



The Hague, 25 May 2020

Murphy & NDA, Handel's *The Water Music*, Live from The Concertgebouw

### **Media Release – National Broadcaster Spotlight**

The Dutch national broadcaster (NPO) has identified Simon Murphy and the NDA's live concert performance of Handel's *The Water Music* for the ZaterdagMatinee series in June 2007 at The Concertgebouw Amsterdam as a highlight from the archives.

The NPO has released this live concert recording to its international partner-broadcasters through the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), spotlighting Murphy and the NDA's work internationally. At home in the Netherlands, the national broadcaster will transmit *The Water Music* on [Radio 4](#) (NTR) on Saturday 6 June 2020 at 16:15 (GMT + 1).

To accompany the EBU radio release, the NPO asked Murphy to write a personal background-story on *The Water Music* and this special performance. It is given here.

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### **Performing Handel's *The Water Music* for the ZaterdagMatinee at The Concertgebouw**

#### **By Conductor Simon Murphy**

Handel's cosmopolitan, orchestral masterpiece *The Water Music* is a vibrant celebration of the rich musical traditions of Baroque Europe. From a Watteau-esque French shepherdess dancing a Sarabande for her lover in the dappled shadows by a babbling brook to an ruddy-faced Irish farmer doing a jig in the local village tavern, *The Water Music* is a captivating portrait of a time and place where humanity and nature are connected and where *both* flourish. It pictures a place which is invigorating, nourishing, abundant and bountiful. It celebrates the fullness of the human experience— earthy, physical, sensual, spiritual, intellectual and emotional.

As the last instrumental masterpiece of the pre-industrial era, it also holds a special significance for us today. Handel's *The Water Music* offers us the opportunity to gain invaluable insights into the intrinsic connections between humanity, nature and culture, and the beauty and importance of diversity in all three. As such, it is not only a portrait of the past. It could also be a picture of our future.

This performance follows the extensive work done together with the NDA on Corelli's orchestral aesthetic. *The Water Music* is also the subject of our current project, *Garden of Eden*. Please find details of this below, alongside a personal story about preparing and performing this concert of *The Water Music* and about our musical approach to the piece.

I invite you to join us for our performance of (selections from) this deeply moving, defining Baroque musical work of genius by Handel, live from The Concertgebouw Amsterdam as part of Dutch radio's ZaterdagMatinee series.

## **A Personal Story**

Listening to the radio as a teenager growing up in Australia in the 1980s, it seemed like every broadcast-concert in the world took place in the Netherlands. Today, from The Festival of Early Music Utrecht ... Today, from The Concertgebouw Amsterdam ... Today, from The North Sea Jazz Festival The Hague ... Later on, I learned that this was due to the Netherlands' very proactive approach to contributing live concert recordings to the world through the EBU sharing system, but also because I had become obsessed with pioneering Dutch early music figures such as Gustav Leonhardt and Frans Brüggen, so my teenage ears pricked up at any sound of the words early music and the Netherlands.

From early on, my boyhood dream was to play Baroque viola – in a Baroque church, with a frescoed ceiling, in Europe. I wanted to be able to revel in being surrounded by the voluptuous sights and sounds of the Baroque, and just soak up the total experience. After my studies in Sydney, I took a very big breath, packed my suitcase, and moved to the Netherlands. And, to my delight, I started performing with those musical heroes of mine.

In that process however, I saw that the younger generation needed more of a platform, and in 2003, I conducted the closing concert at the Holland Festival of Early Music Utrecht with my then brand-new Baroque orchestra, The New Dutch Academy. Festival director Jan van den Bossche invited us to make a big statement, and we did so with a large-scale performance of Corelli's *Concerti Grossi*. It was voted one of the top five highlights in the festival's history.

Broadcast live by Dutch radio with an EBU simulcast around the world, the festival co-production also resulted in a CD album for PENTATONE, and an invitation to perform in Rome, in the presidential palace, under the Bernini vaulted golden ceiling, for a state visit of Queen Beatrix, broadcast live on the RAI. Boyhood dream come true.

An invitation also followed from another Dutch legend, Jan Zekveld, programmer of the ZaterdagMatinee, to perform *The Water Music* in what was to be one of his very last concerts in the series before his retirement. I was super honoured to be included in this tastemaker's long line of rather illustrious musical guests at The Concertgebouw and, thereby, to make an appearance in just the type of radio programme which had so inspired me as a kid back in Australia. The result is this live concert recording.

