Sandrine Piau - Between Heaven & Earth (Handel Arias) [2009]

1. La Resurrezione | Aria 'Disserratevi, o porte d'Averno' 2. Theodora | Recitative 'O Thou bright Sun!' 3. Theodora | Aria 'With darkness deep as is my woe' 4. A song for St Cecilia's day | Aria 'What passion cannot music raise and quell' 5. Messiah | Aria 'Rejoice greatly' 6. Theodora | Largo 7. Alexander Balus | Aria 'O take me from this hateful light' 8. Alexander Balus | Recitative 'Forgive, O queen' 9. Alexander Balus | Accompagnato 'Calm thou my soul' 10. Alexander Balus | Aria 'Convey me to some peaceful shore' 11. Joseph and his brethren | Recitative 'Art thou not Zaphnath? Is not Egypt sav'd?' 12. Joseph and his brethren | Aria 'Prophetic raptures swell my breast' 13. L'allegro, Il penseroso, ed Il moderato | Duet 'As steals the morn upon the night' (*) 14. Solomon | Symphony ('The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba') 15. L'allegro, il penseroso, ed il moderato Accompagnato | 'First and chief on golden wing' 16. L'allegro, il penseroso, ed il moderato Accompagnato | Aria 'Sweet bird' 17. Concerto Grosso in B Flat Major, op.3 no.2 | Largo 18. Samson | Aria 'Let the bright seraphims' 19. Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno | Accompagnato 'Pure del cielo' 20. Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno | Aria 'Tu del Ciel ministro eletto' Sandrine Piau – soprano Accademia Bizantina Stefano Montanari - Conductor, Musical Direction, Violin

French soprano Sandrine Piau, despite her frequent appearances on Baroque recordings, may not seem a first choice for the sheer athleticism of Handel, but wait until you hear her. Piau substitutes grace, precision, and sheer beauty for brawn, and the results are astonishing. She chooses arias ideally suited to her talents. "Rejoice greatly," from Messiah, is full of spiky flash, and lengthy pieces like "Prophetic raptures swell my breast" (track 12), from Joseph and His Brethren, are beautifully developed, with Piau sliding with impossible smoothness into high notes in the later stages. Passagework in faster pieces is a shower of bright sparks, while in "Sweet bird," from L'allegro, il penseroso, ed il moderato (track 16), you will become deliciously disoriented after a while as to whether it is Piau or one of the instruments providing the bird effects. The Accademia Bizantina under violinist/director Stefano Montanari provides the more conventional zip that lets Piau's subtler approach weave its remarkable spell. With the usual striking graphics from Naïve and excellent notes unpacking the album's theme of the interpenetration of sacred and secular in Handel's oratorio-heavy world, this is a superb vocal recording. If you had to complain of one thing, it's that there's a slight disconnect between

sound and syntax in Piau's treatment of English, but with beauty like this you won't care. Texts are in French, English, and Italian, where that is the original. --- James Manheim, Rovi

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