

Haymarket
Opera company



Alessandro Scarlatti

Agar et Ismaele esiliati

Friday, March 3 & Saturday, March 4, 2017

Chicago Temple & Church of the Atonement | Chicago, Illinois



Dear Friends,

We are thrilled to offer our second annual Lenten Oratorio concerts this weekend with Alessandro Scarlatti's *Agar et Ismaele esiliati*. I know you will enjoy his lyrical and powerful setting of de Totis' text, based on the story of Hagar and Ishmael from *Genesis*.

So far we have had a busy sixth season. We began in September with Haydn's elegant opera *L'isola disabitata* at the Athenaeum Theatre. In January we performed Stradella's oratorio *San Giovanni Battista* at the Valletta International Baroque Festival in Malta. This was our European debut and the concerts were special indeed. It's not every day a musician has the opportunity to perform before a huge Caravaggio canvas. You can catch a glimpse of the concerts on our YouTube channel and on our Facebook group page. If you're a Twitterer or an Instagrammer you can see even more images on those sites.

The rest of our season is equally exciting. Please join us on March 24 at Old Saint Patrick's Church, when the Haymarket String Quartet performs Haydn's *The Seven Last Words of Christ* on period instruments. Two days later Haymarket Opera Orchestra joins the Chicago Chorale for one performance of Bach's seminal *Mass in B Minor*. And on May 11 we offer our Early Opera Cabaret fundraiser at the Arts Club of Chicago. Don't miss the June 3 performance of Antonio Cesti's 17th-century blockbuster *L'Orontea* by the participants of our Summer Opera Course. You can find details on all of these events at our website.

Thank you for supporting live theater and music. We could not do any of our work without the generous support of individuals like you.

—Craig Trompeter, Artistic Director

UPCOMING 2017 HOC EVENTS

March 24, 2017	Haydn <i>The Seven Last Words of Christ</i>
March 26, 2017	Bach <i>Mass in B minor</i>
May 11, 2017	HOC Gala Early Opera Cabaret
June 3, 2017	Cesti <i>L'Orontea</i>
Sept 3, Oct 1 & 3, 2017	Marais <i>Ariane et Bacchus</i>

Learn more at haymarketopera.org

Agar et Ismaele esiliati

1683

Music by Alessandro Scarlatti

Libretto by Giuseppe Domenico de Totis

Interlocutori

Sara, wife of Abramo and mother of Isaac Jill Dewsnup
Abramo, husband of Sara Peter van de Graaff
and father of Ismaele and Isaac
Agar, slave of Sara Angela Young Smucker
and mother of Ismaele by Abramo
Ismaele, son of Agar and Abramo Kristin Knutson
Angelo, sent to rescue Jill Dewsnup
Agar and Ismaele in the desert

Musical Director Craig Trompeter

English Translation Alessandra Visconti

Supertitles operator Harrah Friedlander

Orchestra

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Jeri-Lou Zike,
concertmaster
Jody Livo
Wendy Benner

SECOND VIOLIN

Martin Davids
Ann Duggan
Susan Rozendaal

VIOLA

Liz Hagen
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CELLO

Craig Trompeter
Anna Steinhoff

BASS

Jerry Fuller

THEORBO

John Lenti

ORGAN/HARPSICHORD

Jory Vinikour

A NOTE FROM THE TRANSLATOR:

I have prepared a new English translation of Giuseppe Domenico de Totis' Agar et Ismaele esiliati for these concerts by Haymarket Opera Company. Rather than make a literal translation of each word, I have sought to convey the meaning of each line in as few words as possible so that readers may more easily focus on the interplay of text and music.

—Alessandra Visconti

Program Notes: Exile and Salvation

BY ROBERT L. KENDRICK

On almost all fronts—except that of its music—the oratorio *Agar ed Ismaele esiliati* (“Hagar and Ishmael banished”) presents uncertainty and mystery. The story itself is taken from the life of Abraham in *Genesis* (here ch. 21: 9–20), according to which the patriarch had first had Ishmael with the slave Hagar, then Isaac with his wife Sarah, despite their advanced ages. In the Bible, it is Sarah who demands that the two be banished, so that Ishmael would not share in Isaac’s inheritance, and it is here that our oratorio begins. God reiterates the ban, but reassures Abraham that Ishmael will be provided for. Once exiled, the two flee into the desert of Beersheba (the Negev), and Ishmael, on the point of death from thirst, is saved when Hagar cries out and an angel appears to show the well that will save them, after which Ishmael goes to Egypt, takes a wife, and has descendants.

