Handel Water & Fire

B'Rock Orchestra

Dmitry Sinkovsky

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

	Water Music, Suite No.2, HWV 349	
1	I. Allegro	2. 11
2	II. Alla Hornpipe	4. 04
3	III. Menuet	3. 21
4	IV. Rigaudon 1	1. 08
5	V. Rigaudon 2 - IV. Rigaudon 1 da capo	1. 37
	Water Music, Suite No.1, HWV 348	
6	I. Overture. Largo - Allegro	3. 13
7	II. Adagio e staccato	2. 06
8	III. Allegro	2. 26
9	IV. Andante - III. Allegro da capo	4. 43
10	V. Allegro	2. 57
11	VI. Air	1. 22
12	VII. Menuet	2. 38
13	VIII. Bourrée	1. 00
14	IX. Hornpipe	1. 35
15	X. Allegro moderato	4. 14
	Water Music, Suite No.3, HWV 350	
16	I. Lentement	2. 32
17	II. Bourrée	1. 42
18	III. Menuet 1	0. 59
19	IV. Menuet 2	1. 47
20	V. Gigue 1 - VI. Gigue 2	1. 07
21	VII. Menuet	1. 58
	Music for the Royal Fireworks, HWV 351	
22	Ia. Overture - Adagio	2. 26
23	Ib. Allegro - Lentement - Allegro	5. 08
24	II. Bourrée	1. 27
25	III. La paix. Largo alla Siciliana	3. 14
26	IV. La Réjouissance	1. 56
27	VI. Menuet 2	0. 32
28	V. Menuet 1 - VI. Menuet 2 da capo	1. 16

Total playing time: 64. 50

B'Rock Orchestra
Conducted by **Dmitry Sinkovsky**

B'Rock Orchestra

Violin 1
Boris Begelman (concertmaster), Rebecca Huber, Jivka Kaltcheva, Ortwin Lowyck, Madoka Nakamaru, David Rabinovici

Violin 2
Ellie Nimeroski, Gisela Cammaert, Elin Eriksson, Myriam Mahnane, Liesbeth Nijs, Naoko Ogura

Viola
Raquel Massadas, Amaryllis Bartholomeus, Manuela Bucher, Blanca Prieto, Sylvestre Vergez

Cello
Rebecca Rosen, Michel Boulanger, Marian Minnen, Diana Vinagre

Double bass
Tom Devaere, Elise Christiaens, Mattias Frostenson

Oboe
Antoine Torunczyk, Marta Blawat, Stefaan Verdegem, Nele Vertommen

Bassoon
Benjamin Aghassi, Josep Casadella

Contrabassoon Tomasz Wesołowski

Horn Jeroen Billiet, Mark De Merlier, Pieter D'Hoe

Trumpet Sander Kintaert, Bram Mergaert, Elena Torres

Lute Karl Nyhlin, Shizuko Noiri

Harpsichord & organ Andreas Küppers

Harpsichord Alexander von Heißen

Timpani Jan Huylebroeck

Percussion Koen Plaetinck

B'Rock Orchestra, Dmitry Sinkovsky.

Dmitry Sinkovsky

Pleasure and Propaganda

Water Music

Although Handel (like most eighteenth-century composers) regarded opera as the most prestigious genre, and his oratorios cemented his status as a figure of national importance in Britain, it is occasional works such as the *Water Music* and *Music for the Royal Fireworks* that tell us most about Handel's canny relationship with his patrons and public, and that have introduced Handel to the widest audience.

Handel's first biographer, John Mainwaring, cemented the *Water Music* in Handel's posthumous mythography as the work that restored the composer to George I's good graces after they had supposedly fallen out when the Hanoverian Elector acceded to the British throne in 1714:

"The King was persuaded to form a party on the water. Handel was apprised of the design, and advised to prepare some Music for that occasion. It was performed and conducted by himself, unknown to his Majesty, whose pleasure on hearing it was equal to his surprise. He was impatient to know who it was . . . The Baron then produced the delinquent . . . [and] Handel was restored to favour".

The discovery that Handel's royal pension continued when George I assumed the throne undermines this story, but so too do other circumstances: although Mainwaring implies that this party took place in the first year of the King's reign, the only documented water party involving Handel's music took place on 17 July 1717. Equally, George I is unlikely to have been 'surprised' by the inclusion of music, since several such events had already been organised in London in the preceding years. Indeed, the fashion for musical parties on the water had long been common in Italy, where serenading away an evening on a boat was an understandable response to the summer's heat. In 1711 Venice, the *Pallade veneta* noted that:

"Nightly, the strains of music are heard on our canals in the shape of lively serenades of various kinds, which — apart from those who listen from windows — are followed by a dense swarm of boats intent on enjoying the merriment they cause".

Given the centrality of Italy to all fashionable musical activity in Europe throughout the eighteenth century, it is not surprising that courtiers in other countries sought to emulate its polite diversions. The account of the *Water Music* performance is in some ways strikingly reminiscent of 1711 Venice:

"On Wednesday Evening, at about 8, the King took Water at Whitehall in an open Barge . . . And went up the River towards Chelsea. Many other Barges with Persons of Quality attended, and so great a Number of Boats, that the whole River in a manner was cover'd".

