

Rupert Christiansen in the *Daily Telegraph* wrote of our Barbican performance: “Sarah Connolly’s David is in a class of its own. Her wonderfully refined and sensitive singing, radiated with intense musicality and intelligence, made the aria ‘O Lord whose mercies numberless’ a profoundly moving meditation, which must stand as one of Handel’s most ardent professions of Christian faith.”

This recording is based, by permission of the Trustees of the Handel Institute, on the edition of *Saul* made by the late Anthony Hicks.

Supported by an investment from The Sixteen Saul Recording Partnership with thanks to Ed Byers, Henry Doyle, Robert Gray, Simon Haslam, Mark Loveday, Roger Mayhew, Lionel Persey, Marquess of Salisbury, Adam Singer, and Information Engineering Technology Ltd.
SAUL,
AN ORATORIO;
OR,
SACRED DRAMA.
As it is Performed
At the King's Theatre in the Hay-Market.

Set to Musick by George-Frederic Handel, Esq.

LONDON:

Precio One Shilling.

Handel SAUL

CD1: ACT ONE

1. Overture

SCENE 1  An Epinicion or Song of Triumph, for the victory over Goliath and the Philistines.
2. Chorus of Israelites  How excellent Thy name
3. Air Merab  An infant rais'd
4. Chorus  Along the monster
5. Chorus of Israelites  The youth inspir'd
6. Chorus of Israelites  How excellent Thy name
7. Chorus of Israelites  Hallelujah!

SCENE 2
8. Recitative Michal  He comes, he comes!
9. Air Michal  O godlike youth
10. Recitative Abner, Saul, David  Behold, O king
11. Air David  O king, your favours
12. Recitative Jonathan  Oh, early piety!
13. Air Merab  What abject thoughts
14. Recitative Merab  Yet think on whom this honour
15. Air Jonathan  Birth and fortune I despise!
16. Recitative High Priest  Go on, illustrious pair!
17. Air High Priest  While yet thy tide
18. Recitative Saul, Merab  Thou, Merab, first in birth
19. Air Merab, Michal  My soul rejects
20. Sinfonia

Handel 11.55
SCENE 3
2 Recitative Michal Already see the daughters 0.18
2 Chorus of Israelites Welcome, welcome, mighty king! 1.30
3 Accompagnato Saul What do I hear? 0.24
4 Chorus of Israelites David his ten thousands slew 0.31
5 Accompagnato Saul To him ten thousands 0.13
5 Air Saul With rage I shall burst 1.14

SCENE 4
2 Recitative Jonathan, Michal Imprudent women! 0.44
2 Air Michal Fell rage and black despair 2.36

SCENE 5
2 Recitative Abner Racked with infernal pains 0.16
3 Air David O Lord, whose mercies 4.03
4 Symphony (Harp) 'Tis all in vain 0.18
3 Air Saul A serpent, in my bosom warm'd 1.54
4 Recitative Saul Has he escap'd my rage? 0.21
5 Air Merab Capricious man 3.39

SCENE 6
2 Accompagnato Jonathan O filial piety! 1.21
2 Air Jonathan No, cruel father, no! 1.24
2 Air High Priest O Lord, whose providence 1.27
2 Chorus Preserve him for the glory 3.45

CD2: ACT TWO
SCENE 1
1 Chorus Envy, eldest born of hell 2.59

SCENE 2
2 Recitative Jonathan Ah, dearest friend 0.34
3 Air Jonathan But sooner Jordan's stream 2.10
4 Recitative David, Jonathan Oh, strange vicissitude! 0.55
4 Air David Such haughty beauties rather move 5.09
5 Recitative Jonathan My father comes 0.52

SCENE 3
7 Air Jonathan Sin not, O king, against the youth 2.05
7 Air Saul As great Jehovah lives, I swear 1.06
7 Air Jonathan From cities stormed, and battles won 2.02

SCENE 4
10 Recitative Jonathan, Saul Appear, my friend 0.30
11 Air David Your words, O king, my loyal heart 1.04
12 Recitative Saul Yes, he shall wed my daughter! 1.01

SCENE 5
13 Duet Michal, David O fairest of ten thousand fair 2.49
14 Chorus Is there a man, who all his ways 1.40
15 Sinfonia
### CD: ACT THREE

**SCENE 1  Saul disguised, at Endor.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recitative Saul</th>
<th>Wretch that I am, of my own ruin author!</th>
<th>2.10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accompagnato Saul</td>
<td>'Tis said, here lives a woman</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SCENE 2  Saul and the Witch of Endor.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recitative Witch, Saul</th>
<th>With me what would'st thou?</th>
<th>0.44</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Air Witch</td>
<td>Infernal spirits, by whose pow'r</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SCENE 3  Apparition of Samuel.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accompagnato Samuel, Saul</th>
<th>Why hast thou forc'd me from the realms of peace?</th>
<th>3.16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sinfonia</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SCENE 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recitative David, Amalekite</th>
<th>Whence comest thou?</th>
<th>1.03</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Air David</td>
<td>Impious wretch, of race accurst!</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symphony: Dead March</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SCENE 5  Elegy on the death of Saul and Jonathan.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chorus</th>
<th>Mourn, Israel, mourn thy beauty lost</th>
<th>3.35</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accompagnato High Priest</td>
<td>Oh, let it not in Gath be heard</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Merab</td>
<td>From this unhappy day</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air David</td>
<td>Brave Jonathan his bow never drew</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus of Israelites</td>
<td>Eagles were not so swift as they</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Michal</td>
<td>In sweetest harmony they lived</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo/Chorus David, Israelites</td>
<td>O fatal day!</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recitative High Priest</td>
<td>Ye men of Judah, weep no more!</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus of Israelites</td>
<td>Gird on thy sword, thou man of might</td>
<td>5.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Saul was Handel’s fourth English oratorio. He wrote it between 23 July and 27 September 1738, giving the first performance on 16 January 1739. He was 53.

Saul tells the story of a heroic national leader’s disintegration. Handel, the leading figure in English music, had himself recently suffered a breakdown of health. As his patron Lord Shaftesbury wrote in manuscript annotations to John Mainwaring’s biography of Handel (1760):

Great fatigue and disappointment, affected him so much, that he was this Spring [1737] struck with the Palsy, which took entirely away, the use of 4 fingers of his right hand; and totally disabled him from Playing: And when the heats of Summer 1737 came on, the Disorder seemed at times to affect his Understanding.

Saul testifies to Handel’s recovery. It is one of his greatest compositions. It is also revolutionary. It was Handel’s first dramatic work with a bass lead; it was the first English oratorio with a male lead; it was the longest English music theatre work to date; and it had larger forces than any English music theatre work or Italian opera previously performed in England. Saul has strong claims to be Handel’s dramatic masterpiece among his English works.

The librettist was Charles Jennens (1700-73), the cultivated heir to an industrial fortune. A discerning connoisseur and patron of the arts, he was a loyal friend to Handel and an ardent admirer of his music. He built up an unrivalled manuscript collection of every note that Handel wrote (the Aylesford Collection), subscribed to his published works, and encouraged him to write stirring music to worthwhile texts – some of which he provided. Saul was their first collaboration. Jennens probably also selected the texts for Israel in Egypt, premiered in the same season as Saul. Messiah (1742) was his brainchild, and he selected the texts for it. He was also the librettist of Belshazzar (1745) and wrote Il moderato for L’allegro, il penseroso ed il moderato (1740).

