

Orchestra Seattle and the Seattle Chamber Singers  
*present*

# Theodora

An Oratorio for Soli, Chorus and Orchestra



by George Frideric Handel

*featuring*

Jennifer Driscoll-Holmes   Carolyn Maia  
Emily Lunde   Howard Fankhauser  
*and* Brian Box

Orchestra Seattle  
Seattle Chamber Singers  
George Shangrow, conductor

Sunday, June 7, 1998 ❖ 7:00 PM  
University Christian Church

## ❖ Soloists

**Theodora**  
Jennifer Driscoll-Holmes

**Didimus**  
Carolyn Maia

**Irene**  
Emily Lunde

**Septimius**  
Howard Fankhauser

**Valens**  
Brian Box

**Messenger**  
Howard Fankhauser

## ❖ Orchestra Seattle

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Robert Kechley

**Viola**  
Beatrice Dolf  
Saundrah Humphrey  
*Principal*  
Katherine McWilliams  
Stephanie Read

**Oboe**  
Geoff Groshong  
*Principal*  
Taina Karr

**Trumpet**  
Craig Penrose  
Gordon Ullmann  
*Principal*

**Violin**  
Dajana Akrapovic-  
Hobson  
Sue Herring  
Deborah Kirkland  
*Concertmaster*  
Pam Kummert  
Avron Maletzky  
Gregor Nitsche  
Leif-Ivar Pedersen  
*Principal second*

**Cello**  
Julie Reed  
*Principal*  
Matthew Wyant

**Bassoon**  
Jeff Eldridge

**Horn**  
Barney Blough  
Jennifer Crowder

**Flute**  
Lukas Robatto

**Timpani**  
Daniel Oie

**Bass**  
Josephine Hansen

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Barbara Anderson  
Sue Cobb  
Crissa Cugini  
Kyla DeRemer  
Susan Dier  
Dana Durasoff  
Cinda Freece  
Kiki Hood  
Lorelette Knowles  
Jill Kraakmo  
Nancy Lewis  
Alexandra Miletta  
Paula Rimmer

**Alto**  
Laila Adams  
Sharon Agnew  
Cheryl Blackburn  
Nicole Blackmer  
Jane Blackwell  
Wendy Borton  
Shireen Deboo  
Penny Deputy  
Laura Dooley  
Christine Hackenberger  
Susan Maloff  
Adrienne McCoy  
Verlayn McManus  
Suzi Means

**Laurie Medill**  
Nedra Slauson

**Tenor**  
Alex Chun  
Ralph Cobb  
Jon Lange  
Timothy Lunde  
Tom Nesbitt  
Jerry Sams  
Dave Spurling

**Bass**  
Andrew Danilchik  
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## ❖ Guest Artists

### Brian Box

Brian Box is a native of Washington and received his Master of Music degree in vocal performance from Western Washington University. Mr. Box has appeared frequently with OS/SCS as a soloist in cantatas and oratorios. Among his credits are performances of Brahms' Four Last Songs with the Western Washington University Orchestra and the leading role in Dominic Argento's opera *Postcard from Morocco* at the University of British Columbia. He is a regular performer with Northwest Opera in Schools, Etc. (NOISE), and Seattle Opera's education program and made his Seattle Opera solo debut as the Corporal in *The Daughter of the Regiment*; this past summer he appeared in their production of *Der Rosenkavalier*. Mr. Box's recent appearances with Orchestra Seattle and the Seattle Chamber Singers include Haydn's *The Seasons* and Handel's *Israel in Egypt*, *Messiah*, *Hercules* and *Brockes Passion*.

### Jennifer Driscoll-Holmes

Born in England, Jennifer Driscoll-Holmes now resides in British Columbia where she is an active soloist and teacher. A graduate of the University of British Columbia, she is heard frequently in Canada and Washington, receiving particular acclaim for performances of major oratorio and orchestral repertoire, including music of Handel, Haydn, Bach and Mozart. She has appeared as featured soloist with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Peter McCoppin (including a gala evening of Viennese operetta) and with numerous Pacific Northwest groups, including the Vancouver Bach Choir, Seattle Choral Company and Orchestra Seattle. In December of 1996, she sang Handel's *Judas Maccabeus* with OS/SCS and is featured as a soloist (along with mezzo-soprano Carolyn Maia) on a CD recording of Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* and Baroque vocal duets.

### Howard Fankhauser

Howard Fankhauser is a frequent soloist with community and professional choirs and orchestras throughout the Northwest, including the Northwest Chamber Orchestra, the Seattle Youth Symphony, Cascadian Chorale, and Choir of the Sound. Recent performances have included Mozart cantatas with the Northwest Chamber Orchestra, Handel's *Messiah* at St. Mark's Cathedral, Orpheus in Gluck's *Orpheus et Eurydice*, guest artist in St. James Cathedral's New Year's Eve all-Bach concert, and tenor soloist in Mozart's *Requiem*. In July of 1995, Mr. Fankhauser was featured in the Living Composers Recital at the (National Association of

Teachers of Singing national convention. He made his debut with Orchestra Seattle and the Seattle Chamber Singers in an April, 1996 performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and appeared this season in Handel's *Hercules*.

### Emily Lunde

One of our region's premier mezzo-sopranos, Emily Lunde is a performer whose repertoire runs the gamut from early and Classical music to contemporary works. A Seattle native, she has sung extensively with many of the area's finest choral ensembles and orchestras, including the Seattle Symphony and Chorale, Orchestra Seattle and Seattle Chamber Singers, Seattle Choral Company, Choir of the Sound, the Everett Symphony and the Walla Walla Symphony. Ms. Lunde also performs regularly with the Pacific Northwest Ballet in their productions of *Nutcracker* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In 1997, she gave a Brahms recital in Seattle and performed for the Seattle Opera as part of their Young Artists Outreach Program, previewing selections from *Il Trovatore*. This season Ms. Lunde has sung *Messiah* in Walla Walla and Colorado Springs, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* at UPS, as well as Handel's *Saul* and *Hercules* with OS/SCS. Upcoming performances include the Duruflé *Requiem* with the Pacific Northwest Chamber Chorus.

