



HWV 61

Oratorio in tre atti

Musica di

George Frideric Handel

Libretto di Charles Jennens

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A cura di

Arsace

http://it.groups.yahoo.com/group/Handel_forever

<http://utenti.lycos.it/gfh/>

Aprile 2003



Personaggi:

Saul (basso)
Merab (soprano)
Michal (soprano)
Jonathan (tenore)
David (alto)
Samuel (basso)
Sommo Sacerdote (tenore)
Strega di Endor (tenore)
Abner (tenore)
Amalekite (tenore)
Doeg (basso)
Coro di Israeliti
Coro

ATTO PRIMO

1. Ouverture

Scena 1

*An Epinicion or Song of Triumph, for the victory
over Goliath and the Philistines.*

2. Coro di Israeliti

How excellent Thy name, O Lord,
In all the world is known!
Above all Heav'ns, O King ador'd,
How hast Thou set Thy glorious throne!

3. Aria (soprano)

An infant rais'd by Thy command,
To quell Thy rebel foes,
Could fierce Goliath's dreadful hand
Superior in the fight oppose.

4. Trio

Along the monster atheist strode,
With more than human pride,
And armies of the living God
Exulting in his strength defied.

5. Coro di Israeliti

The youth inspir'd by Thee, O Lord,
With ease the boaster slew:
Our fainting courage soon restor'd,
And headlong drove that impious crew.

5b. Coro di Israeliti

How excellent Thy name, O Lord,
In all the world is known!
Above all Heavn's, O King ador'd,
How hast thou set Thy glorious throne!
Hallelujah!

Scena 2

*Saul, Jonathan, Merab, Michal e Abner,
entrano David e Il Sommo sacerdote.*

6. Recitativo

Michal

He comes, he comes!

7. Aria

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*

8. Recitativo

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.

9. Aria

David

O king, your favours with delight

I take, but must refuse your praise:
For every pious Israelite
To God that tribute pays.
Through Him we put to flight our foes,
And in His name,
We trod them under that against us rose.
O king. . . *da capo*

10. Recitativo

Jonathan
Oh, early piety! Oh, modest merit!
In this embrace my heart bestows itself;
Henceforth, thou noble youth, accept my friendship,
And Jonathan and David are but one.

11. Aria

Merab
What abject thoughts a prince can have!
In rank a prince, in mind a slave.

12. Recitativo

Merab
(*aside, to Jonathan*)
Yet think on whom this honour you bestow;
How poor in fortune, and in birth how low!

13. Aria

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.
Birth and fortune. . . *da capo*

14. Recitativo

Sommo Sacerdote
Go on, illustrious pAir! Your great example
Shall teach your youth to scorn the sordid world
And set their hearts on things of real worth.

15. Aria

Sommo Sacerdote

While yet thy tide of blood runs high,
To God thy future life devote;
Thy early vigour all apply,
His glorious service to promote.
So shall thy great Creator bless,
And bid thy days serenely flow:
So shall thy youthful happiness
In age no diminution know.
With sweet reflections thou shalt taste,
Declining gently to thy tomb,
The pleasure of good actions past,
And hope with rapture joys to come.

16. Recitativo

Saul

Thou, Merab, first in birth, be first in honour:
Thine be the valiant youth, whose arm has sav'd
Thy country from her foes.

Merab

(aside)

Oh, mean alliance!

17. Aria

Merab

My soul rejects the thought with scorn,
That such a boy, till now unknown,
Of poor plebeian parents born,
Should mix with royal blood his own!
Though Saul's command I can't decline,
I must prevent his low design,
And save the honour of his line.

18. Aria

Michal

See, with what a scornful Air
She the precious gift receives!
Though e'er so noble, or so fair,
She cannot merit what he gives.

19. Aria

Michal

Ah, lovely youth, wast thou design'd
With that proud beauty to be joined?

20. Symphony

21. Recitativo

Michal

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

Scena 3

Saul, Michal, Coro.

22. Coro di Israeliti

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 are his due!