THE BIBLICAL DRAMA

The libretto of Saul skilfully condenses the Bible story of Saul, David and Jonathan, which extends over 26 chapters of the Old Testament (I Samuel 15 – II Samuel 5). Jennens’ and Handel’s audiences were thoroughly familiar with the Bible. Oratorio composers could pick and choose incidents from it with confidence that their audience knew the context. The context of Saul is especially loaded.

The Old Testament relates that the Israelites, hitherto led by God through the agency of judges such as Samson and prophets such as Samuel, demanded to have a king, to be like other nations. God agreed only on condition that king and people remained completely obedient to divine command. He chose Saul, the Israelites’ ablest leader, and directed the prophet Samuel to anoint him as king.

Saul soon began to act on his own initiative instead of following God’s instructions. Signally, he failed to fulfil God’s orders regarding the Amalekites, God’s and Israel’s inveterate enemies. The Amalekites had placed themselves forever in the wrong by an unprovoked attack on the Jews when they first came out of Egypt. God required Saul to extirpate the Amalekites utterly, but Saul spared their king and took their possessions. From that moment God abandoned Saul, while still caring for His chosen people, the Israelites. He pursued Saul with an evil spirit, a form of morbid depression which turned the tormented king against his best supporters.

The biblical story is rich in dramatic ironies, and Jennens heightened them.
In the oratorio Saul does not know (though the Bible-reading audience does) that God has sent Samuel to anoint David, an obscure plebeian, as the next king. Moreover (again unlike the Bible) Saul is not aware of the implications of his own early disobedience to God. So Saul does not understand his malady, and does not realise that he is doomed. Brilliantly compressing the Bible's diffuse, episodic narrative, Jennens brings all these factors together to make the crisis of Saul's tragedy.

THE POLITICAL DRAMA
Like other Protestants, the English, for whom Protestantism was not only the state religion but the passport to full citizenship, identified the chosen people of the Old Testament as direct forerunners of themselves, God's present-day chosen people, and even looked to the Old Testament for lessons in government. For them, the story of Saul and David was especially strong in parallels to their own experience.

In the vast amount of British debate about the lawfulness of the changes of rulership, both sides constantly invoked the story of Saul and David to bolster their arguments. The story was even built into the fabric of the state religion. Each year, on the anniversary of Charles I's execution, a penitential service was held in churches throughout the country to expiate the communal crime of killing the Lord's anointed. The reading from the Old Testament in this commemorative service was David's Lament for Saul and Jonathan – the text which forms the basis for the great extended climax of Saul.

Jennens was a man of strong religious and political views and, out of step with the government of the day, deeply committed to the cause of Charles I's descendants. For him the death of Saul had special, complicated resonance: the killing of Saul, the anointed king, was (like the killing of Charles I) terrible sacrilege. The two secular texts on which he drew for his libretto, Abraham Cowley's verse epic Davideis, and Lord Orrery's play The Tragedy of King Saul, both defend the concept of the divine right of kings. But equally, Jennens would have agreed that the lawless, perjuring, apostate Saul had to be set aside, just as the rightful but Catholic king James II had had to be set aside because of his backsliding from what Jennens, a devout Church of England Protestant, held to be the true religion. On theological grounds too, the Bible-reading Jennens and Handel, and their audience, would have seen David's survival and kingship as divinely ordained necessity, for it was from David's line that the Messiah was to come. Hence in the oratorio the 'god-like' David is acclaimed as the new king. But Jennens managed to dissuade Handel from introducing a 'Hallelujah' to the finale, when the nation is still in shock after Saul's death.

THE HUMAN DRAMA
Jennens transformed the theocentric biblical epic into a drama of feeling, akin to the many plays of the contemporary stage which celebrated warm and refined sensibility. Into a history concerned mainly with obedience to God as God, Jennens injected humanitarian ideas about moral goodness, friendship and generosity. At the same time, the interweaving of dynastic, family and
romantic relationships with urgent crises of national survival has Shakespearian strength and pace. It is no surprise to learn that in later life Jennens was a pioneering editor of Shakespeare’s plays.

A striking example of Saul’s musical-dramatic innovation is the first soloists’ scene, in which more characters interact, and for longer, than in any music theatre work hitherto heard in Britain. Handelian drama here abandons the norms of opera seria derived from French (and ultimately Greek) classical tragedy, where conversations are between at most three people. Handel also deploys a variation of musical forms unprecedented in his music dramas. He depicts the developing family disharmony structurally, using our expectations to do so. The conventions of both polite society and musical sequence are disregarded, as siblings bicker and the king their father fails to stamp his authority on events. After Jonathan’s recitative ‘O early piety’ we expect an air from him, but his elder sister Merab is so disgusted by his offer of friendship to the unknown plebeian David that she breaks in without the decorum of a recitative of her own, adding that as a challenge after her air, in turn stinging Jonathan into replying with a combative air of his own, also without the preparation of recitative. In this way the airs do not discharge tension but increase it.

Saul’s compelling dramatic and emotional realism exists within a deliberate and clear moral scheme. Jennens is on record as having an agenda in writing the libretto, stating to his friend Edward Holdsworth that he selected the epigraphs for the wordbook ‘to point out more strongly my own Sentiments expressed in some parts of the Oratorio’. The Greek motto is from the Carmen Aureum, a moral poem thought in early modern times to be by Pythagoras: ‘Whoever is outstanding in virtue, make him your friend.’ The Latin motto is from Cicero’s dialogue De amicitia, a favourite 18th-century text: ‘Now, there are those who locate the “chief good” in virtue, and that is a noble doctrine. But this very virtue is the parent and preserver of friendship, and without virtue friendship cannot possibly exist.’ As in the influential philosophy of the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (father of Handel’s patron and friend the 4th Earl), warm feeling for fellow human beings is an expression of the highest virtue.

**DAVID, JONATHAN AND SAUL**

The friendship of David and Jonathan was (and is) one of the most celebrated same-sex relationships in history, but mid-18th-century England did not regard it with complete equanimity.

Paraphrase of great literature of the past, especially of the poetic parts of the Old Testament, was a highly respected art-form in the first half of the 18th century. David’s Lament, esteemed as a pinnacle of elegiac verse, was frequently paraphrased: at least ten versifications had been published in the 60 years preceding Handel’s oratorio. The majority are desperately stilted, and seem unnerved by David’s description of Jonathan’s feeling for him, ‘Thy love for me was great, passing the love of women’. Contradicting the Bible, the paraphrases assert that the friends’ love was purely platonic. Contemporary biblical commentaries also manifested deep unease about the friendship. Jennens initially provided a circumlocution for the critical verse, but on second thoughts boldly kept close to the original King James version: ‘Great was the pleasure I enjoyed in thee / And more than women’s love thy wondrous love to me’.