For me personally, it is a very special recording of what is a treasured musical experience, as it represents a kind of full circle, but also a springboard, as it has had so much positive effect on me being able to create all sorts of further musical opportunities since then.

## Roman Holiday

The quite substantial musical work which we did on bringing Corelli's rich orchestral soundscape to life in 2003 formed the basis for our approach to Handel's *The Water Music*. Whilst in Rome, Handel worked closely with Corelli. Handel was clearly influenced by Corelli's rich soundscape.

We know from payment records, that, on occasion, Corelli also used winds, brass and percussion, alongside his string group and basso continuo section. In preparing for *The Water Music*, we experimented adding horns and oboes to a Corelli movement, and yes, perhaps unsurprisingly, you do get a rather “Handelian” sound as the result. Another example of Handel being a fan of Corelli is Corelli's Fuga a 4 which is basically a blueprint of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus pretty much with just about everything in it except for the Hallelujah itself (see our Corelli CD, track 23). You can also read an article on the experience which I wrote for Limelight [here](#).

Handel's *The Water Music* is such an encyclopaedia of

1. the formal musical styles of the time (including church, opera, instrumental, ballet, theatre and military styles),
2. the regional languages/dialects/flavours of the time (including Italian, French, German, English, Irish and Spanish) and
3. the myriad of instruments in and as part of the Baroque orchestra.

In bringing *The Water Music* to life we wanted to highlight the variety in musical styles as well as the variety and richness of timbres of which the Baroque orchestra is capable.

In general, we tried to achieve one broad colour per suite matching the emotional state represented by the key (according to the 18<sup>th</sup> century sources)

- Suite 1 in F - polite and refined, *bonne grâce* (contrasting with the relative minor of d minor in the extensive last movement – grave and serious matters),
- Suite 3 in G rustic, pastoral, friendly, and
- Suite 2 in D royal, grand, military might, warlike and noisy, triumph, celebration.

As well as honing the playing style to represent each of these 3 general colours effectively (tone production, timbre and articulation), we varied the use of lutes and/or guitars accordingly, alongside Handel's own variations in the scoring per suite – most obviously the horns in Suite 1, the solo flute in Suite 3, and then the trumpets and horns together in Suite 2.

In individual movements, we also used flecks of colour from guest percussionist Ivo Nitschke (who actually hails from Handel's home town of Halle!) to underline the different regional flavours particularly in the dance movements, for example spoons in the more Irish movements and then side drum in the more military movements. In the theatre, percussion (either played by the dancers or in the orchestra) was used enthusiastically, so we wanted to have that included in the experience. In this way also, we wanted to ensure the full range of colours from the Baroque orchestra would be represented and explored.

For the winds, we chose to have a oboe band style wind section - tripling or quadrupling the numbers of oboes and bassoons, which bulks up the sound in general to Handelian “proportions” (and simply also follows in the Lully-tradition). It provides a nice equal weight between the strings and winds in the orchestral balance, and also in the musical conversations between the two groups (for example in the last movement of Suite 1). It also means that there's a difference between solo and tutti in the winds, as well as in the strings.

With the resulting instrumentation, (authentic) instruments and playing style, we've endeavoured to create a soundscape with plenty of profile, grain, grit and texture.

With this inspiring musical work, Handel expresses his strong vote of confidence in humanity. He underscores this through every aspect of the work. As such

- the instruments of the orchestra have their own distinctive voice but also come together to form a beautifully interweaving whole, a tapestry of sound with its unity being far richer for its diversity,
- highly diverse national and regional dishes are all given a place at this colourful, nourishing, musical table, and
- the rich journey of the human experience is explored from the joy of young dance, to triumph and collective celebration, to the personal reflection of a solemn church procession.

## **Garden of Eden**

Following the successful performance at the ZaterdagMatinee in The Concertgebouw, we were invited to perform *The Water Music* at the Händel Festspiele in Handel's birth city, Halle, for a festival concert broadcast live by the MDR.

Now, the work forms the centrepiece of our new project, *Garden of Eden*. The project aims to make an energising, cultural contribution to promoting action on the climate crisis. This will be our next recording, together with our partner label, PENTATONE, with the recording sessions taking place as soon as is feasible.

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Not for publication

Simon Murphy  
+ 31 614 975 395  
[info@simonmurphyconductor.com](mailto:info@simonmurphyconductor.com)  
[www.simonmurphyconductor.com](http://www.simonmurphyconductor.com)