

Los Angeles Philharmonic
Hollywood Bowl
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The Grand Tour: London
Notes by John Glover

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From the mid 1600s until the early 1800s, the Grand Tour was a kind of rite of passage for young men in British high society. The idea was to become a more educated and fully rounded individual by experiencing the art, culture, and languages of the European nations of (primarily) France, Italy, and Germany. Those that were particularly wealthy might also rent a yacht for traveling to the Greek isles. While airlines would make a Grand Tour considerably simpler today, at that time the typical trip required taking a ship across the English Channel, purchasing a coach in France, and bringing along a retinue of servants for the journey. The crossing over the Alps into Italy was a particular challenge, requiring the servants to dismantle the coach, carry everything over the mountain, and reassemble it on the other side. Needless to say, the Grand Tour was a rather expensive venture and was something reserved for the elite. It lost a great deal of its social currency in the 1820s with the introduction of mass railway transit, allowing a burgeoning middle class to experience what had been reserved for the very wealthy.

At their height, these tours could last anywhere from many months to several years depending on the wealth of the young man or, perhaps more correctly stated, the wealth of his family. The tour would serve as an educational preparation for a position of high social status in government, e. g., a diplomat. Writings such as John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) insisted that one learned through the experiencing of external stimuli. Locke's thoughts were widely accepted in the mid 1700s, when all of the music on tonight's program was written, making travel the necessary means for becoming a thoroughly learned person. Fortunately for us, Nicholas McGegan has made the Tour easier than booking a flight on Orbitz. In this first installment of his musical portrait of the Grand Tour, McGegan has selected music that would have been heard in London society as our young nobleman prepared for departure. This evening provides the perfect musical send-off for our own Grand Tour, all from the comfort of a seat at the Hollywood Bowl.

George Frideric Handel's (1685-1759) coronation anthem *Zadok the Priest* is from a collection of four anthems written for the coronation of King George II and Queen Caroline in 1727. It is certainly the most well-known of the four and is still performed to this day at every British coronation. It is easy to see why, as the music carries an infectiously jubilant and ceremonial character throughout.

One of the great masters of the oratorio, Handel made his final contribution to the genre with *Jephtha*. Although Handel was famously speedy in his writing, *Jephtha* required a great deal of energy from the ageing composer, who completed it in August of 1752 after eight months of work. The story comes from the biblical tale of Jephtha, who made a vow to God that if victorious, he would sacrifice the first person he saw upon his return from battle. Unfortunately, that person was his daughter Iphis. As soon as Jephtha resolved himself to be true to his oath God relieved him of his duty, requiring only that Iphis remain a virgin for the rest of her life. Both of the arias heard tonight are Jephtha's. The first is a *da capo* aria displaying his power and rage through rapid-fire runs in the voice. The second aria is heard after Jephtha has resigned himself to sacrificing his daughter. To the tenderest music, he asks that she be guided by angels "through the skies."

The oratorio *Solomon*, written before *Jephtha*, was also one of the last he composed. The work is divided into three acts, giving three separate views of an ideal ruler (Solomon) all linked by the building of a new temple in Jerusalem. The rousing "Arrival of the Queen of Sheba" comes from the third act, in which Solomon is visited by the queen and presents a musical masque to show her the glory of his kingdom.

Handel's skill as a composer, particularly of dramatic vocal music, was such that his arias were often heard outside the context of their complete works. "Where'er You Walk" from the opera *Semele* is one of those pieces, and it was often heard on concerts as a work of dramatic and musical beauty in its own right.

In keeping with that tradition, the final three selections from Handel come from his oratorio *Judas Maccabaeus*. Written in 1746, this oratorio marked his first collaboration with librettist Thomas Morell, who also provided the text for his final oratorios *Theodora* (1750) and *Jephtha* (1752). The work was written in anticipation of the Duke of Cumberland's victory over forces raised by Prince Charles Edward and uses the biblical tale of Judas Maccabaeus as an allegory for the Duke's strength in battle. "Sound the alarm!" appears in the second act and is

sung by Judas as he rouses his troops to action. The construction of this piece aids in the feeling of a gathering of forces by beginning only with continuo and adding the full orchestra at the typical *da capo* repeat. “See the conqu’ring hero comes!” March, and “Sing unto God” are the three numbers celebrating the victory of Judas over his foe Simon. This bold and vibrant music leaves little question why the work remained immensely popular from its premiere, on through the Victorian era, and into the first half of the 20th century.

Handel was not the only composer to benefit from the cosmopolitan and music-hungry public of London. In 1791, with the passing of his long-time patron Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) was finally free to pursue a more international career. Concert producer and violinist Johann Salomon heard of Esterházy’s death and immediately went to Vienna to engage Haydn for London’s upcoming concert season. His contract included the composition of a new opera, six symphonies, publication rights, 20 other pieces of music, and conducting engagements for a payment of around £1200.

Almost immediately upon settling in, Haydn was thrust into a whirlwind schedule of fulfilling commissions, royal soireés, and concert engagements. His short cantata for chorus and orchestra *The Storm* was one such piece written during the beginning of his time in London. Its success, along with his other works, drew Haydn into a much longer stay than initially planned. At the close of his first year, Salomon signed him on for a second and Haydn had to write to his new patron, Esterházy’s son Prince Anton, for an extension of leave. Although he returned to Austria at the close of 1792, the vibrancy of the London musical society and his immense popularity brought him back for frequent engagements on through the end of 1794.

Around the height of the Grand Tour, the young Mozart (1756-1791) was undergoing his own journey through Europe, but for quite different reasons. Under the ever-watchful gaze of his father, the eight-year-old Mozart was touring with his sister Nannerl seeking fame and fortune performing for numerous heads of church and state. Beginning in Paris in the winter of 1763, where Mozart wrote his first published works, they then traveled to London. His “official” (there is some debate as to which one truly was written first) Symphony No. 1 was written in 1764 during his stay in England. His father had become extremely ill and the children were not allowed to play the piano for several months while he recovered. The young Mozart occupied himself by writing the symphony while his sister copied out the parts. Nannerl described the experience: “Whilst he composed and I sat by his side copying he said to me: Remind me to give the horns something interesting to do!” Of particular note is the dramatic middle andante movement, which possesses a great deal of gravity for an eight-year-old child and, perhaps, found its source in the dire illness of his father during its composition.

“Va, dal furor portata” marked another first for the young composer during his stay in London. It was his first aria, which he contributed to a pasticcio of the opera *Ezio*. Because numerous composers would set the same text, it was common to compile arias from different composers to string together the plot. In this case it was the elder composer J.C. Bach who contributed a great deal of the music in the work.

Working in England at the same time as Handel, Thomas Arne (1710-1778) was admired as one of the great composers of his time. However, due to his Catholicism he was prevented from writing for grand ceremonies or coronations. His world was the theater and the pleasure gardens and he created numerous songs and full-scale works for these venues. *Alfred* was one of the more famous works, built on a patriotic story of a national hero overcoming a foreign enemy, much like Handel’s *Judas Maccabaeus*. Like Purcell before him, Arne was considered in his own time to be a truly British composer and his music was widely popular. As Nicholas McGegan remarks, “‘Rule Britannia,’ the final number of *Alfred*, is a song which encapsulates all the virtues the British admire and like to think they possess...” It is therefore the perfect close to a musical portrait of London society at the height of the Grand Tour, and an ideal send-off as we prepare for departure to Venice, Paris, and Vienna.

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