Handel solves the potential problem of this passage by embedding it within a solo-and-chorus movement for David and the Israelites, and, on either side of David’s individual statement, giving David and the Israelites the same music. The effect is of communal assent to, even participation in, David’s emotion. His loss is absorbed into the communal loss of the nation.
That this modulation of emotion is not just the fortunate result of a ‘purely musical’ choice is suggested by an earlier part of the oratorio: the start of the relationship. In the autograph score Jonathan’s first utterance to David, offering friendship, was originally followed not by an air for Merab but, as one would expect, by an air for Jonathan, to the words:

\[\text{Wise, valiant, good, above thy tender years}\\ \text{Endu’d with ev’ry grace divine}\\ \text{What charm unites my soul with thine}\\ \text{Firm as a rock my Love shall stand}\\ \text{Nor Time nor Chance shall loose the Band.}\]

The air is fully composed, but is marked for omission. It is not the only number to be deleted from \textit{Saul} before the first performance: the autograph contains additional airs for all the roles except Merab, and an air for Abner. But the fact remains that in the Bible there is, and in the oratorio there was to be, and in the event there is not, a full profession of love by Jonathan to David at first meeting.

Instead, in the finished work the exchange between Merab and Jonathan which follows Jonathan’s profession of friendship shows Jennens and Handel deftly positioning the relationship on the highest moral ground. Merab expresses hidebound society’s outrage, but that outrage is directed at the way the relationship flouts the conventions of class, not the conventions of gender. In dismissing her charge, Jonathan centres his love not (as in the omitted aria) in David’s ‘charm’, but in his ‘virtue’. And to conclude the assertion of their friendship’s values, the High Priest blesses it as exemplary.

Handel’s setting of Jonathan’s aria shows how aware he was of the centrality of ‘virtue’ to the oratorio. It is David’s distinguishing quality, and contrasts with Saul’s arbitrary lawlessness. In the Bible, Saul retains much of his virtue and his kingly stature, and so he also retains the loyalty of Jonathan, Merab, and a section of his people. In the oratorio, his lawlessness progressively drives away everyone except David (whom, as in the Bible, Saul himself drives away). The effect is to isolate Saul morally and socially in a way that the Bible narrative does not, and that isolation is used to tremendous effect in Saul’s final scene.

In the Bible Saul is accompanied at Endor by loyal retainers, and the witch recognises him and establishes a relationship with him. The episode does not end with Samuel’s prophecy, but moves into a scene of comfort, domesticity and recuperation. Saul collapses, because he is afraid and because he has eaten nothing for 24 hours; a petulant invalid, he first refuses succour and then is persuaded by his servants and the witch to let her give him a meal as he sits on a bed.

Jennens and Handel deny Saul this touching and essentially diminishing scene. On the contrary, their Saul rises to tragic greatness. He has a soliloquy (the biblical Saul does not), in which he shows that he has attained self-awareness, even before Samuel explains his history to him. Although Saul is the title character of the oratorio, he is never accorded the humanity and insight of a full da capo aria – a decision which perfectly conveys his baulked, inadequate, character, and a very deliberate one. Handel initially wrote an aria setting of Saul’s soliloquy at the Feast of the New Moon but then substituted a recitative, with the result that Saul has less to sing than any of the main characters except Merab. But his soliloquy at Endor, ‘Wretch that I am’, is dignified with a preceding symphony and is set as an accompagnato, here as so often the musical mark of genuine introspection. Jennens and Handel saved for the climax all the clarity, remorse and desolation of the biblical Saul’s anguished self-recognition.

\textbf{FIRST PERFORMANCE}

\textit{Saul} had a successful first run and Handel revived it seven times. Its premiere was
in a season without precedent in his career, offering a preponderance of works in English and no Italian operas. This may have been due as much to circumstance as to artistic design. The Opera of the Nobility, set up to compete with Handel, folded in 1737, and in the following year the impresario Heidegger failed to raise a subscription for an Italian opera season, so most of the Italian singers left London. The cast of Saul included only one ‘Italian’ singer, the Italian-trained Elisabeth Duparc (La Francesina), who sang Michal and became one of Handel’s main prime donne. Cecilia Arne created the role of Merab; Saul was Handel’s staple bass of the preceding six years, Gustavus Waltz. The pre-eminent member of the cast was John Beard, who sang Jonathan. The leading tenor of his day, he had been an accomplished stage actor, and was admired for the emotional intelligence of his singing, especially of recitatives: Handel’s cultivation of him, despite his not having the best of voices, testifies to the composer’s desire to have the drama of his music understood.

The original casting of David is something of a puzzle. The role is mostly written in the alto clef and was sung at the first performance by a singer so little known that only his surname survives, Russell; he is thought to have been a counter-tenor, but even that is not certain. Moreover, in the autograph score the passage for David in the elegy is written in the soprano clef and is marked to be sung by ‘Sgrä Marches,’ that is, the mezzo Maria Antonia Marchesini (also known as ‘La Lucchesina’), who was something of a trouser role specialist. This marking, and the fact that Handel later gave David’s part to a bewildering variety of voices (soprano, mezzo, counter-tenor, tenor and bass), more than justifies the use of a mezzo for David’s role, as in the present recording. It is just possible that by allotting David’s line to a female and not a male voice in the elegy, which contains the strongest statement of the love between David and Jonathan, Handel was in part aiming further to distance their relationship from any suspicion of impropriety.

Handel’s investment in Saul was huge. Not only does it need more solo singers than any other of his oratorios, but, as Winton Dean says, ‘In richness and grandeur of orchestration Saul has scarcely a rival in 18th-century music.’ Handel’s scoring was no mere flamboyance. It was dramatically conceived. The three trombones – for which he probably had to hire German players, the instrument being currently obsolete in England – added an authentically archaic timbre to the trumpets of the battle music; the military kettledrums which he borrowed from the Tower, besides heightening the realism of the battles, would have given extra meaning to the Dead March, since they had been paraded at the funeral of a national hero, the Duke of Marlborough; David’s harp, his identifier, was not a usual oratorio instrument but receives a solo; and for the specific instrument, shalish, a kind of triangle, which in the Bible the women of Jerusalem play to welcome back Saul and David (with such disastrous results), Handel commissioned a carillon of a kind unknown in England. This wealth of rare instrumental colour attests to Handel’s care and commitment to the work, as does the massively corrected state of his autograph score – confounding the notion that he was a hasty or easily satisfied composer.

SAUL – SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE

The Israelites praise God for saving them from extinction (‘How excellent Thy name, O Lord’): the young shepherd David, inspired by God, has killed Goliath, the giant Philistine champion (‘The youth inspir’d’), and so the Israelites, under the leadership of Saul, their first king, with David at his side, have been able to defeat the Philistines who threatened to overwhelm them.
Saul's younger daughter, Michal, falls in love with David ('O godlike youth'). David graciously deprecates Saul's gratitude: praise is due to God alone ('O King'). Deeply impressed, Saul's son and heir, Jonathan, declares eternal friendship with David ('Oh, early piety!'). Saul's class-conscious elder daughter, Merab, condemns her brother's behaviour ('What abject thoughts a prince can have!'), but Jonathan values the claims of virtue over those of birth ('Birth and fortune I despise'). The High Priest endorses the exemplary friendship of David and Jonathan ('While yet thy tide of blood runs high'). Merab is appalled when Saul promises her to David in marriage, in gratitude for his having saved the nation ('My soul rejects the thought'). Michal is distressed by her sister's contempt for the man she loves but seemingly cannot have ('See, with what a scornful air').