Few would argue that this is the most appealing story in *Genesis*. In the seventeenth century, its interpretation was similarly problematic in Catholic thought; the major Biblical exegete of the century, Cornelius a Lapide (1567–1637), simply glossed it as Abraham’s obedience to God’s will, no matter how seemingly arbitrary, adding St. Paul’s veiled reference to the story (*Galatians* 4:29) that it was a prefiguring of the division between law (the “old covenant”) and grace (the “new covenant”), and also citing a variant translation to claim that Ismael had mocked Isaac on the occasion of the latter’s being weaned (and thus “deserved” the banishment).

The Jesuit superior G. P. Oliva (1600–81) found more difficulties in the tale, and devoted some eight pages of “ethical commentary” to it in his *Commentationes in Genesim* (1677). Here, the semi–happy end of the story is seen as God’s merciful response to sinners (i.e. Hagar) who call out in penitence, and thus the story would have sense for musical treatment during the penitential season of Lent (in which our performances fall). Still, the simpler and more popular story of Abraham’s (almost) Sacrifice of Isaac, a prefiguring of Christ’s Passion, was far more common in musical settings from 1640 on to Pietro Metastasio’s libretto *Isaaco figura del Redentore* (1740).

The uncertainties do not end there. The text of today’s piece, the work of the Roman librettist Giuseppe de Totis (1644–1707), was copied into a Roman collection of oratorio libretti as early as 1677 (I am grateful to Prof. Arnaldo Morelli for his thoughts on the piece), to be used at the Oratory of the Roman church of S. Maria in Vallicella (the “Chiesa Nuova”, the site of many early performances of the genre).

But that copy of the libretto does not survive, and the earliest source for the literary text is a print from 1691 for a performance by a Marian confraternity in Palermo (Sicily) on Rosary Sunday that year. This version differs in some details from that of the only source for the music, a full score probably copied in Rome for shipment to the music-loving court of the Austrian Habsburg dynasty in Vienna (and today the score is still preserved in the Austrian National Library). Here the music is clearly attributed to the Sicilian/Neapolitan/Roman composer Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725). The score bears the date of 1683, but this is likely the date of its copying, not necessarily its composition or performance. Furthermore, there is no documentation of an actual performance at the Viennese court at any point.

Although de Totis can be traced in Rome throughout the 1670s, the young Scarlatti had only arrived in the city in 1672, together with his widowed mother and siblings, coming from Palermo after a famine in Sicily. For all his precociousness, we know little about his training or early years; if de Totis had written this text for Scarlatti to set already by 1677, it would be a very early work by the composer. There is no evidence for any Roman performance of the piece, not even of the often-cited but not documented 1683 occasion in one of the two palaces of the powerful Pamphilj family (Cardinal Benedetto from this family was a notable music patron and librettist, a generation later also for the young Handel).

In contrast to all this uncertainty, the focus of the libretto and the brilliance of the music stand out all the more clearly. De Totis crafted his two-section text symmetrically, as both parts begin with disputes between Abraham and Sarah and move to Abraham's internal conflicts about the banishment, ending in both cases with extended scenes for Hagar and Ishmael. The Angel appears only at the very end as a kind of *deus ex machina*, and his final words concluding the piece, referring to overcoming adversity (“fioriscon le viole/dopo il brino e ‘l gel//the violets flower after frost and ice”) index Ishmael's words of accepting his banishment in the first part (“o dove fra il rigor d'eterne brine/in orrido confine/batto il freddo Aquilon vanni di gelo//that I go where the frigid North Wind blows amidst eternal frosts at the horrid icy end [of the earth]”).

What is most striking even for newcomers to this repertory is the highly hidden implications of Divine Will, as de Totis makes this into a drama of Ishmael's innocence unjustly accused, Hagar's pleas for her son, and Abraham's ongoing conflict between duty and paternal affection. Indeed, the patriarch only gives in when Sara threatens to leave him and take Isaac with her. Contemporary listeners would have had to know the Biblical story and to infer only from hints in Sara's recitatives that ultimately she was acting as an agent of God's orders in order to secure Abraham's salvational paternity through Isaac alone (and it is just possible that the piece was performed, in whichever original context, as a kind of Lenten prelude to another oratorio on the Sacrifice of Isaac story).