### Carolyn Maia

A native of London, England, Carolyn Maia attended the Guildhall School of Music and Drama on a vocal scholarship. She continued her operatic training in Vienna on a scholarship from the Arts Council of Great Britain. While in Britain, she performed frequently with the BBC on both radio and television, with both the BBC Symphony and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. She also sang with most of the major opera companies in Britain and Ireland as well as in opera houses and festivals in Stockholm, Brussels, Copenhagen, Montreal and San Francisco. In 1974, Ms. Maia move to the Pacific Northwest. Since then she has sung numerous roles with the opera companies of Seattle, Portland, San Diego and Vancouver. She has also been featured with the symphony orchestras of Seattle, Oregon and Victoria, BC. With Orchestra Seattle, she has recorded a CD of Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* (together with her niece, soprano Jennifer Driscoll-Holmes) and sung the alto solos in Handel's *Judas Maccabeus*. Next season, she will be joined by her *Due Voci* partner Barbara Coffin and soprano Felicia Dobbs in a hilarious show celebrating three women "of a certain age" entitled *Times Three*.

## How to Listen to an Oratorio You Have Never Heard Before

For many music lovers, listening to Handel's *Messiah* is like spending an evening by the fire with an old friend. Enjoyment is easy and relaxed. The charms of the friend are well known and trusted and you happily anticipate the pleasures you have experienced before.

But listening to an oratorio you have never heard before is like going to a party where you don't know anyone. At first you do all right. You arrive at the place and there are things to see (someone hands you a program), and there are introductions to be made. You say hello to the musicians (applause), the orchestra shakes your hand (overture), you meet a soloist or two (what a wonderful dress the soprano is wearing!). Then the full chorus comes in (Wow! There are a lot of them!) Then...

Then you don't really know what to do. You feel a little awkward. You could go stand by the refreshment table and look busy choosing whether to eat carrot sticks or celery sticks (you glance through the program. How long is this going to be?!?) But if you are lucky, you might find yourself unexpectedly, but happily involved in an interesting and engaging conversation with someone you've never met before. The party turns out to be worthwhile, and you don't want to go home.

It is possible to have a good conversation with an Oratorio you've never met before. You can get caught up in it, engaged by the drama, and carried away by the music. How? One of the best ways is to focus on the story. A Handel oratorio such as *Theodora* is not three hours of abstract music. It is a dramatic story. While there are no costumes, no scenery, no action, a Handel oratorio is a colorful and intense dramatization which invites you to enter into the joys and sorrows of the human beings whose tale is told, to contemplate the connections between the people in the story and your own life experience, and to consider the insights into life the story seeks to convey.

A Handel oratorio is something like radio theater. You don't get to see any of what is going on. Instead, you hear everything. You hear the scenery. For example, part of Act II of *Theodora* takes place in a dungeon. The orchestra plays a Sinfonia that sets the scene. You can feel the darkness and loneliness of the place creeping over

you, until you are in that dungeon yourself! Just before the dungeon scene, the music takes you to a Bacchanalia—you can see the faces bright with delight, the garlands of flowers, the dancing, the tables laden with food. The dark dungeon is really miserable in contrast.

In Handel's oratorios you also hear, rather than see, the action. At one point in *Theodora*, Theodora realizes Didimus is in danger, her concern is intense, and she makes a fast, decisive decision to rescue him. You can hear her taking off at a run, and you feel her mixture of excitement, fear, righteous outrage, and passionate hope. You run with her to the rescue! When the lover's embrace you feel the music wrap tenderly around you. When the oppressive, controlling governor barks his orders that no insolence will be tolerated, you feel him looming over you.

It is interesting to speculate on why Handel wrote oratorios when he had the opportunity to write and produce operas. His first oratorio, *Esther*, was presented in London because the Bishop of London objected to Handel's plans to produce a staged version of the Biblical story. The Bishop considered the opera house an immoral place, and as Handel scholar Winton Dean writes, "Hearing Holy Writ in a theatre was like meeting a clergyman in a brothel; the conjunction was disgraceful, if the aim was pleasure, and dangerous, if it was not." The Puritan reformers of the 17<sup>th</sup> century objected to the sensuality and triviality of the theater, and it is often commented that English audiences found the oratorio more tasteful. In addition, there was the expense of opera: an oratorio was less costly to produce. But it is clear that in addition to these practical considerations Handel found artistic delight in the challenges of conveying dialogue, emotion, scenery, and action all through the music alone.

In listening to an oratorio, it helps if you can avoid feeling cheated. "If only those Puritans hadn't been so prudish, this would be an opera and I could see costumes, lights, action!" Handel does not cheat the listener. He gives it all to us. As Winton Dean says, Handel's oratorios are "beyond all question among the greatest productions of musical drama."

Forget the carrot sticks. Enjoy the party.

# The Story of *Theodora*

## ACT I

Handel's *Theodora* tells the story of a woman caught in a situation in which she must choose whether to remain faithful to her convictions and her love or compromise them and save herself from violence. Though set in the context of a big historical event (the Third Century persecution of Christians by the Roman Emperor Diocletian) it is not an epic drama like *Israel in Egypt* but an intimate portrayal of human beings struggling with issues of power and oppression, love and fear, conviction and compromise, hope and despair. These themes reflect Handel's own humanism—the concern that human beings be freed from dogmatic intolerance and unjust oppression. These were the qualities Beethoven so admired in Handel. The whole oratorio has been described by S.W. Bennett as "an urgent plea for a social morality germane to Handel's own time; it is that for tolerance and freedom of thought... So Didimus tells Septimius,

"Ought we not to leave  
The free-born mind of man still ever free?  
Since vain is the attempt to force belief  
With the severest instruments of death."

The oratorio begins by setting the stage for conflict. First we meet Valens, the Roman governor of the city of Antioch. In an opening recitative and aria he announces that it is the Birthday of the Emperor, and sends his servant to begin the celebration and sacred rites in honor of the Emperor. The announcement carries a threat. Anyone who will not participate in worship of the Emperor "shall feel our wrath in chastisement or death." The chorus of Romans, unconcerned with the threat, sings the opening prayer asking that the Emperor be blessed. It is stately and festive, and gives a hint of the implacable Roman insistence on obedience to authority.

But Didimus, a Roman soldier who is secretly a Christian, is disturbed by the threat. He approaches Valens and requests that the Governor not persecute those who for reason of conscience will not worship the Roman gods. His is a plea for religious tolerance, but Valens is an obedient Roman. The persecution of the Christians is the Emperor's decree and Valens holds the position, "They are not Caesar's friends who own not Caesar's gods!" Any one departing from the party line is a traitor who must be punished! Valens sings an aria, "Racks, gibbets, sword..." full of stubborn anger. The Chorus confirms the Roman position in a chorus, "For ever thus stands fixed the doom..." which Handel sets as a Siciliano, bringing in a feeling of pathos.