At this moment of family tension the women of Jerusalem are heard coming out from the city to celebrate Saul and David. As they approach, their song ('Welcome, welcome, mighty king!'), attributing greater achievements to David than to Saul ('David his ten thousands slew'), triggers murderous jealousy in Saul ('With rage I shall burst'). Prompted by Michal ('Fell rage'), David tries to soothe the king with music ('O Lord, whose mercies numberless'). But Saul, still enraged, hurls his javelin at David ('A serpent, in my bosom warm'd'). He misses his aim; David flees. Saul, paranoid and imagining that David wants to take over the kingdom, commands that he be hunted down.

Merab sees the perils of her father's arbitrary wilfulness ('Capricious man'). Jonathan, torn between duty to his father and loyalty to his friend ('O filial piety!'), determines to defend 'the Godlike David'. The High Priest and the nation pray for David's safety ('O Lord, whose providence', 'Preserve him for the glory of Thy name').

ACT TWO
A chorus decries the hellish spirit of Envy poisoning Saul ('Envy, eldest-born of hell'). Jonathan assures David of his eternal affection ('But sooner Jordan's stream'). Besides expressly ordering Jonathan to destroy David, Saul has withdrawn his offer of Merab to David, and bestowed her on one of his courtiers. David is unconcerned, having been attracted by Michal ('Such haughty beauties'). Jonathan begs Saul to reflect on David's loyalty and readmit 'this God-like Man' to favour ('Sin not, O king'). Saul swears to renounce his enmity and reinstates David, giving him command of the army against the Philistines, and giving him Michal in marriage ('As great Jehovah lives'). David delightedly accepts ('Your words, O king').

At the festival of the New Moon Saul expects David to attend the royal feast and is determined to have him murdered ('The time at length is come'). But his plans are frustrated when David fails to appear. Saul turns on Jonathan, who first tries to excuse David's absence and then selflessly pleads for him. Incensed
by such apparent betrayal, Saul tries to kill his own son. Jonathan escapes, and the onlooking courtiers express horror at their monarch's lawlessness ('Oh, fatal consequence of rage').

ACT THREE
Saul, now clear-sighted and grimly aware that he has alienated his family and all his followers, including the man who could save him and the nation, comes alone in disguise to Endor ('Wretch that I am'). Here he intends to consult the resident witch, although, following God's law, he has himself outlawed witchcraft. The witch is afraid to break the law but Saul, swearing that she will be unharmed, asks her to summon the ghost of his mentor, the prophet Samuel. At her incantation ('Infernal spirits') Samuel rises from the dead and explains Saul's fate to him ('In sweetest harmony'). David celebrates Jonathan's love for him ('O Jonathan!'). The outpouring of grief is succeeded by acclamation of David as the new king ('Gird on thy sword'): blessed by God, David will overcome all enemies and unify the nation through his exemplary virtue.

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Handel **SAUL**

Text by Charles Jennens (1700-73), after I Samuel 15 to II Samuel 5, and Abraham Cowley's Davideis (1656).

**CD1: ACT ONE**

1. **Overture**

2. **Chorus of Israelites**
   - How excellent Thy name, O Lord,
   - Above all Heav'n, O King ador'd,
   - The youth inspir'd by Thee, O Lord,
   - How excellent Thy name, O Lord,
   - How hast Thou set Thy glorious throne!

3. **Chorus of Israelites**
   - How hast Thou set Thy glorious throne!

4. **Chorus of Israelites**
   - Hallelujah!

5. **Scene 2**
   - Saul, Jonathan, Merab, Michal and Abner, introducing David and the High Priest.

6. **Recitative**
   - Michal
   - He comes, he comes!
Air

Jonathan

Birth and fortune I despise!
From virtue let my friendship rise.
(To David)

No titles proud thy stem adorn,
Yet born of God is nobly born,
And of His gifts so rich thy store,
That Ophir to thy wealth is poor.

Air

Michal

When human race the pride!
O virgin among women blest,
Whom Heav’n ordains thy bride!
But ah, how strong a bar I see
Betwixt my happiness and me!
O godlike youth . . . da capo

Recitative

Abner

Behold, O king, the brave, victorious youth,
And in his hand the haughty giant’s head.

Saul

Young man, whose son art thou?

David

The son of Jesse,
Thy faithful servant, and a Bethlemite.

Saul

Return no more to Jesse; stay with me;
And as an earnest of my future favour,
Thou shalt espouse my daughter: small reward
Of such desert, since to thy arm alone
We owe our safety, peace and liberty.

Air

Michal

O godlike youth, by all confess’d
Of human race the pride!
O virgin among women blest,
Whom Heav’n ordains thy bride!
But ah, how strong a bar I see
Betwixt my happiness and me!
O godlike youth . . . da capo

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Saul

Return no more to Jesse; stay with me;
And as an earnest of my future favour,
Thou shalt espouse my daughter: small reward
Of such desert, since to thy arm alone
We owe our safety, peace and liberty.
Michal
Ah, lovely youth, wast thou design'd
With that proud beauty to be joined?

Sinfonia

SCENE 3
Saul, Michal, Chorus.

Recitative
Michal
Already see the daughters of the land,
In joyful dance, with instruments of music,
Come to congratulate your victory.

Chorus of Israelites
Welcome, welcome, mighty king!
Welcome all who conquest bring!
Welcome David, warlike boy,
Author of our present joy!
Saul, who hast thy thousands slain,
Welcome to thy friends again!
David his ten thousands slew,
Ten thousand praises is his due!

Accompagnato
Saul
What do I hear? Am I then sunk so low,
To have this upstart boy preferr'd before me?

Chorus of Israelites
David his ten thousands slew,
Ten thousand praises is his due!

Accompagnato
Saul
To him ten thousands, and to me but thousands!
What can they give him more, except the kingdom?

Air
Saul
With rage I shall burst his praises to hear!
Oh, how I both hate the stripling, and fear!
What mortal a rival in glory can bear?
Exit.

SCENE 4

Recitative
Jonathan
Imprudent women! Your ill-timed comparisons,
I fear, have injured him you meant to honour.
Saul's furious look, as he departed hence,
Too plainly shew'd the tempest of his soul.

Michal (to David)
'Tis but his old disease, which thou canst cure:
Oh, take thy harp, and as thou oft hast done,
From the king's breast expel the raging fiend,
And sooth his tortured soul with sounds divine.

Air
Michal
Fell rage and black despair possess'd
With horrid sway the monarch's breast;
When David with celestial fire
Struck the sweet persuasive lyre:
Soft gliding down his ravish'd ears,
The healing sounds dispel his cares;
Despair and rage at once are gone,
And peace and hope resume the throne.

Recitative
Jonathan
'Tis all in vain; his fury still continues:
With wild distraction on my friend he stares,
Stamps on the ground, and seems intent on mischief.

