

The London Handel Festival

Laurence Cummings - part 1

Founded by Denys Darlow in 1978, the London Handel Festival has contributed to a Handel revival in the UK, and specialising in the performance of his lesser-known works of the period. In 1981, the London Handel Orchestra and London Handel Singers made their debut at the Festival, and in 2002, Laurence Cummings took over as Musical Director.

We spoke to Laurence about his decade as Musical Director of the LHF, and one of this year's highlights, a return visit to Handel's *Il pastor fido*.

As part of this year's London Handel Festival, we wanted to celebrate the fact that we have had the collaboration for twenty years with the Royal College of Music with whom we have been putting on Handel's operas. Denys Darlow realised that there was a gap since the Handel Opera Society had folded in 1985, and

that as a consequence, Handel operas were not being put on in London. Therefore, twenty years ago we decided that we would mount a Handel opera at the Royal College of Music with students from the opera department. It is wonderful that this collaboration continues today. Since then, we have been performing one opera a year with the RCM.

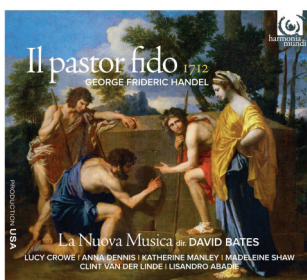
The first opera we did was the 1712 version of *Il Pastor Fido*, which was the second opera that Handel wrote for London. We thought that it would be fun to revisit it, especially as it also coincides with David Bates' group *La Nuova Musica*, who recently launched their CD recording of this work. *

Il pastor fido is a great work. Handel came back to it later on in his life in 1734, and we actually did one of the versions, the later version, two years ago, which also included the Terpsichore prologue.

However, returning to the 1712 version; this is a pastoral tragic comedy, so you get the usual wonderful Arcadian setting, and the lovers that are thwarted by fate and also by a mischievous character called Erilla. You have Mirtillo the faithful shepherd, who is indeed the eponymous hero, and you then have his lover Amarilli, and the two are not allowed to marry, as she is

promised to Silvio who, as his name might suggest, is a lover of hunting and all things country. As Erilla also has her eyes on Mirtillo, she stirs up the plot. However, the comic element comes in at the end, because Erilla sees the error of her ways, and it all unravels and becomes appropriate, and order is restored in the universe, so to say.

The interesting thing about Handel's score is that this is the second opera that he wrote for London. It wasn't a huge success because *Rinaldo* had been an extraordinary success the year before, 1711, and with that piece you really get the feeling that he has created something quite dramatic: the orchestration is fantastic, with four trumpets, and drums. He was also able to use several of his arias that he had used in his operas in Italy already, so of course the London public did not yet



**Il pastor fido* was recorded earlier this year by *La Nuova Musica* - and reviewed in MA issue 3.