Handel may not have originally composed the piece for this royal occasion: there are plentiful and varied borrowings from his own and others' works, the trumpets — a regal instrument — seem to have been added at a late stage, and there is no thematic hint of 'water' in the 22 movements, unless one counts a possible allusion in the final Trumpet Minuet to Reinhard Keiser's 1707 *Der Carneval von Venedig* ('carnival of Venice'). But the varied movements — many dance-derived — indicate an aspiration to represent the best of instrumental music, providing the band of the opera house with some employment in its fallow summer months. A Prussian visitor present for the occasion enumerated 'the musicians, about 50 in number, who played on all kinds of instruments, to wit trumpets, horns, hautboys [oboes], bassoons, German flutes, French flutes, violins and basses'. The players were evidently put through their paces: while the king shared his barge with five noble guests, all 50 musicians crammed into one

barge, and because 'His Majesty approved of [the music] so greatly . . . he caused it to be repeated three times in all, although each performance lasted an hour — namely twice before and once after supper', supper taking place at Chelsea at 1am, and the return trip to St James's occurring at 3am. Although no complete score in the composer's hand survives (as they have for most of his music), the various arrangements of movements in both published and manuscript collections attest to a lively performing tradition throughout the eighteenth century, albeit in more manageable smaller, key-based groupings.

Music for the Royal Fireworks

The *Water Music* may have been commissioned as part of a kind of royal 'progress', to help present a favourable image of George I to his less-than-loyal new British subjects after the 1715 Jacobite uprising. At the other end of his career, Handel was again the go-to composer for state propaganda after the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 — this time, to varnish the unpopular Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle of 1748, between the British, Spanish, Austrians, French, Dutch (and other smaller principalities) at the end of the War of the Austrian Succession. Just as for the *Water Music*, the mounting of spectacular shows featuring fireworks and music at times of national celebration was widespread across Europe. Handel apparently assembled the music swiftly, borrowing in substance and style from his militaristic music of the preceding few years; the opening of the overture, for instance, comes from the Concertos for Orchestra, HWV 335a and 335b (but also from the *Water Music* hornpipe and various other versions of the same theme over the intervening years). Despite — or perhaps because of — these borrowings, militaristic symbolism suffused the work, from the overture's battle between alternating (English and French) forces, to a pastoral *siciliana* for 'La paix' and the fanfares of 'La réjouissance'. Importantly, he was writing not so much for royalty as for the ordinary folk who thronged the Park to watch the fireworks display.

Given Handel's increasingly monumental status — he became known as 'giant Handel' — his musical fireworks were much anticipated, with Horace Walpole asserting that the show would open 'with a concert of fifteen hundred hands', and *The London Magazine* of 17 January 1749 only slightly more realistically proclaiming that it would 'consist of 40 trumpets, 20 French horns, 16 hautboys, 16 bassoons, 8 pair of kettle-drums, 12 side-drums, a proper number of flutes and fifes; with 100 cannon to go off singly at intervals, with the musick'. (In the event, Handel specified 24 oboes, nine each of horns and trumpets, three sets of timpani, twelve bassoons, a contrabassoon and serpent.) Perhaps this overblown publicity, like the fireworks themselves, was intended to mask the perception that the Treaty was a bad deal for Britain, with the return of colonial territorial gains to their pre-war holders, but even the fireworks were controversial, particularly the plan to hold them on a Sunday.

In order to help with arrangements for the display itself — which was staged from an extremely elaborate Doric 'temple', constructed from a wooden frame covered with canvas, and including various illuminated scenes — the fireworks directors agreed to allow Handel's music to be 'rehearsed' at Vauxhall Gardens in advance of the actual fireworks performance in Green Park. Handel himself, who only stood to lose by this (as it lessened the rarity value of a subsequent Foundling Hospital charity performance), was decidedly unenthusiastic, but when the Vauxhall rehearsal went ahead, at 11am on 21 April 1749, *The Gentleman's Magazine* estimated with typical exaggeration 'an audience of above 12000 persons . . . [which] occasioned such a stoppage on *London-Bridge*, that no carriage could pass for 3 hours'. The fireworks performance itself, six days later, was similarly crowded (though newspapers reassured people that Green Park could comfortably take over 2 million people and so could not possibly become overcrowded), with visitors thronging into London for the magnificent and lengthy display of fireworks and illuminations. Such a crowd in such a space inevitably could have heard little of Handel's music, even had his forces been as overblown as advertised. And so, despite the anticipation, no reports survive on how

the music fared, but only on the spectacle (and mishaps) of the fireworks. Handel himself never performed this occasional music again except in adapted form a month later at the Foundling Hospital. It is ironic, then, that it is one of his most well-known pieces today.

Suzanne Aspden

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Acknowledgements

PRODUCTION TEAM
Executive producer **Kate Rockett** (Pentatone)
A&R coordinator **Miljana Parcetic**
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Liner notes **Suzanne Aspden**
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PENTATONE TEAM
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