Air
Saul
A serpent, in my bosom warm'd,
Would sting me to the heart:
But of his venom soon disarm'd,
Himself shall feel the smart.
Ambitious boy! Now learn what danger
It is to rouse a monarch's anger!

He throws his javelin. Exit David.

Air
Michal
Yet longer for repentance wait,
And heal his wounded soul.

Symphony (Harp)

Recitative
Jonathan
Has he escap'd my rage?
I charge thee, Jonathan, upon thy duty,
And all, on your allegiance, to destroy
This bold, aspiring youth; for while he lives,
I am not safe. Reply not, but obey.
Scene 2
Jonathan and David.

2 Recitative
Jonathan
Ah, dearest friend, undone by too much virtue!
Think you, an evil spirit was the cause
Of all my father’s rage? It was, indeed,
a spirit of envy, and of mortal hate.
He has resolved your death; and sternly charged
His whole retinue, me especially,
To execute his vengeance.

Air
Jonathan
But sooner Jordan’s stream, I swear,
Back to his spring shall swiftly roll,
Than I consent to hurt a hair
Of thee, thou darling of my soul.

4 Recitative
David
Oh, strange vicissitude! But yesterday
He thought me worthy of his daughter’s love;
Today he seeks my life.

5 Air
Jonathan
My sister Merab, by his own gift thy right,
He hath bestow’d on Adriel.

David
Oh, my prince, would that were all!
It would not grieve me much: the scornful maid
(Didst thou observe?) with such disdainful pride
Receiv’d the king’s command! But lovely Michal,
As mild as she is fair, outstrips all praise.

Scene 6
Accompagnato
Jonathan
O filial piety! O sacred friendship!
How shall I reconcile you? Cruel father!
Your just commands I always have obeyed:
But to destroy my friend, the brave, the virtuous,
The godlike David, Israel’s defender,
And terror of her foes! To disobey you —
What shall I call it? ’Tis an act of duty
To God, to David — nay, indeed, to you.

Air
Merab
Capricious man, in humour lost,
By ev’ry wind of passion toss’d!
Now sets his vassal on the throne,
Then low as earth he casts him down!
His temper knows no middle state,
Extreme alike in love or hate.

Scene 6
Accompagnato
Jonathan
O filial piety! O sacred friendship!
How shall I reconcile you? Cruel father!
Your just commands I always have obeyed:
But to destroy my friend, the brave, the virtuous,
The godlike David, Israel’s defender,
And terror of her foes! To disobey you —
What shall I call it? ’Tis an act of duty
To God, to David — nay, indeed, to you.

Air
Jonathan
No, cruel father, no!
Your hard commands I can’t obey.
Shall I with sacrilegious blow
Take pious David’s life away?
No, cruel father, no!
No, with my life I must defend
Against the world my best, my dearest friend.

Air
High Priest
O Lord, whose providence
Ever wakes for their defence
Who the ways of virtue choose:
Let not thy faithful servant fall
A victim to the rage of Saul
Who hates without a cause,
And, in defiance of thy laws,
His precious life pursues.

Chorus
Preserve him for the glory of Thy name,
Thy people’s safety, and the heathen’s shame.

CD2: ACT TWO
Scene 1
Chorus
Envy, eldest born of hell,
Cease in human breasts to dwell,
Ever at all good repining,
Still the happy undermining!
God and man by thee infested,
Thou by God and man detested,
Most thyself thou dost torment,
At once the crime and punishment!
Hide thee in the blackest night:
Virtue sickens at thy sight!

Scene 2
Jonathan and David.

2 Recitative
Jonathan
Ah, dearest friend, undone by too much virtue!
Think you, an evil spirit was the cause
Of all my father’s rage? It was, indeed,
a spirit of envy, and of mortal hate.
He has resolved your death; and sternly charged
His whole retinue, me especially,
To execute his vengeance.

Air
Jonathan
But sooner Jordan’s stream, I swear,
Back to his spring shall swiftly roll,
Than I consent to hurt a hair
Of thee, thou darling of my soul.

4 Recitative
David
Oh, strange vicissitude! But yesterday
He thought me worthy of his daughter’s love;
Today he seeks my life.

5 Air
Jonathan
My sister Merab, by his own gift thy right,
He hath bestow’d on Adriel.

David
Oh, my prince, would that were all!
It would not grieve me much: the scornful maid
(Didst thou observe?) with such disdainful pride
Receiv’d the king’s command! But lovely Michal,
As mild as she is fair, outstrips all praise.

6 Recitative
Jonathan
My father comes: retire, my friend, while I
With peaceful accents try to calm his rage.
Exit David.
SCENE 3
Saul and Jonathan.

Saul
Hast thou obey’d my orders, and destroy’d
My mortal enemy, the son of Jesse?

Jonathan
Alas, my father! He your enemy?
Say, rather, he has done important service
To you, and to the nation; hazarded
His life for both, and slain our giant foe,
Whose presence made the boldest of us tremble.

Air
Jonathan
From cities stormed, and battles won,
What glory can accrue?
By this the hero best is known,
He can himself subdue.
Wisest and greatest of his kind,
Who can in reason’s fetters bind
The madness of his angry mind!

Exeunt David and Jonathan.

Recitative
Saul
Yes, he shall wed my daughter! But how long
Shall he enjoy her? He shall lead my armies!
But have the Philistines no darts, no swords,
To pierce the heart of David? Yes, this once
To them I leave him; they shall do me right!

Scene 5
David and Michal.

Michal
A father’s will has authorized my love:
No longer, Michal, then attempt to hide
The secret of my soul. I love thee, David,
And long have loved. Thy virtue was the cause;
And that be my defence.

Air
David
Your words, O king, my loyal heart
With double ardour fire:
If God his usual aid impart,
Your foes shall feel what you inspire.
In all the dangers of the field,
The great Jehovah is my shield.

Exeunt David and Jonathan.

Recitative
Saul
Yes, he shall wed my daughter! But how long
Shall he enjoy her? He shall lead my armies!
But have the Philistines no darts, no swords,
To pierce the heart of David? Yes, this once
To them I leave him; they shall do me right!

Scene 4
Jonathan
Sin not, O king, against the youth,
Who ne’er offended you:
Think, to his loyalty and truth,
What great rewards are due!
Think with what joy this godlike man
You saw, that glorious day!
Think, and with ruin, if you can,
Such services repay.

Air
Saul
As great Jehovah lives, I swear,
The youth shall not be slain:
Bid him return, and void of fear
Adorn our court again.

Air
Jonathan
From cities stormed, and battles won,
What glory can accrue?
By this the hero best is known,
He can himself subdue.
Wisest and greatest of his kind,
Who can in reason’s fetters bind
The madness of his angry mind!

Recitative
Jonathan
Appear, my friend.
Enter David.

Saul
No more imagine danger:
Be first in our esteem; with wonded valour
Repel the insults of the Philistines:
And as a proof of my sincerity,
(Oh, hardness to dissemble!) instantly
Espouse my daughter Michal.

Chorus
Is there a man, who all his ways,
Directs, his God alone to please?
In vain his foes against him move:
Superior pow’r their hate disarms;
He makes them yield to virtue’s charms,
And melts their fury down to love.

Sinfonia

Air
Jonathan
As great Jehovah lives, I swear,
The youth shall not be slain:
Bid him return, and void of fear
Adorn our court again.