A dialogue ensues between Didimus and Septimius, his superior officer. Didimus decries the cruel decree, asserting that threats of violence cannot prevail against convictions of the truth. "No engines can the tyrant find to storm the truth-supported mind," he sings in the B section of the aria, while the strings play music that storms against the vocal line. In Septimius' response, we see a Roman who is not comfortable with the authoritarian threat of his governor. Caught between the

claims of his own conscience and his sense of duty, he sings an aria that expresses his awareness that only mercy from the governor will prevent a tragic end. His prayer, "Descend kind pity..." contrasts with the opening chorus and closes the first scene of the story. In contrast to the prayer of the opening chorus, "Bless the Emperor," Septimius hopes for the advent of mercy in "each human breast."

The second half of Act I introduces us to the Christians. Handel makes the conflict between Roman authority and Christian conscience clear by the contrast between music the Christians sing and the music of the Romans. The Christians' music is more legato, it doesn't use any of the banal gestures found in the Romans' music, and where the Romans' musical accents are almost funny in their awkwardness, the Christians' music is full of elegant line and sweet suspension.

We meet *Theodora* as she is teaching and encouraging her friends. She appears to be the leader of the community of Christians, and thus is the most in danger because of Valens' decree. She counsels them to not be afraid in the face of violent threats—affliction teaches the soul to discern what is of lasting value. In her aria, "Fond, flattering world, Adieu!", she communicates her conviction that truth offers the greatest possible delight and joy. We see that she understands that holding fast to her convictions will put her in mortal conflict with the powers that be. She either has to give up her beliefs or say good-bye to the world. She has already made her decision: She will hold fast, and sing her farewell in advance of her fate.

Irene, another member of the Christian community, praises *Theodora* for her inspiring instructions, and the Chorus, now representing the Christian congregation, prays to be filled with love, grace and truth. Their prayer meeting is disrupted by the arrival of a messenger frantically warning them all to flee for their lives. But inspired by *Theodora*'s leadership, Irene sings one of the most beautiful arias of the oratorio, "As with rosy steps the morn..." in which the light of God is invoked as an advancing dawn, whose "rosy steps" drive back the shades of night.

The Chorus says Amen to Irene's aria by singing a hymn of praise. The prayer meeting is disrupted a second time by the entrance of Septimius, the sympathetic Roman who doesn't want to see violence done. "Oh mistaken wretches!" he cries in his recitative, arguing that their faith in God is impractical—they are going to get killed! Here the librettist makes an interesting choice of words. "Why thus blind to fate, Do ye in private oratories dare rebel against the President's decree..."

A momentary scholarly excursion is in order here. The word "oratorio" comes from the Latin "oratory", which means "a prayer". In 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy it became popular to form societies for religious study. These societies met for prayer and discussion in gathering places built especially for this purpose called Oratories, or prayer-halls. A popular aspect of oratory gatherings was the singing of Laude—hymns of praise. The Laude gradually were developed into narrative motets that dramatized

Biblical stories. The most famous early collection of songs for singing in the oratory was published as a "Spiritual Harmonic Theatre of Madrigals". By the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century when Handel lived for a few years in Italy, the "prayer hall" music had become full-fledged musical drama (though without costumes, scenery, or acting) with soloists singing different characters in the Biblical story or story from the lives of the Saints, using recitatives and arias, with the chorus taking the crowd scenes or commenting on the events. Oratorios, as the oratory music was called by then, were so popular they were sung both in oratories and as a form of secular entertainment in the palaces and courts of the nobility. While in Italy Handel wrote his first Oratorio, and his later works in England draw upon this Italian tradition.

Handel appears to be imagining the Christians in an oratory. They are doing just what the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Italians did—offering one another spiritual instruction and performing music. What we have here is like the ever-popular "play within the play" in Shakespeare; only this is an "oratorio with the oratorio".

Roman guards arrive to arrest Theodora, and threaten her with sexual violence (forced prostitution). We can imagine the guards laying hands on her, while she says she would rather die than face sexual violence. She asks the angels to take her instead, in her famous aria, "Angels, ever bright and fair".

Didimus arrives just after Theodora is taken away. We discover that he is in love with Theodora, in his anguished recitative, "Where is my love, My life, my Theodora?" He sings an aria praying for courage or cleverness to rescue Theodora. Irene praises the power of love, and the Chorus of Christians sends him forth to rescue Theodora, with their prayer that he be rewarded either with Theodora's charms, or heavenly rest. Repeated throughout the Oratorio are these two hopes of the Christians, either for earthly enjoyment of their love for one another, and joy in life; or for heaven's recompense—eternal bliss. Handel does not present "world-denying" Christians, longing for the glories of martyrdom. These Christians love life, affirm earthly joys, and long for freedom from oppressive power. Faith in heaven gives them courage in the face of death, but they do not want to die, except when despair overshadows hope. The first Act closes with this hymn of shining confidence and hope.

## ACT II

The tensions that propel the rest of the drama have been drawn. Will Theodora stand up under torture, or will she recant? Will Didimus succeed in finding a way to rescue her? Will Valens continue in his stubborn insistence on obedience to the Emperor or will his heart be softened by mercy? Will Septimius continue his feeble efforts to avert violence, or will he take decisive action?

Act II is brilliantly structured, and as Handel scholar Winton Dean argues, "claims to rank as the finest single act in any of the oratorios." Repeating the Structures of Act One, it opens in the Roman court, with the Roman chorus; and ends in the Christian oratory, with the

Christian chorus. In between these two chorus scenes are four intimate scenes, which take us deeply into the characters' feelings and decisions.

The Act opens with the Roman festival proceeding gaily. The Chorus "Queen of Summer" is a rollicking dance. Valens takes time out from the celebration to coldly announce that if Theodora hasn't recanted by sundown, "the meanest of my guards shall triumph o'er her boasted chastity." The Roman chorus takes lustful delight in this threat of sexual violence, and sings "Venus, laughing from the skies, will applaud..." in music that laughs itself.

In an abrupt scene change we leave the laughing Romans to their festivities and are taken to the prison where Theodora is in despair. The orchestral Sinfonia sets the scene of misery and loneliness. Theodora, alone, is overcome with fear and despair. She wants to die. A repeat of the Sinfonia gives us the feeling that the prison walls are closing around her. She struggles to regain her faith and hope, and her mood lifts as she affirms her trust that if she must die, she will rise like "the silver dove" to the saints and angels in the courts above.

We leave Theodora in this more exalted mood, and are let in on a conversation between Didimus and Septimius. Didimus has decided on a plan to rescue Theodora, but he needs the help of his friend, Septimius. Septimius responds to his request by revealing the depth of his character. Though a Roman, he does not believe that his Gods sanction the violence Valens' proposes, "Yet nor Venus nor Flora delight in the woe, that disfigures their fairest resemblance below." He resolves to take decisive action to assist Didimus, and will instruct the guards to take him to her cell.

