

ACIS AND GALATEA

Masque in due atti HWV 49a

Libretto di John Gay, Alexander Pope, John Hughes

(dalle "Metamorfosi" di Ovidio)

Musica di George Friedrich Händel

1ª esecuzione: Cannons, dimora del duca di Chandos, ?-5-1718

1ª rappresentaz.: Londra, Theatre Royal of Lincoln's Inn Fields, 26-3-1731

Personaggi, vocalità (PRIMI INTERPRETI)

Galatea, soprano (MRS. WRIGHT)

Acis, tenore, (PHILIP ROCHETTI)

Damon, tenore (THOMAS SALWAY)

Polyphemus, basso (RICHARD LEVERIDGE)

Coro di Pastori e Pastorelle

PRIMO ATTO

1. Sinfonia

2. Coro

Oh, the pleasure of the plains!
Happy nymphs and happy swains,
Harmless, merry, free and gay,
Dance and sport the hours away.
For us the zephyr blows,
For us distills the dew,
For us unfolds the rose,
And flow'rs display their hue.
For us the winters rain,
For us the summers shine,
Spring swells for us the grain,
And autumn bleeds the wine.
Oh, the pleasure... (*da capo*).

3. Accompagnato

Galatea - Ye verdant plains and woody mountains,
Purling streams and bubbling fountains,
Ye painted glories of the field,
Vain are the pleasures which ye yield;
Too thin the shadow of the grove,
Too faint the gales, to cool my love.

4. Aria

Galatea - Hush, ye pretty warbling quire!
Your thrilling strains
Awake my pains,
And kindle fierce desire.
Cease your song, and take your flight,
Bring back my Acis to my sight!
Hush... (*da capo*)

5. Aria

Acis - Where shall I seek the charming fair?
Direct the way, kind genius of the mountains!
O tell me, if you saw my dear!
Seeks she the grove, or bathes in crystal fountains?
Where... (*da capo*)

6. Recitativo

Damon - Stay, shepherd, stay!
See, how thy flocks in yonder valley stray!
What means this melancholy Air?
No more thy tuneful pipe we hear.

7. Aria

Damon - Shepherd, what art thou pursuing?
Heedless running to thy ruin;
Share our joy, our pleasure share,
Leave thy passion till tomorrow,
Let the day be free from sorrow,
Free from love, and free from care!
Shepherd... (*da capo*)

8. Recitativo

Acis - Lo, here my love, turn, Galatea, hither turn thy eyes!
See, at thy feet the longing Acis lies.

9. Aria

Acis - Love in her eyes sits playing,
And sheds delicious death;
Love on her lips is straying,
And warbling in her breath!
Love on her breast sits panting
And swells with soft desire;
No grace, no charm is wanting,
To set the heart on fire.
Love in her eyes... (*da capo*)

10. Recitativo

Galatea - Oh, didst thou know the pains of absent love,
Acis would ne'er from Galatea rove.

11. Aria

Galatea - As when the dove
Laments her love,
All on the naked spray;
When he returns,
No more she mourns,
But loves the live-long day.
Billing, cooing,
Panting, wooing,
Melting murmurs fill the grove,
Melting murmurs, lasting love.
As when... (*da capo*)

12. Duet

Galatea, Acis - Happy we!
What joys I feel!
What charms I see
Of all youths/nymphs thou dearest boy/brightest fair!
Thou all my bliss, thou all my joy!
Happy... (*da capo*)

SECONDO ATTO

13. Coro

Wretched lovers! Fate has past
This sad decree: no joy shall last.
Wretched lovers, quit your dream!
Behold the monster Polypheme!
See what ample strides he takes!
The mountain nods, the forest shakes;
The waves run frighten'd to the shores:
Hark, how the thund'ring giant roars!

14. Accompagnato

Polyphemus - I rage - I melt - I burn!
The feeble god has stabb'd me to the heart.
Thou trusty pine,
Prop of my godlike steps, I lay thee by!
Bring me a hundred reeds of decent growth
To make a pipe for my capacious mouth;
In soft enchanting accents let me breathe
Sweet Galatea's beauty, and my love.

15. Aria

Polyphemus - O ruddier than the cherry,
O sweeter than the berry,
O nymph more bright
Than moonshine night,
Like kidlings blithe and merry.
Ripe as the melting cluster,
No lily has such lustre;
Yet hard to tame
As raging flame,
And fierce as storms that bluster!
O ruddier... (*da capo*)

16. Recitativo

Polyphemus - Whither, fairest, art thou running,
Still my warm embraces shunning?
Galatea - The lion calls not to his prey,
Nor bids the wolf the lambkin stay.

Polyphemus - Thee, Polyphemus, great as Jove,
Calls to empire and to love,
To his palace in the rock,
To his dairy, to his flock,
To the grape of purple hue,
To the plum of glossy blue,
Wildings, which expecting stand,
Proud to be gather'd by thy hand.

Galatea - Of infant limbs to make my food,
And swill full draughts of human blood!
Go, monster, bid some other guest!
I loathe the host, I loathe the feast.