Air
Saul
As great Jehovah lives, I swear,
The youth shall not be slain:
Bid him return, and void of fear
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Recitative
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To pierce the heart of David? Yes, this once
To them I leave him; they shall do me right!

Scene 5
David and Michal.

Michal
A father’s will has authorized my love:
No longer, Michal, then attempt to hide
The secret of my soul. I love thee, David,
And long have loved. Thy virtue was the cause;
And that be my defence.
David's bed discovered with an image in it.

Do you mock the king?  
This disappointment will enrage him more:  
Then tremble for the event.

Exit.

Air  
Merab  
Author of peace, who canst control  
Every passion of the soul;  
To whose good spirit alone we owe  
Words that sweet as honey flow:  
With thy dear influence his tongue be fill'd,  
And cruel wrath to soft persuasion yield.

Saul at the Feast of the New Moon.

Symphony  

Accompagnato  
Saul  
The time at length is come when I shall take  
My full revenge on Jesse's son.  
No longer shall the stripling make  
His sov'reign totter on the throne.  
He dies — this blaster of my fame,  
Bane of my peace, and author of my shame!

Saul and Jonathan.

Recitative  
Saul  
Where is the son of Jesse? Comes he not  
To grace our feast?

Recitative  
David  
Thy father is as cruel, and as false,  
As thou art kind and true.  
When I approach'd him,  
New from the slaughter of his enemies,  
His eyes with fury flam'd, his arms he rais'd,  
With rage grown stronger; by my guiltless head  
The javelin whizzing flew, and in the wall  
Mock'd once again his impotence of malice.

Recitative  
Michal  
Mean as he was, he is my brother now,  
My sister's husband; and to speak the truth,  
Has qualities which justice bids me love,  
And pity his distress. My father's cruelty  
Strikes me with horror! At th'approaching feast  
I fear some dire event, unless my brother,  
His friend, the faithful Jonathan, avert  
Th'impending ruin. I know he'll do his best.

Recitative  
Saul  
Where is the son of Jesse? Comes he not  
To grace our feast?
Scene 2
Saul and the Witch of Endor.

Recitative
Witch
With me what'li'st thou?

Saul
I would, that by thy art thou bring me up
The man whom I shall name.

Witch
Alas! Thou know'st
How Saul has cut off those who use this art.
Would'st thou ensnare me?

Saul
As Jehovah lives,
On this account no mischief shall befall thee.

Witch
Whom shall I bring up to thee?

Saul
Bring up Samuel.

Air
Witch
Infernal spirits, by whose pow'r
Departed ghosts in living forms appear,
Add horror to the midnight hour,
And chill the boldest hearts with fear:
To this stranger's wond'ring eyes
Let the prophet Samuel rise!

Scene 3
Apparition of Samuel.

Accompagnato
Samuel
Why hast thou forc' d me from the realms of peace
Back to this world of woe?

Saul
O holy prophet!
Refuse me not thy aid in this distress.
The num'rous foe stands ready for the battle:
God has forsaken me: no more he answers
By prophets or by dreams: no hope remains,
Unless I learn from thee what course to take.

Samuel
Hath God forsaken thee? And dost thou ask
My counsel? Did I not foretell thy fate,
When, madly disobedient, thou didst spare
The curst Amalekite, and on the spoil
Didst fly rapacious? Therefore God this day
Hath verified my words in thy destruction,
Hath rent the kingdom from thee, and bestow’d it
On David, whom thou hatest for his virtue.
Thou and thy sons shall be with me tomorrow,
And Israel by Philistine arms shall fall.
The Lord hath said it: He will make it good.

6 Sinfonia

SCENE 4
David and an Amalekite.

7 Recitative
David
Whence comest thou?

Amalekite
Out of the camp of Israel.

David
Thou canst inform me then. How went the battle?

Amalekite
The people, put to flight, in numbers fell,
And Saul, and Jonathan his son, are dead.

David
Alas, my brother! But how knowest thou
That they are dead?

Amalekite
Upon mount Gilboa
I met with Saul, just fall’n upon his spear;
Swiftly the foe pursu’d; he cried to me,
Begg’d me to finish his imperfect work,
And end a life of pain and ignominy.
I knew he could not live, therefore slew him;
Took from his head the crown, and from his arms
The bracelets, and have brought them to my lord.

David
Whence art thou?

Amalekite
I am an Amalekite.

8 Air
David
Impious wretch, of race accurst!
And of all that race the worst!
How hast thou dar’d to lift thy sword
Again th’anointed of the Lord?

(To one of his attendants,
who kills the Amalekite.)
Fall on him, smite him, let him die!
On thy own head thy blood will lie;
Since thy own mouth has testified,
By thee the Lord’s anointed died.

9 Symphony: Dead March

SCENE 5
Elegy on the death of Saul and Jonathan.

14 Chorus
Mourn, Israel, mourn thy beauty lost,
Thy choicest youth on Gilboa slain!
How have thy fairest hopes been cross’d!
What heaps of mighty warriors strew the plain!

Accompanato
High Priest
Oh, let it not in Gath be heard,
The news in Askelon let none proclaim;
Lest we, whom once so much they fear’d,
Be by their women now despis’d,
And lest the daughters of th’uncircumcis’d
Rejoice and triumph in our shame.

13 Air
Michal
In sweetest harmony they lived,
Nor death their union could divide.
Harry Christophers is known internationally as founder and conductor of The Sixteen as well as a regular guest conductor for many of the major symphony orchestras and opera companies worldwide. He has directed The Sixteen choir and orchestra throughout Europe, America and Asia-Pacific gaining a distinguished reputation for his work in Renaissance, Baroque and 20th-century music. In 2000 he instituted the Choral Pilgrimage, a national tour of English cathedrals from York to Canterbury in music from the pre-Reformation, as The Sixteen's contribution to the millennium celebrations. It raised awareness of this historic repertoire so successfully that the Choral Pilgrimage in the UK is now central to The Sixteen's annual artistic programme.

In 2008 Harry Christophers was appointed Artistic Director of Boston's Handel and Haydn Society; he is also Principal Guest Conductor of the Granada Symphony Orchestra. As well as enjoying a very special partnership with the BBC Philharmonic, with whom he won a Diapason d'Or, he is a regular guest conductor with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields. With The Sixteen he is an Associate Artist at the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester and features in the highly successful BBC television series, Sacred Music, presented by Simon Russell Beale.

Increasingly busy in opera, Harry has conducted numerous productions for Lisbon Opera and English National Opera as well as conducting the UK premiere of Messager's opera Fortunio for Grange Park Opera. He is a regular conductor at Buxton Opera where he initiated a very successful cycle of Handel's operas and oratorios including Semele, Samson and Saul.

Harry Christophers is an Honorary Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, as well as the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and has been awarded the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Music from the University of Leicester.

The pious son ne'er left the father's side,
But him defending bravely died:
A loss too great to be survived!
For Saul, ye maids of Israel, moan,
To whose indulgent care
You owe the scarlet and the gold you wear,
And all the pomp in which your beauty long
has shone.

Solo and Chorus
Israelites
O fatal day! How low the mighty lie!