Now comes the most beautifully crafted section of the Oratorio. We are taken briefly back to the Oratory, where the Christians are keeping vigil. Irene, who earlier announced in her serene aria that God's power, like the dawn, would scatter the shades of night, now announces that the dreaded hour of sunset is arriving, when Theodora must face her torture. They pray for her protection and peace.

We see this prayer is answered as we return to the prison cell. Didimus finds Theodora peacefully asleep, he sings a lullaby love song to her. She wakes, startled. He announces that he is there to rescue her, and that they are to change clothes so that she can escape undetected. But Theodora, either crazed or comprehending the big picture better than Didimus, asks him for another kind of rescue. She asks him to kill her. Her reason for this request becomes clear in the following recitative, "Ah! What is liberty or life to me, that Didimus must purchase with his own!" She is not willing to have her liberation from prison cost him his life. The only way out she sees is her death, and she'd rather it be by the hand of one she loves, than by those who oppose her. But Didimus manages to convince her that there is hope that they both can escape death, and she consents to his plan, and changes clothes with him.

In a mood of hope that life and love will be preserved the two lovers sing a parting duet, praying for the blessings of life and safety, and affirming their hope that if their plan fails, they still have the hope of heaven. "I hope again to meet on earth, But sure shall meet in heaven!"

At their parting, we are returned to the Oratory, where the Christians are still keeping their prayer vigil. They do not know that the rescue has been accomplished, but they are putting their trust in God who "can raise the dead to life and joy." In the tradition of the Italian oratory gatherings they sing a mini-oratorio, a musical dramatization of a Biblical story. The Bible story they sing to one another is found in Luke 7:11,

"Soon afterward Jesus went to a town named Nain; his disciples and a large crowd went with him. Just as he arrived at the gate of the town, a funeral procession was coming out. The dead man was the only son of a woman who was a widow, and a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart was filled with pity for her and he said to her, "Don't cry!" Then he walked over and touched the coffin, and the men carrying it stopped. Jesus said, "Young man! Get up, I tell you!" The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother."

In the style of early 17<sup>th</sup> century "spiritual madrigals" from which the grand oratorios evolved, Handel dramatizes this story in the chorus. The opening of the chorus captures the scene of the funeral procession. Jesus sees the grief and is filled with pity. His words, "Rise youth!" are set as a dramatic command; immediately fulfilled by the music rising in a strong upward scale. Then the mother bends to embrace her child with joy, "Lowly the matron bowed, and bore away the prize." And the music paints both the picture of her bending embrace, and through a canon that builds to a joyful height of intensity, the profound human joy that life has been rescued from the jaws of death.

Handel considered this chorus, which occurs at the high point of hope in the oratorio, and is itself a reconstruction of the beginnings of the oratorio as an art form, to be the greatest oratorio chorus he ever composed. It is, simultaneously, a grand chorus, an affirmation of the power of life over death, and a celebration of art integrated with life.

### ACT III

Act III of *Theodora* is the denouement of the Oratorio. Only one question remains to propel the dramatic action forward. Will Didimus succeed in escaping so that the lovers can enjoy the pleasures of life together? The act opens in the Oratory. Irene is singing a hymn of praise expressing hope in God. The words of this aria may have had special poignancy to the citizens of London who attended the premiere performance of *Theodora*. The audience was small because there had just been an earthquake in London and people were terrified to leave their homes. Ironically, we may find the words poignant for us as well,

"Strong in hope we sing and pray,  
Though convulsive rocks the ground..."

*Theodora* arrives, dressed in Didimus' clothes. The chorus rejoices to discover she is free, and prays that Didimus, also, will be blessed with "liberty and life..." But a messenger arrives with the news that Valens is not going to release Didimus. He is enraged, and now is seeking *Theodora* to kill her.

*Theodora* resolves immediately that she must go rescue Didimus. She is unwilling to have him die for her, and with the courage of her convictions, and strengthened by her passionate love, she refuses Irene's counsel that she should think of her safety. She goes to liberate Didimus from the Romans.

In the Roman Court, Didimus is on trial before Valens. Valens sends him off to be tortured just as *Theodora* arrives and pleads that he let Didimus go and inflict his "justice" on her instead. Septimius sings an aria, praising virtue, and hoping that the virtuous be saved. Valens, enraged, answers the prayer with his words of condemnation, "The powers below, No pity know, For the brave or for the fair."

Didimus and *Theodora* then both entreat Valens to only kill one of them, pleading that their beloved be spared. The chorus sings, marveling how strange this outcome of the conflict—that the two lovers are pleading to be killed, so their beloved can be spared. Valens' anger is only intensified by these pleas, and he pronounces that both shall die.

In the end, the plot turns on Valens, alone. He holds fast to the rule of dogmatic authority, and admits no mercy. He is the unmoved mover, who places obedience above all other virtues.

The Oratorio might have concluded with a dramatization of the violent death of Didimus and *Theodora*, but Handel puts the focus elsewhere. We do not see or hear the martyrdom itself. The Oratorio ends portraying how *Theodora* and Didimus face their unjust, tragic death. Earthly hopes destroyed, they have one hope left—heaven. This hope they celebrate in their final duet, singing together of the pleasures of paradise.

The Oratorio closes with a final chorus in which the Christians pray for zeal equal to the serene confidence and joy demonstrated by *Theodora* and Didimus. The final notes affirm that earth is a blessed place. Heaven's streams flow not only in the afterlife, but also in this life. *Theodora* and Didimus were themselves testimony to the presence of Heaven on Earth.

It is with this serene and gentle conclusion that Handel makes it clear that his interpretation of the conflict between Roman authority and Christian conscience is a conflict between two different kinds of power. Roman power demands obedience, discipline, and submission to authority—and backs up this demand with violent threats. In contrast, the power of Truth is gentle, like the dawn. It advances as a natural and gracious force, as Irene sang in her aria, "As with rosy steps the dawn..." The music expresses confidence not in bombastic, authoritarian power, but in a triumphant gentleness.

## ❖ Program Notes

by Lorelette Knowles

"[Sir T. Hankey] is a fool; the Jews will not come to it (as to *Judas [Maccabaeus]*) because it is a Christian story; and the Ladies will not come because it [is] a virtuous one." So George Frideric Handel exclaimed, according to Thomas Morell, the author of *Theodora's* libretto. Morell had just told the composer that Hankey had said that if *Theodora* were sung again he would "engage for all the Boxes." This work, with *Messiah*, Handel's only English oratorio based on a Christian text, was his penultimate - and favorite - oratorio ("...Mr Handell himself valued [*Theodora*] more than any Performance of the kind," according to Morell). It was also, despite marvelous musical merit, the least successful of all Handel's oratorios. Its failure must have caused the aging composer considerable pain, hidden though it might have been behind a veil of humor. Apart from a solitary revival in 1755, this oratorio, a work of unquestionable sublimity, received only four performances in Handel's lifetime, and is seldom performed today. Why?

