



BBC
MUSIC
MAGAZINE

JUNE 2015

VERACINI

Adriano in Siria

Sonia Prina, Ann Hallenberg, Roberta Invernizzi, Romina Basso, Lucia Cirillo; Europa Galante/Fabio Biondi

Fra Bernardo FB 1409491 172 mins (3 discs)

BBC Music Direct £32.99

When Handel fired the celebrated castrato, Senesino, London nobility set up a rival company with Senesino, along with prima donna Cuzzoni and Handel's other lead vocalists. Farinelli, imported from Italy in 1734, completed the line-up of this 'Nobility Opera'. Virtuoso violinist and composer Veracini, known from a stunning series of London concerts, was invited in 1735 to lead the band and set a libretto in which the hero (played by Farinelli) defends the honour of its heroine (Cuzzoni), slandered to the virtuous Roman general Adriano (Senesino).

Richly scored, Veracini's opera alternates between lyricism, virtuosity, and brilliant instrumental-vocal exchanges. Unlike Handel, Veracini's music allows singers to extemporise freely, either by making lines simple or by handing them opportunities for slam-dunk cadenzas. In this live recording Fabio Biondi reveals the score's potential with perfect pacing, breathless silences and towering affective climaxes, leaving you wanting more even after three hours.

In Farinelli's role, Ann Hallenberg delivers peak-career bravura, culminating in a nine-minute show-stopper, 'Amor, dover, rispetto'. Cuzzoni-styled pathos is ravishingly executed by Roberta Invernizzi with richness of timbre and grace of extemporisation, for example in 'Quell'amplesso', involving fine violin solos originally performed by Veracini himself. Sonia Prina as Adriano (Senesino) personifies dignity, commanding outrageous passages with almost scornful ease. Veracini's ideas do thin out in Act III, with some clumsy parallel voice writing; here, Prina's vibrato also loses some focus. Yet on the whole this a superb CD premiere. *Berta Joncus*

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★★