David and Israelites
O Jonathan! How nobly didst thou die,
For thy king and people slain.

David
For thee, my brother Jonathan,
How great is my distress!
What language can my grief express?
Great was the pleasure I enjoy'd in thee,
And more than woman's love
thy wondrous love to me!

Recitative
High Priest
Ye men of Judah, weep no more!
Let gladness reign in all our host;
For pious David will restore
What Saul by disobedience lost.
The Lord of hosts is David's friend,
And conquest will his arms attend.

Chorus of Israelites
Gird on thy sword, thou man of might,
Pursue thy wonted fame:
Go on, be prosperous in fight,
Retrieve the Hebrew name!
Thy strong right hand, with terror armed,
Shall thy obdurate foes dismay;
While others, by thy virtue charm'd,
Shall crowd to own thy righteous sway.

David and Israelites
O fatal day! How low the mighty lie!
Where, Israel, is thy glory fled?
Spoild of thy arms, and sunk in infamy,
How canst thou raise again thy drooping head!

Recitative
High Priest
Ye men of Judah, weep no more!
Let gladness reign in all our host;
For pious David will restore
What Saul by disobedience lost.
The Lord of hosts is David's friend,
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The Sixteen

After three decades of world-wide performance and recording, The Sixteen is recognised as one of the world’s greatest ensembles. Its special reputation for performing early English polyphony, masterpieces of the Renaissance, Baroque and early Classical periods, and a diversity of 20th and 21st-century music, all stems from the passions of conductor and founder, Harry Christophers.

The Sixteen tours internationally giving regular performances at the major concert halls and festivals. At home in the UK, The Sixteen are ‘The Voices of Classic FM’ as well as Associate Artists of Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. The group also promotes the Choral Pilgrimage, an annual tour of the UK’s finest cathedrals.

The Sixteen’s period-instrument orchestra has taken part in acclaimed semi-staged performances of Purcell’s Fairy Queen in Tel Aviv and London, a fully-staged production of Purcell’s King Arthur in Lisbon’s Belem Centre, and new productions of Monteverdi’s Il ritorno d’Ulisse at Lisbon Opera House and The Coronation of Poppea at English National Opera.

Over 100 recordings reflect The Sixteen’s quality in a range of work spanning the music of 500 years. In 2009 they won the coveted Classic FM Gramophone Artist of the Year Award and the Baroque Vocal Award for Handel’s Coronation Anthems. The Sixteen also features in the highly successful BBC television series, Sacred Music, presented by Simon Russell Beale.

In 2011 the group launched a new training programme for young singers called Genesis Sixteen. Aimed at 18 to 23 year-olds, this is the UK’s first fully funded choral programme for young singers designed specifically to bridge the gap from student to professional practitioner.

Christopher Purves

Born in Cambridge, Christopher Purves was a choral scholar at King’s College Cambridge where he studied English. On leaving university he joined the highly innovative rock & roll group Harvey and the Wallbangers.

Christopher has enjoyed much critical acclaim for his interpretations of Wozzeck and Beckmesser Die Meistersinger and title role Don Giovanni for Welsh National Opera; title role Falstaff at the Glyndebourne Festival; Balstrode Peter Grimes for both Opera North and Houston Grand Opera; Mr Redburn Billy Budd for Netherlands Opera, Méphistophélès Damnation of Faust and Sharpless Madama Butterfly for English National Opera, and Nick Shadow The Rake’s Progress for Opera de Lille. Christopher made his Salzburg debut in Katie Mitchell’s production of Nono’s Al gran sole carico d’amore.

On the concert platform Christopher performs regularly with renowned ensembles including The Sixteen, Le Concert d’Astrée, and the Gabrieli Consort, and made his recital debut at the Aldeburgh Festival. His concert performances include Beethoven Symphony 9 with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment; Haydn Nelson Mass with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra; Mahler 8 at the Casa da Musica in Porto; Aci, Galatea e Polifemo with Les Arts Florissants and with the Gabrieli Consort; and Handel’s Saul and Messiah with Harry Christophers and The Sixteen.
Sarah Connolly

Sarah Connolly sang in The Sixteen in the late 1980s and early 1990s and it was with the group under the direction of Harry Christophers that she made her first solo recording ‘Heroes and Heroines’, a disc of Handel arias (COR16025) which won her universal critical acclaim and helped bring her to international attention. She now enjoys a major career the world over and appears regularly on such stages as the Metropolitan Opera, Covent Garden, La Scala, the Paris Opera, the Liceu, the Bayerische Staatsoper and at the Glyndebourne and Aix-en-Provence Festivals. Renowned for her performances of the great lyric mezzo-soprano roles she has been particularly acclaimed for her Octavian, Komponist, Didon, Marguerite, Maria Stuarda, Romo, Orfeo, Sesto, Brangaene and Fricka. She is also a noted Handelian and has enjoyed great success as Giulio Cesare, Ariodante, Serse, Ruggiero, Solomon, Agrippina and David – captured on this recording. She is in demand too on the concert platform and her engagements include appearances at the Aldeburgh, Edinburgh, Lucerne, Salzburg, Tanglewood and Three Choirs Festivals and at the BBC Proms where, in 2009, she was a memorable guest soloist at The Last Night. Highlights have included appearances with the Boston Symphony Orchestra/Sir Colin Davis, Leipzig Gewandhausorchester / Chailly, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra/Harding, LPO/Nzet-Sguin, OAE/Jurowski, l’Orchestre des Champs-Elysées/Herreweghe, BBC Symphony Orchestra/Gardner and Halle/Elder.

She has recorded prolifically and twice been nominated for a Grammy Award.

Robert Murray

Robert Murray studied at the Royal College of Music and the National Opera Studio. He won second prize in the Kathleen Ferrier awards 2003 and was a Jette Parker Young Artist at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden.

Operatic roles range from Tamino Die Zauberflöte to Toni Reischmann in Henze’s Elegy For Young Lovers, Idamante Idomeneo to Benvolio Romeo et Juliette, Male Chorus The Rape of Lucretia to Ferrando Così fan tutte, as well as Tom Rakewell The Rake’s Progress and Don Ottavio Don Giovanni. He has appeared at the Royal Opera House, English National Opera, Opera North, Garsington, Norway Opera and the Salzburg Festival.

He has sung in concert with many of today’s leading conductors, including Harry Christophers, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Sir Charles Mackerras, and Emanuelle Haim with orchestras including The Sixteen, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the Rotterdam Philharmonic, and the Orquesta y Coro Nacionales de España.

In recital he has performed at the Brighton and Aldeburgh Festivals and at London’s Wigmore Hall. Recordings include a recital of Brahms, Poulenc and Barber, excerpts from Britten’s Gloriana (Ed Gardner/Chandos) and he appears on Malcolm Martineau’s Complete Poulenc series (Signum) and Berlioz’s Grande Messe des Morts with the Gabrieli Consort & Players.

He has also performed Handel’s Saul at the Buxton Festival under Harry Christophers as well as with The Sixteen under Christophers at the Barbican.
Joëlle Harvey

Soprano Joëlle Harvey is quickly becoming recognised as one of the most promising young talents of her generation. Awards include the 2009 Sara Tucker Study Grant from the Richard Tucker Foundation, First Prize award in 2011 from the Gerda Lissner Foundation and second prize in Houston Grand Opera's 2008 Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers. She graduated in vocal performance from Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.