23. Accompagnato

Saul

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

24. Coro di Israeliti

David his ten thousands slew,
Ten thousand praises are his due!

25. Accompagnato

Saul

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

26. Aria

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?

Esce.

Scena 4

27. Recitativo

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

(a 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 tortur'd soul with sounds divine.

28. Aria

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.

29. Recitativo

Sommo Sacerdote

This but the smallest part of harmony,
Great attribute of attributes divine,
And centre of the rest, where all agree:
Whose wondrous force what great effects proclaim!

30. Accompagnato

Sommo Sacerdote

By Thee this universal frame
From its Almighty Maker's hand
In primitive perfection came,
By Thee produc'd, in thee contain'd:
No sooner did th'eternal word dispense
Thy vast mysterious influence,
Than chaos his old discord ceas'd.
Nature began, of labour eas'd,
Her latent beauties to disclose,
A fair harmonious world arose;
And though, by diabolic guile,
Disorder lord it for a while,
The time will come,
When nature shall her pristine form regain,
And harmony for ever reign.

Scena 5

Saul, David, Jonathan, Merab, Michal, Abner, Sommo Sacerdote.

31. Recitativo

Abner

Racked with infernal pains, ev'n now the king
Comes forth, and mutters horrid words, which hell,
No human tongue, has taught him.

32. Aria

David

O Lord, whose mercies numberless
O'er all thy works prevail:
Though daily man Thy law transgress,
Thy patience cannot fail.
If yet his sin be not too great,
The busy fiend control;
Yet longer for repentance wait,
And heal his wounded soul.

33. Symphony

34. Recitativo

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.

35. Aria

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. Esce David.

36. Recitativo

Saul

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.

37. Aria

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.

Scena 6

38. 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.

39. Aria

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.

40. Aria

Sommo Sacerdote

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.

41. Coro

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

ATTO SECONDO

Scena 1

42. Coro

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!

Scena 2

Jonathan and David.

43. Recitativo

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 resolv'd your death; and sternly charg'd
His whole retinue, me especially,
To execute his vengeance.

44. Aria

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.

45. Recitativo

David

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

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.

46. Aria

David

Such haughty beauties rather move
Aversion, than engage our love.
They can only our cares beguile,
Who gently speak, and sweetly smile.
If virtue in that dress appear,
Who, that sees, can love forbear?
Such beauties. . . *da capo*.

47. Recitativo

Jonathan

My father comes: retire, my friend, while I
With peaceful accents try to calm his rage.

Esce David.

Scena 3

Saul e Jonathan.

48. Recitativo

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.

49. Aria

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.

50. Aria

Saul

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

51. Aria

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!

Scena 4

52. Recitativo

Jonathan

Appear, my friend.
Entra David.

Saul

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

53. Aria

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.

54. Recitativo

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!

Scena 5

David e Michal.

55. Recitativo

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.

56. Duet

Michal

O fairest of ten thousand fair,
Yet for thy virtue more admir'd!
Thy words and actions all declare
The wisdom by thy God inspir'd.

David

O lovely maid! Thy form beheld,
Above all beauty charms our eyes:
Yet still within thy form conceal'd,
Thy mind, a greater beauty, lies.

Both

How well in thee does Heav'n at last
Compensate all my sorrows past.

Exeunt.

57. Coro

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.

58. Symphony

Scena 6

David and Michal.

59. Recitativo

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.

60. Duet

David

At persecution I can laugh;
No fear my soul can move,
In God's protection safe,
And blest in Michal's love.

Michal

Ah, dearest youth, for thee I fear!
Fly, begone, for death is near!

David

Fear not, lovely fAir, for me:
Death, where thou art, cannot be;
Smile, and danger is no more.

Michal

Fly, or death is at the door!
See, the murd'rous band comes on!
Stay no longer, fly, begone!

Scena 7

Michal and Doeg.

61. Recitativo

Michal

Whom dost thou seek? And who hast sent thee hither?

Doeg

I seek for David, and am sent by Saul.