Handel was 64 years old (quite aged by the standards of his time) when he composed *Theodora's* music during the summer of 1749. It appears that he was quite vigorous and in fine spirits, and the work was written in less than five weeks, between June 28 and July 31. *Theodora's* libretto was written by Thomas Morell, DD., Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries, and the author of *Judas Maccabaeus* and of *Jephtha*, Handel's last oratorio. It is based partly on an unnamed French tragedy, and mostly on an "unctuous and gory" historical novel, *The Martyrdom of Theodora and Didimus* (1667) by Robert Boyle, the famous chemist, who wrote "his sententious little novel as a neurotic reaction to his disturbed private life," according to author Jonathan Keates. Keates states that Morell was "inevitably hampered by [Boyle's] novelette's] more rambling excursions into moralizing," and as a result, the libretto was, according to Handel biographer, Newman Flower, perhaps the worst that Morell ever prepared. Setting this text to music must have been quite a fascinating exercise for Handel: coffee-colored blots, penciled cuts, and sealing-wax marks provide evidence of the composer's struggles to produce a work of convincing artistic unity, and to convey the enduring human values which underlie martyrdom and suffering in a great cause.

The historical Theodora, better known as St. Dorothy, died in Antioch in 304 CE., a victim of the persecution of the Christians by the Roman Emperor, Diocletian. The oratorio opens with a scene honoring Jove and the emperor on his birthday, and Valens, the Roman prefect of Antioch, threatens all who refuse to offer sacrifice to the emperor with death. Didimus, a young Roman officer who has secretly converted to Christianity, pleads conscientious objection, though he affirms his loyalty to

the emperor. This is not acceptable to Valens, who sings sadistically of the tortures those who defy the emperor will suffer. Didimus looks to Septimius, his friend and immediate superior; Septimius is sympathetic, but affirms that soldiers must obey orders. The next scene finds Theodora, a young noblewoman descended from King Antiochus and a devout Christian, accompanied by Irene, her confidante, in the midst of the assembled Christians. They also defy the decree to offer sacrifice, and Septimius arrives to take them to task. When Theodora persists in her defiance, Valens, who cannot understand why common sense does not lead the Christians to avoid such a deadly conflict, has Theodora arrested. She is taken away by Septimius and condemned to serve as a prostitute in the temple of Venus (her brief aria, "Angels ever bright and fair," is the only number from the oratorio that has remained in the popular repertoire). Upon hearing of this, Didimus vows to rescue Theodora or die in the attempt, and the chorus of Christians prays for divine aid.

The second act opens with the Romans' preparations for the pleasures that await them in the temple of Venus. Septimius, on behalf of Valens, tries once again to convince Theodora, now in prison, that sacrificing to Jove is preferable to becoming a temple prostitute, but Theodora places her trust in divine assistance. Didimus confesses to Septimius that he has been converted to Christianity by Theodora, and is in love with her, and Septimius permits the younger soldier to visit Theodora in her cell. Irene begs heaven for angels to protect Theodora. Didimus enters the cell with "the visor of his helmet closed," which causes Theodora to fear that the end has come, but Didimus shows himself and proposes to exchange clothes with Theodora so that she can escape. Theodora prefers death by his "hand and sword" to escape at Didimus' expense, but she finally agrees to his plan. The act ends with the chorus retelling the story of the widow of Nain and her son, in which Jesus' power to raise the dead youth offers comfort (about this chorus, which Handel considered his finest, Morell wrote: "and when I once ask'd him, whether he did not look upon the Grand Chorus in the *Messiah* as his Master Piece? 'No,' says he, 'I think the Chorus at the end of the 2d part in *Theodora* far beyond it. He saw the lovely youth &c.'").

Act III begins with the Christians at prayer. They rejoice over Theodora's unexpected return, but a messenger soon arrives with the sorrowful news that Didimus must die, and Theodora as well, when she is discovered. Joyfully, she accepts her fate, and, despite the protests of Irene, she goes to attempt to save Didimus. Theodora interrupts the trial, and both Didimus and Theodora offer to die. Valens finally decrees that "If both plead guilty, 'tis but equity that both should suffer." The lovers go nobly to their deaths, leaving the chorus to pray for them in a piece that has been compared to the sublime lullaby that concludes the *St. John Passion*.



*Theodora* is a remarkable departure for a man of Handel's age, as analyst Paul Henry Lang points out. It displays an uncharacteristic spiritual serenity, a preoccupation with life's (and the afterlife's) profundities, an attractive poise that is almost detachment, and a faith in a Christian destiny. Nobility, loyalty, sacrifice, and eventual martyrdom are shown as facets of a courage very different from the military pomposity and heroism present in some of the composer's earlier oratorios. Christianity and paganism are presented as equally vital and attractive, and after a balanced struggle, Christianity is declared morally preferable. The work's construction is controlled to the minutest detail; tempo and tonality are assigned carefully to the individual numbers, as are melodic intensity and dramatic pace. Handel borrowed quite a bit of music, from the chamber duets of Clari, from Muffat's *Componimenti* (an entire movement is used in the overture), from Bonocini's *Griselda*, and from his own works, but the materials are nearly always transformed so that they outshine the originals.



The oratorio is scored for soloists (soprano, mezzo-soprano, alto (countertenor), tenor, and bass), chorus, and an orchestra of strings, flute (featured in the prison scene), oboes, bassoon, horns and trumpets (for the Roman scenes), timpani, and harpsichord. Handel's cast of soloists included, as Didimus, the Lombard castrato, Gaetano Guadagni, one of the most spectacular vocal artists of his day. About him, Charles Burney wrote that "his attitudes and gesture were so full of grace and propriety, that they would have been excellent studies for a statuary," and attributed the power of his unique style to "his artful manner of diminishing the tones of his voice like the dying notes of an Aeolian harp." The oratorio was first performed at Covent Garden Theatre, on Friday, March 16, 1750; it was repeated on the 21st and on the 23rd. It was a dismal failure. Regarding the oratorio's second performance, a Mrs. Montague wrote to her sister: "The Wednesday night the Oratorio was very empty, though it was the most favourite performance of Handel's." On the same night, the composer is reported to have asked Morell, his librettist, "Will you be there next Friday night? and I will play it to you."