17. Aria

Polyphemus - Cease to beauty to be suing,
Ever whining love disdain,
Let the brave their aims pursuing,
Still be conqu'ring not complaining.
Cease... (*da capo*)

18. Aria

Damon - Would you gain the tender creature,
Softly, gently, kindly treat her:
Suff'ring is the lover's part.
Beauty by constraint possessing
You enjoy but half the blessing,
Lifeless charms without the heart.
Would you... (*da capo*)

19. Recitativo

Acis - His hideous love provokes my rage.
Weak as I am, I must engage!
Inspir'd with thy victorious charms,
The god of love will lend his arms.

20. Aria

Acis - Love sounds th'alarm,
And fear is a-flying!
When beauty's the prize,
What mortal fears dying?
In defence of my treasure,
I'd bleed at each vein;
Without her no pleasure,
For life is a pain.
Love sounds... (*da capo*)

21. Aria

Damon - Consider, fond shepherd,
How fleeting's the pleasure,
That flatters our hopes
In pursuit of the fair!
The joys that attend it,
By moments we measure,
But life is too little
To measure our care.
Consider... (*da capo*)

22. Recitativo

Galatea - Cease, oh cease, thou gentle youth,
Trust my constancy and truth,
Trust my truth and pow'rs above,
The pow'rs propitious still to love!

23. Trio

Galatea and Acis - The flocks shall leave the mountains,
The woods the turtle dove,
The nymphs forsake the fountains,
Ere I forsake my love!

Polyphemus - Torture! fury! rage! despair
I cannot, cannot bear!

Galatea and Acis - Not show'rs to larks so pleasing,
Nor sunshine to the bee,
Not sleep to toil so easing,
As these dear smiles to me.

Polyphemus - Fly swift, thou massy ruin, fly!

Die, presumptuous Acis, die!

24. Accompagnato

Acis - Help, Galatea! Help, ye parent gods!
And take me dying to your deep abodes.

25. Coro

Mourn, all ye muses! Weep, all ye swains!
Tune, tune your reeds to doleful strains!
Groans, cries and howlings fill the neighb'ring shore:
Ah, the gentle Acis is no more!

26. Solo and Coro

Galatea - Must I my Acis still bemoan,
Inglorious crush'd beneath that stone?

Coro - Cease, Galatea, cease to grieve!
Bewail not whom thou canst relieve.

Galatea - Must the lovely charming youth
Die for his constancy and truth?

Coro - Cease, Galatea, cease to grieve!
Bewail not whom thou canst relieve;

Call forth thy pow'r, employ thy art,
The goddess soon can heal thy smart.

Galatea - Say what comfort can you find?
For dark despair o'er-clouds my mind.

Coro - To kindred gods the youth return,
Through verdant plains to roll his urn.

27. Recitativo

Galatea - 'Tis done! Thus I exert my pow'r divine;
Be thou immortal, though thou art not mine!

28. Aria

Galatea - Heart, the seat of soft delight,
Be thou now a fountain bright!
Purple be no more thy blood,
Glide thou like a crystal flood.
Rock, thy hollow womb disclose!
The bubbling fountain, lo! it flows;
Through the plains he joys to rove,
Murm'ring still his gentle love.

29. Coro

Galatea, dry thy tears,
Acis now a god appears!
See how he rears him from his bed,
See the wreath that binds his head.
Hail! thou gentle murm'ring stream,
Shepherds' pleasure, muses' theme!
Through the plains still joy to rove,
Murm'ring still thy gentle love.

Fine

LA NOTA - Quando George Friedrich Händel era intento a questa composizione per il teatro inglese, ancora in corso di completamento la definì una "piccola opera", cosa che vien fuori dal suo epistolario. Però, subito dopo essere stata rappresentata, venne identificata come appartenente ora al genere "pastorale", ora alla "serenata", ora al "masque", ora al "divertimento". Tutte identificazioni che, a rigor di logica, potrebbero, seppur in sordina, sostenersi. Nel tempo è prevalsa l'attribuzione di "masque", soprattutto perché detiene tutti i crismi di questa forma d'intrattenimento in uso nelle corti altonobiliari nei cento anni a cavallo fra il '600 e il '700 (danza, dramma, musica, spettacolo: il tutto completato da sfarzose maschere dal richiamo all'allegorica mitologia classica con il parlato e con il coro anch'essi nell'accezione classica, e ancor il tutto condito, possibilmente, da fantastici marchingegni più o meno volanti). Da sottolineare che dal "Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians" - forse, o senz'altro, il più autorevole testo enciclopedico di argomento musicale - è identificato come "oratorio". Noi dissentiamo perché non troviamo in "Acis and Galatea" alcunché di sacro, liturgico, biblico o religioso: indispensabili cardini perché una composizione possa definirsi "oratorio". Nel HWV - Händel-Werke-Verzeichnis (catalogo delle opere di Georg Friedrich Händel) - questo masque occupa il numero 49, e i tre librettisti (John Gay, Alexander Pope, John Hughes) presero spunto dalle "Metamorfosi" che Ovidio scrisse nei sei anni che vanno dal 2 all'8 d.C., cioè nel pieno della sua maturità di cinquantenne alla vigilia del suo esilio vero o supposto che sia stato.