Michal

Thy errand?

Doeg

'Tis a summons to the Court.

Michal

Say he is sick.

Doeg

In sickness or in health,
Alive or dead, he must be brought to Saul;
Show me his chamber.
David's bed discovered with an image in it.
Do you mock the king?
This disappointment will enrage him more:
Then tremble for th'event.
Esce.

62. Aria

Michal

No, no, let the guilty tremble
At ev'ry thought of danger near.
Though numbers, armed with death, assemble,
My innocence disdains to fear.
Though great their power as their spite,
Undaunted still, my soul, remain:
For greater is Jehovah's might,
And will their lawless force restrain.

Scena 8

63. Recitativo

Merab

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.

64. Aria

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.

Scena 9

Saul at the Feast of the New Moon.

65. Symphony

66. Accompagnato

Saul

The time at length is come when I shall take
My full revenge on Jesses'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!

Scena 10

Saul and Jonathan.

67. Recitativo

Saul

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

Jonathan

He earnestly ask'd leave
To go to Bethlem, where his father's house,
At solemn rites of annual sacrifice,
Requir'd his presence.

Saul

O perverse, rebellious!
Thinkst thou I do not know that thou hast chose
The son of Jesse to thy own confusion?
The world will say thou art no son of mine,
Who thus canst love the man I hate; the man
Who, if he lives, will rob thee of thy crown:
Send, fetch him thither; for the wretch must die.

Jonathan

What has he done? And wherefore must he die?

Saul

Darest thou oppose my will? Die then thyself!
He throws the javelin. Esce Jonathan, then Saul.

68. Coro

Oh, fatal consequence
Of rage, by reason uncontroll'd!
With every law he can dispense;
No ties the furious monster hold:
From crime to crime he blindly goes,
Nor end, but with his own destruction knows.

ATTO TERZO

Scena 1

Saul disguised, at Endor.

69. Accompagnato

Saul

Wretch that I am, of my own ruin author!
Where are my old supports? The valiant youth,
Whose very name was terror to my foes,
My rage has drove away. Of God forsaken,
In vain I ask his counsel. He vouchsafes
No answer to the sons of disobedience!
Even my own courage fails me! Can it be?
Is Saul become a coward? I'll not believe it!
If Heav'n denies thee aid, seek it from hell!

70. Accompagnato

Saul

'Tis said, here lives a woman, close familiar
With th'enemy of mankind: her I'll consult,
And know the worst. Her art is death by law;
And while I minded law, sure death attended
Such horrid practises. Yet, oh hard fate,
Myself am now reduc'd to ask the counsel
Of those I once abhorr'd!

Scena 2

Saul and the Witch of Endor.

71. Recitativo

Witch

With me what would'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.

72. Aria

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!

Scena 3

Apparition of Samuel.

73. 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 from 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.

74. Symphony

Scena 4

David and an Amalekite.

75. Recitativo

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

Of the race of Amalek.

76. Aria

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.

77. Symphony: dead march

Scena 5

Elegy on the death of Saul and Jonathan.

78. Coro

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!

79. Aria

Sommo Sacerdote

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.

80. Aria

Merab

From this unhappy day
No more, ye Gilboan hills, on you
Descend refreshing rains or kindly dew,
Which erst your heads with plenty crown'd;
Since there the shield of Saul, in arms renown'd,
Was vilely cast away.

81. Aria

David

Brave Jonathan his bow never drew,
But wing'd with death his arrow flew,
And drank the blood of slaughter'd foes.
Nor drew great Saul his sword in vain;
It reek'd, where'er he dealt his blows,
With entrails of the mighty slain.

82. Coro di Israeliti

Eagles were not so swift as they,
Nor lions with so strong a grasp
Held fast and tore the prey.

83. Aria

Michal

In sweetest harmony they lived,
Nor death their union could divide.
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.

84. Solo e Coro

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!

David and Israelites

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

85. Recitativo

Sommo Sacerdote

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.

86. Coro di Israeliti

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.

FINE DELL'ORATORIO