Charles Burney wrote about Handel as follows in 1785 (original spelling retained):

...*Theodora* was so very unfortunately abandoned, that he was glad if any professors, who did not perform, would accept of tickets or orders for admission. Two gentlemen of that description, now living, having applied to Handel, after the disgrace of *Theodora*, for an order to hear the

*Messiah*, he cried out, "Oh your sarvant, Mienherren! you are tamnaple tainty! you would not co to *Theodora* ñ der was room enough to tance dere, when dat was perform."

Sometimes, however, I have heard him, as pleasantly as philosophically, console hi[s] friends, when, previous to the curtain being drawn up, they have lamented that the house was so empty, by saying "Nevre moind; di moosic vil sound de petter."

The few who truly appreciated what Handel was attempting to do embraced the oratorio. The Earl of Shaftesbury told his cousin, James Harris: "I can't conclude a letter and forget *Theodora*, I have heard it three times and will venture to pronounce it, as finished, beautifull and labour'd a composition as ever Handel made. To my knowledge, this took him up a great while in composing. The Town don't like it at all, but Mr Kelloway and several excellent Musicians think as I do." Handel's friend, Mrs. Delany, wrote to her sister, Ann: "Don't you remember our snug enjoyment of *Theodora*?" Ann declared: "Surely *Theodora* will have justice at last if it was to be again performed, but the generality of the world have ears and *hear not*."



Why was *Theodora* such a failure? Many factors apparently contributed to its box-office defeat. The Jews indeed stayed away, and current earthquake scares in England seem to have caused many Londoners to leave the city for safer territory. The story of *Theodora* was possibly objectionable to Protestant audiences because, of all Handel's "religious" English vocal works, it is the only one not based on a biblical source. It is also the only one dealing with virgin martyrdom in a way more obviously related than any of Handel's other works to the specifically Roman Catholic world in which the oratorio as a musical form had developed. Handel's audience seems to have had little sympathy for persecuted saints, and instead wanted to hear the heroic tales of the warriors, prophets, and kings of the Old Testament with whom they more readily identified. The oratorio's refusal to deprive the pagan Romans of their due, its tragic end, and its introversion all worked against it. But it may have been the work's insistence on the ultimate triumph of Christian values in an unchristian society that embarrassed its hearers and assured its demise. *Theodora's* portrayal of tragic lovers who experience, but who have risen above, all human passions and desires - whose hearts burn with an intense flame of love, but who direct their ardor heavenward - was and perhaps remains incomprehensible to an oratorio audience. Will the beauty of the musical expression conquer *your* heart?

## Part the First

### Overture

#### Recitative – Valens

'Tis Dioclesian's natal day; Proclaim throughout the bounds of Antioch, a feast, and solemn sacrifice to Jove; whose disdains to join the sacred rites, Shall feel our wrath in chastisement or death, And this, Septimius, take you in charge.

#### Air – Valens

Go, my faithful soldier, go:  
Let the fragrant incense rise  
To Jove, great ruler of the skies.

#### Chorus

And draw a blessing down,  
On his imperial crown,  
Who rules the world below.

#### Recitative – Didimus

Vouchsafe, dread lord, a gracious ear To my request.

Let not thy sentence doom, to racks and flames  
whose doubtful minds will not permit them, to bend the knee,  
to gods they know not; or, in wanton mood,  
to celebrate the day with Roman rites.

#### Valens

Art thou Roman, and yet dar'st defend  
a sect rebellious to the gods and Rome?

#### Didimus

Many there are in Antioch who disdain an idol offering,  
yet are friends to Caesar.

#### Valens

It cannot be: they are not Caesar's friends who own  
not Caesar's gods: I'll hear no more.

#### Air – Valens

Racks, giblets, sword, and fire,  
Shall speak my vengeful ire  
Against the stubborn knee;  
Nor gushing tears, nor ardent prayers,  
Shall shake the firm decree.

#### Chorus – Heathens

For ever thus stands fixed the doom,  
Of rebels to the gods and Rome:  
While sweeter than the trumpet's sound,  
Their groans and cries are heard around.

#### Recitative – Didimus

Most cruel decree; sure thy noble soul, Septimius,  
abhors the dreadful task of persecution. Ought we  
not to leave the free-born mind of a man still ever  
free? Since vain is the attempt to force belief with  
the severest instrument of death.

#### Air – Didimus

The raptured soul defies the sword,  
Secure of virtue's claim;  
And trusting Heaven's unerring word,  
Enjoys the circling flame.  
No engines can a tyrant find  
To storm the truth-supported mind.

#### Recitative – Septimius

I know thy virtues, and ask not thy faith: Enjoy it as  
you will, my Didimus. Though not a Christian, yet I  
own something within declares for acts of mercy.  
But Antioch's President must be obeyed; such is the  
Roman discipline, while we can only pity those we  
dare not spare.

#### Air – Septimius

Descend, kind pity, heavenly guest,  
Descend and fill each human breast  
With sympathising woe,  
Then liberty and peace of mind  
May sweetly harmonise mankind  
And bless the world below.

#### Recitative – Theodora

Though hard, my friends, yet wholesome are the  
truths taught in affliction's school, whence the  
pure soul rises refined and soars above the world.

#### Air – Theodora

Fond, flattering world, adieu!  
Thy gaily smiling power,  
Empty treasures, fleeting pleasures,  
Ne'er shall tempt or charm me more.  
Faith inviting, hope delighting,  
Nobler joys we now pursue.

#### Recitative – Irene

Oh bright example of all goodness, how  
easy seems affliction's heavy load, while  
thus instructed and companioned thus, as  
'twere with Heaven conversing, we look  
down on the vain pomp of proud prosperity.

#### Chorus – Christians

Come, mighty Father, mighty Lord,  
With love our souls inspire;  
While grace and truth flow from Thy Word,  
And feed the holy fire.

#### Recitative – Messenger

Fly, fly, my brethren, heathen rage pursues us swift,  
armed with the terrors of insulting death.

#### Irene

Ah! Whither should we fly, or fly from whom? The  
Lord is still the same, today, forever;  
and His protection here, and everywhere. Though  
gathering round our destin'd heads,  
the storm now thickens, and looks big with fate: still  
shall Thy servants wait on Thee, oh Lord, and in Thy  
saving mercy put their trust.

#### Air – Irene

As with rosy steps the morn,  
Advancing drives the shades of night;  
So from virtuous toil well-borne,  
Raise Thou our hopes of endless light.  
Thou art the life, the light, the way.

#### Chorus – Christians

All pow'r in Heaven above, or earth beneath  
Belongs to thee alone, Thou everlasting One,  
Mighty to save in peril, storm and death.

#### Recitative – Septimius

Oh foolish people, why thus blind to fate,  
do ye in private oratories dare rebel against  
the President's decree, and scorn with  
native rites to celebrate the day sacred to  
Caesar and protecting Jove?