In the summer of 2011, she made her role and company debut with Festival d'Aix-en-Provence as Galatea in Acis and Galatea. In the 2011-2012 season, Joëlle Harvey performed Galatea at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice and sang Handel's Messiah for her debut with the Kansas City Symphony, and in a return to the San Francisco Symphony. She also appeared with The Sixteen, led by Harry Christophers, as Michal in a performance of Handel's Saul at London's Barbican. Other noted performances include the role of Eurydice in Telemann's Orpheus for New York City Opera and Bach's Mass in B minor at the BBC Proms and in Leipzig with The English Concert. She made her Glyndebourne Festival debut in The Fairy Queen.

Other roles include Susanna in Le nozze di Figaro with Glyndebourne Festival Tour; her debut with the Handel and Haydn Society as Iphisin Jephtha; Susanna with Arizona Opera, the Bach and Mendelssohn Magnificats with Masaaki Suzuki and the New York Philharmonic, and Serpetta in a new production of La finta giardiniera for Glyndebourne Festival Opera.

Elizabeth Atherton

Elizabeth Atherton studied at Trinity College, Cambridge, and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama with Patricia MacMahon. She has won several prestigious prizes including the 2001 Maggie Teyte Prize, the 2003 Handel Singing Competition, the WNO Sir John Moores Award and WNO Chris Ball Bursary.

As an Associate Artist at Welsh National Opera she sang roles including Contessa Le Nozze di Figaro, Elvira Don Giovanni, Pamina The Magic Flute, Micaela Carmen, Minerva Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria and Thibault Don Carlos.

She performs regularly with Opera North and has sung in productions at Grange Park Opera, English Touring Opera, the Royal Albert Hall, The O2, and the Aldeburgh, Holland, Bregenz, and Batignano Festivals. Notably, she played Merab in Buxton Festival's production of Saul under Harry Christophers in 2011, a performance subsequently repeated in concert at the Barbican with The Sixteen.

Other concert highlights include work with the Philharmonia, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano, Hong Kong Philharmonic, BBC Symphony and Orchestre de Paris, with such eminent conductors as Charles Mackerras, Thierry Fischer, Neville Marriner, David Atherton, Antonio Pappano and Pierre Boulez.

In recital she has appeared at Wigmore Hall, Leeds Lieder+ Festival, Purcell Room, Aldeburgh Festival, St. David's Hall, Kings Place and ROH Linbury Studio. She has recorded discs for Hyperion and EMI and On this Island with Malcolm Martineau for Onyx.
Jeremy Budd

A graduate of the Royal Academy of Music where he studied with David Lowe, Jeremy is a full time member of The Sixteen and regularly performs with many of the UK’s other leading choirs, including The Monteverdi Choir, Gabrieli Consort, The Cardinall’s Musick, Ex Cathedra and Tenebrae.

Jeremy is a former Head Chorister of St Paul’s Cathedral, London. As a treble soloist he performed extensively both at home and abroad, including performances at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and with the London Symphony Orchestra.

Jeremy made his London debut as a tenor in 2000 singing Pilatus in Arvo Pärt’s Passio in Westminster Cathedral, London, and has since made regular appearances on the concert platforms around the world including Evangelist in Bach’s St John Passion in London; Mozart’s Requiem and Mass in C minor in San Francisco and New York; Handel’s Messiah and Mozart’s Requiem in St Martin-in-the-Fields, Rossini’s Petite Messe Solennelle, the Swan in Orff’s Carmina Burana; and the role of Damon in Handel’s Acis & Galatea, Mendelssohn’s Elijah and Haydn’s Creation, as a soloist for Paul McCreesh. Jeremy made his solo debut at the BBC Proms in Bach’s St John Passion (arias) with Sir John Eliot Gardiner.

Operatic engagements include Bach’s St John Passion, Monteverdi’s L’Orfeo, Handel’s Oreste, Purcell’s Dido & Aeneas, and Chabrier’s L’Étoile at Opéra Comique, Paris. He sang part of the Witch in Handel’s Saul with The Sixteen under Harry Christophers at the Barbican, London – a role which he repeats on this recording.

Jeremy has appeared on a number of other recordings with The Sixteen most notably as a soloist on Handel’s Dixit Dominus and Steffani’s Stabat Mater.

Mark Dobell

Originally from Tunbridge Wells in Kent, Mark Dobell was a choral scholar of Clare College, Cambridge, where he read Classics. He later studied as a postgraduate at the Royal Academy of Music, and was awarded the Clifton Prize for the best final recital.

Mark first sang with The Sixteen in 2001, and has greatly enjoyed working with Harry Christophers since then, both as a member of the group and as a soloist. Particular highlights as a soloist include Bach’s Mass in B minor in Cuenca, Pamplona and Santiago; Handel’s Israel in Egypt at the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester; Bach’s St John Passion in Porto; Bach’s St Matthew Passion in Barcelona; Mozart’s Requiem at the Teatro Nacional in Madrid; Handel’s Messiah at the Palace de Versailles; and MacMillan’s Seven Last Words at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

His contribution to The Sixteen’s recording catalogue is also considerable. Most notably he is featured as a soloist on recordings of Monteverdi’s Selva morale e spirituale and Mozart’s Solemn Vespers (recorded live at the Barbican). Other solo recordings include repertoire by Pelham Humfrey, Purcell, Mendelssohn, Bruckner, Holst, MacMillan and Roderick Williams. He appeared in the successful BBC television series Sacred Music, performing Byrd’s elegy on the death of Thomas Tallis, Ye Sacred Muses.

Mark is proud to be a member of the choir of Westminster Abbey, The Tallis Scholars and The Orlando Consort. He also enjoys performing with many of Britain’s other leading choirs and ensembles, such as The Cardinall’s Musick, I Fagiolini, The King’s Consort and Alamire.
Stuart Young

Stuart Young graduated in music from the University of Exeter and then went on to study as a post-graduate at the Royal Academy of Music, where he was taught by Mark Wildman and Audrey Hyland. He is increasingly in demand as a choral singer as well as a soloist and has performed and recorded with a large number of ensembles including The Monteverdi Choir, The Cardinall’s Musick, The Choir of Westminster Abbey, The Gabrieli Consort, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and holds the position of Vicar Choral in St Paul’s Cathedral Choir.

He sings regularly with The Sixteen and has participated in many tours including their 2012 visits to Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand where he appeared as a soloist in a number of the concerts, and the Choral Pilgrimage 2012 singing repertoire by Josquin, Brumel and Lassus in over 30 venues across the UK. He sang the role of Polyphemus in Handel’s Acis and Galatea under the direction of Harry Christophers in the Foundling Museum in London and is also a soloist on The Sixteen's recordings of Selva Morale e Spirituale by Monteverdi.

Other solo performances have included the title role in Mendelssohn’s Elijah, Verdi’s Requiem, The Dream of Gerontius by Elgar, Bach’s St John Passion and the Requiem by Brahms.