#### Air – Septimius

Dread the fruits of Christian folly,  
And this stubborn melancholy,  
Fond of life and liberty,  
Chains and dungeons ye are wooing,  
And the storm of death pursuing,  
Rebels to the known decree.

#### Recitative – Theodora

Deluded mortal, call it not rebellion to  
worship God: it is His dread command,  
His whom we cannot, dare not, disobey,  
though death be our reward.

#### Septimius

Death is not yet thy doom, but worse than  
death to such a virtuous mind; Lady, these guards  
are ordered to convey you to Venus' temple, to  
worship her and fulfill her rites.

#### Recitative – Theodora

Oh worse than death indeed! Lead me, ye guards,  
lead me or to the rack, or to the flames; I'll thank  
your gracious mercy.

#### Air – Theodora

Angels, ever bright and fair,  
Take, oh take me to your care!  
Speed to your own courts my flight  
Clad in robes of virgin white!

#### Recitative – Didimus

Unhappy, wretched crew! – Why stand you  
thus, wild with amazement? Say, where is  
my love, my life, my Theodora?

#### Irene

Alas! she's gone; too late thou cam'st to save  
the fairest, noblest, best of women. A Roman  
soldier led her trembling hence to the place  
where Venus keeps her court.

#### Air – Didimus

Kind Heaven, if virtue be Thy care;  
With courage fire me,  
Or art inspire me,  
To free the captive fair!  
On the wings of the wind I will fly,  
With this princess to live, or this Christian to die.

#### Recitative – Irene

Oh Love, how great thy power! but greater still  
when virtue prompts the steady mind, to prove its  
native strength in deeds of highest honor.

#### Chorus

Go, gen'rous, plous youth!  
May all the powers above  
Reward thy virtuous love,  
Thy constancy and truth  
With Theodora's charms,  
Free from these dire alarms;  
Or crown you with the blest  
in glory, peace and rest!

## Part the Second

#### Recitative – Valens

Ye men of Antioch, with solemn pomp renew the  
grateful sacrifice to Jove! And while your songs  
ascend the vaulted skies, pour on the smoking  
altar floods of wine, in honor of the smiling  
deities, fair Flora, and the Cyprian Queen.

#### Chorus

Queen of Summer, Queen of Love,  
And thou cloud-compelling Jove:  
Grant a long and happy reign  
To great Caesar, king of men!

#### Air – Valens

Wide spread his name,  
And make his glory  
Of endless fame,  
The lasting story!

#### Recitative – Valens

Return, Septimius, to the stubborn maid,  
and learn her final resolution. If, ere the sun  
with prone career has reached the western isles,  
she makes an offering to the great gods,  
she shall be free; if not, the meanest of my  
guards shall lead her bound to Venus' temple.

#### Chorus

Venus, laughing from the skies,  
Will applaud her votaries,  
While now without measure,  
We revel in Pleasure,  
Revenge sweet love supplies!

#### Symphony

#### Recitative – Theodora

Oh thou bright Sun! how sweet thy rays to  
health and liberty! but here, alas! They swell  
the agonising thought of shame, and pierce  
my soul with sorrows yet unknown.

*Air – Theodora*

With darkness deep, as is my woe  
Hide me, ye shades of night!  
Your thickest veil around me throw,  
Concealed from human sight!  
Or come, thou death, thy victim save,  
Kindly embosomed in the grave.

*Symphony*

*Recitative – Theodora*

But why art thou disquieted, my soul? Hark!  
heaven invites thee in sweet rapturous strains,  
to join the ever-singing, ever-loving choir  
of saints and angels in the courts above.

*Air – Theodora*

Oh that I on wings could rise,  
Swiftly sailing, though the skies,  
As skims the silver dove!  
That I might rest  
For ever blest,  
With harmony and love.

*Recitative – Didimus*

Long have I known thy friendly social soul,  
Septimius,  
oft experienced in the camp and perilous scenes of  
war when side by side we fought, and braved the  
dangers of the field, dependent on each other's arm.  
With freedom then I will disclose my mind; – I am a  
Christian and she, who by Heaven's influential  
grade,  
with pure religious sentiments inspired my soul, with  
virtuous love inflamed my heart even she, who  
shame to all humanity! is now condemned to worse  
than death.

*Septimius*

No more! The shame reflects too much upon  
thy friend, the mean though duteous instrument  
of power, knowing her virtues only not thy love.

*Air – Septimius*

Though the honors that Flora and Venus receive  
From the Romans, this Christian refuses to give,  
Yet nor Venus nor Flora delight in the woe,  
That disfigures their fairest resemblance below.

*Recitative – Didimus*

O save her, the, or give me power to save  
by free admission to the imprisoned maid.

*Septimius*

My guards not less ashamed of their sad office,  
will second your intent and pleasure me.

*Didimus*

I will reward them with a bounteous heart,  
and you, my friend, with all that heaven can give  
to the sincerity of prayer.

*Air – Didimus*

Deeds of kindness to display,  
Pity suing, mercy wooing,  
Who the call can disobey?  
But the opportune redress  
Of virtuous beauty in distress,  
Earth will praise and heaven repay.

*Recitative – Irene*

The clouds begin to veil the hemisphere and  
heavily bring on the night; the last perhaps to us.  
Oh that it were the last to Theodora, ere she fall  
a prey to the unexampled shame and cruelty.

*Air – Irene*

Defend her, Heaven, let angels spread  
Their viewless tents around her bed!  
Keep her from rude assaults secure,  
Still ever calm and ever pure.

*Recitative – Didimus*

Or lulled with grief or rapt her soul to heaven,  
in innocence of thought, entranced she lies.

*Air – Didimus*

Sweet rose and lily, flow'ry of form,  
Take me your faithful guard,  
To shield you from bleak wind and storm –  
A smile by my reward.

*Recitative – Theodora*

O save me, Heaven, in this my perilous hour.

*Didimus*

Start not, much injured princess. I come not as one  
this place might give you cause to dread,  
but your deliverer, and that dear ornament to  
Theodora, her angel purity. If you vouchsafe your  
habit but to change with Didimus.

*Theodora*

Excellent youth! I know thy courage, virtue,  
and thy love! This becomes not Theodora,  
but the blind enemies of truth – Oh no,  
it must not be! yet Didimus can give a boon  
will make me happy!

*Didimus*

How? or what? my soul with transport  
listens to the request.

*Air – Theodora*

The pilgrim's home, the sick man's health,  
The captive's ransom, poor man's wealth,  
From thee I would receive!  
These, and a thousand treasures more,  
That gentle death has now in store,  
Thy hand and sword can give.

*Recitative – Didimus*

Forbid it, Heaven! Shall I destroy the life  
I came to save? Shall I in Theodora's blood  
embroe my guilty hand, and give her death,  
who taught me first to live.

*Recitative – Theodora*

Ah! what is liberty or life to me, that  
Didimus must purchase with his own?

*Didimus*

Fear not for me. The power that led me hither will  
guard me hence; if not, His will be done.

*Theodora*

Yes, kind deliverer, I will trust that power, farewell,  
thou generous youth.

*Didimus*

Farewell, thou mirror of the virgin state.

*Duet*

*Theodora*

To thee, thou glorious son of worth,  
Be life and safety given.

*Didimus*

To thee whose virtues suit thy birth  
Be every blessing given.

*Both*

I hope again to meet on earth,  
But sure shall meet in heaven.

*Recitative – Irene*

'Tis night; but night's sweet blessing is  
denied to grief like ours. Be prayer our  
refuge, prayer to Him who raised and  
still can raise the dead to life and joy.

*Chorus – Christians*

He saw the lovely youth, death's early prey,  
Alas! too early snatched away;  
He heard his mother's funeral cries:  
Rise, youth, he said; the youth begins to rise.  
Lowly the matron bowed,  
and bore away the prize.

## Part the Third

*Air – Irene*

Lord, to Thee, each night and day,  
Strong in hope we sing and pray,  
Though convulsive rocks the ground,  
And Thy thunders roll around,  
Still to Thee we sing and pray.

*Recitative*

*Irene*

But see, the good, the virtuous Didimus, he  
comes to join with us in prayer for Theodora.

*Theodora*

No, Heaven has heard your prayers for  
Theodora. Behold her safe – Oh that as free  
and safe were Didimus, my kind deliverer,  
but let this habit speak the rest.

*Air – Theodora*

When sunk in anguish and despair,  
To Heaven I cried, Heaven heard my prayer,  
And bade a tender Father's care  
The generous youth employ.  
The generous youth obeyed and came,  
All rapt in love's divinest flame,  
To save a wretched virgin's fame,  
And turn her grief to joy.

*Chorus*

Blest be the hand, and blest be the power,  
That in this dark and dangerous hour  
Saved thee from cruel strife.  
Lord, favor still the kind intent,  
And bless Thy gracious instrument  
With liberty and life.

*Recitative – Messenger*

Undaunted in the court stands Didimus,  
virtuously proud of rescued innocence.  
But vain to save the generous hero's life are  
all entreaties, even from Romans vain; and high  
in rage the President protests, should he regain  
the fugitive, no more to try her with the fear of  
infamy, but with the terrors of a cruel death.

*Irene*

Ah, Theodora! whence this sudden change  
from grief's pale looks to looks of reddening joy.

*Theodora*

Oh my Irene, Heaven is kind, and Valens, too,  
is kind to give me power to execute in turn my  
gratitude while safe my honor. Stay me not,  
dear friend, only assist me with a proper dress,  
that I may ransom the too generous youth.

*Duet*

*Irene*

Whither, Princess, do you fly?  
Sure to suffer, sure to die.

*Theodora*

No, no, Irene, no,  
To life and joy I go.

*Irene*

Vain attempt, O stay, O stay!

*Theodora*

Duty calls, I must obey.

*Recitative – Irene*

She's gone, disdainful liberty and life, and  
every honor this frail life can give. Devotion  
bids aspire to nobler things, to boundless love  
and joys ineffable: and such her expectation  
from kind heaven.

*Air – Irene*

New scenes of joy come crowding on,  
While sorrow fleets away,  
Like mists before the rising sun,  
That gives a glorious day.

**Recitative – Valens**

It is a Christian virtue, then, to rescue  
from Justice one condemned?

*Didimus*

Had your sentence doomed her but to death  
I then might have deplored your cruelty  
and should not have opposed it.

*Valens*

Take him hence, and lead him to repentance  
or to death.

*Theodora*

Be that my doom. You may inflict it here  
with legal justice: there 'tis cruelty.

*Septimius*

Dwells there such virtuous courage in the sex?  
Preserve them, O ye gods, preserve them both.

**Air – Septimius**

From virtue springs each generous deed,  
That claims our grateful prayer  
Let justice for the hero plead,  
And pity save the fair.

**Air – Valens**

Cease, ye slaves, your fruitless prayer,  
The powers below,  
No pity know,  
For the brave, or for the fair.

**Recitative – Didimus**

'Tis kind, my friends, but kinder still if for this  
daughter of Antiochus, in mind as noble as her  
birth, your prayers prevail that Didimus alone  
shall die. Had I as many lives as virtues thou,  
freely for thee I would resign them all.

*Theodora*

Oppose not, Didimus, my just desires; for know  
that 'twas dishonor I declined, not death; most  
welcome now, if Didimus were safe, whose only  
crime was my escape.

**Chorus**

How strange their ends  
And yet how glorious,  
Where each contends,  
To fall victorious.  
Where virtue its own innocence denies,  
And for the vanquish'd the glad victor dies.

**Recitative – Didimus**

On me your frowns your utmost rage exert,  
on me, your prisoner in chains.

*Theodora*

Those chains are due to me, and death  
to me alone.

*Valens*

Are ye then judges for yourselves! Not so  
our laws are to be trifled with if both plead  
guilty, 'tis but equity that both should suffer.  
Ye ministers of justice, lead them hence,  
I cannot, will not, bear such insolence.

**Recitative – Didimus**

And must such beauty suffer?

*Theodora*

Such useful valor be destroyed?

*Septimius*

Destroyed alas! by an unhappy constancy!

*Didimus*

Yet deem us not unhappy, gentle friend,  
nor rash; for life we neither hate nor scorn:  
but think it a cheap purchase for the prize  
reserv'd in heaven for purity and faith.

**Duet – Theodora and Didimus**

Streams of pleasure ever flowing,  
Fruits ambrosial ever growing:  
Golden thrones,  
Starry crowns,  
Are the triumphs of the blest:  
When from life's dull labor free,  
Clad with immortality,  
They enjoy a lasting rest.  
Thither let our hearts aspire!  
Objects pure of pure desire:  
Still increasing,  
Ever pleasing,  
Wake the song and tune the lyre  
Of the blissful holy choir!

**Recitative – Irene**

Ere this their doom is past, and they are gone,  
to prove, that love is stronger far than death.

**Chorus**

Oh love divine, thou source of fame,  
Of glory and all joy!  
Let equal fire our souls inflame,  
And equal zeal employ:  
That we the glorious spring may know,  
Whose streams appear'd so bright below!

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