For this libretto—with its emotional pleas, first by Sara and then by Hagar and Ishmael, its dramatic dialogue, and its resolution suspended until the last possible moment—the young Scarlatti supplied a remarkably varied and quite virtuoso score. De Totis had provided short arias in three different forms—single-stanza, two-stanza, and the (not yet universal) da capo—and the composer came up with musical gestures different for the various affects of the arias. His particular skill in portraying contrasting emotions is evident both in the first duet for the feuding Abraham and Sara (“Con fronde gradita/Lo sdegno t’irrita”), in which contrasting motives set the two emotions, as well as duets that use the same melodic ideas to express the two conflicting characters (“è cieca la guida/è scorta malfida” later in the same duet, or Ishmael/Abraham’s “Mercede ti chieggiò/Il core è di scoglio” in the trio later in the first part). The most theologically unorthodox section of the libretto, Hagar’s accusation that Sara is motivated only by greediness for her son (aria: “Non ha limiti, nè mete, / il desio d’avarò cor”), is set to a two-strophe continuo aria with instrumental ritornelli for the strings, lengthening its dramatic effect.

The difficult melodic writing for Sara tends to mitigate her seeming harshness (and the fact that she disappears halfway through both parts), while the lengthy duet for Ishmael and Hagar in the second part, “Quando, o Dio, quando sarà?”, is set with accompanying strings and based on the pitch center E evident in some of Hagar’s other solos (contemporary theorists would have called this “church-key #4/*quarto tono*”). Although the piece begins around the center of B (with two sharps; again, theory of the time would refer to this as “church-key #3 transposed up a major second”), it takes the arrival of the Angel at the end to bring this tonal area back to the oratorio’s beginning.

Although Abraham’s is a role for virtuoso bass, the other characters were likely to have been sung by male castrati or altos (Hagar) in most Italian situations (there is evidence for women singing in Viennese oratorios of the 1690s). The original string band was also likely relatively small, contributing to the almost “domestic”—in many ways—ambiance of this piece. But certainly the musical quality of the piece stands in contrast to its limited diffusion, at least in the 1680s (possibly the Ottoman threat to Vienna in 1683 obstructed its performance there, if indeed the score had been copied in Rome in that year and then sent to Austria). One final note: although there is no direct evidence, the young Scarlatti, who had lost his father at a young age and had had to move with his mother from Sicily to the unknown Rome, might well have empathized with Ishmael’s own predicament. Like the Biblical character, who found a new home and started an important line of descendants, the composer himself would have experienced the opportunities—and difficulties—of a new environment far from his childhood, as he moved into his early twenties.



Thank you, Russell Wagner

Russell has recently stepped down from the HOC Board of Trustees after more than six years of indispensable volunteer service. From the very beginning Russell brought a total commitment to his work with HOC. He showed up in a suit and tie to the first official board meeting required by the State of Illinois—before he even knew exactly what we were going to do. He has generously offered his expertise, level-headed advice, artistic eye, and unfailing friendship to us all. We will miss him terribly at board meetings, behind the wheel of his moving van, and backstage with the scenery he built, calling the show. As Master Carpenter he made sure props were gorgeous and always ready for use. We will miss his attention to detail and empathy for the performers. It was a big treat for us when he brought his fine musical virtuosity to the bass viola da gamba trio lines in Charpentier's *La Descente d'Orphée aux Enfers* in 2012. This one-of-a-kind renaissance man is looking forward to spending more time with his family, especially his beautiful new grandchildren in New York and Belgium.

Grazie e buon viaggio, Signor Wagner! Alla prossima.



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Soloists



ANGELA YOUNG SMUCKER has earned praise for her “luscious mezzo” (Chicago Tribune) and “powerful stage presence” (The Plain Dealer). Highlights of the 2016-17 season include performances with Bach Collegium San Diego, Chicago A Cappella, Chicago Chorale, Seraphic Fire, and Third Coast Baroque. Ms. Smucker has also been featured with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Music of the Baroque, Oregon Bach Festival, Newberry Consort, Conspirare, Bella Voce, Les Délices, and Carmel Bach Festival. Radio and television appearances include Garrison Keillor’s *A Prairie Home Companion*, WFMT’s *Impromptu* and *Live from WFMT*, and WTTW’s *Chicago Tonight*. Ms. Smucker holds degrees from University of Minnesota and Valparaiso University – where she also served as instructor of voice for seven years – and is pursuing her doctorate at Northwestern University. She is also a 2015 NATS Intern Program alumna and serves as the Executive Director of Third Coast Baroque.



Soprano **KRISTIN KNUTSON** has appeared as Venus in John Eccles’ *The Judgment of Paris*, the Shepherdess in John Blow’s *Venus and Adonis*, Belinda in *Dido and Aeneas*, Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel*, and Musetta in *La Bohème*. She appeared in the concert version of *Candide* with the New York Philharmonic, and made her off-Broadway debut in *The Music Teacher*, written by Wallace and Allen Shawn. On the concert stage, she has appeared as the soprano soloist in Mozart’s *Vesperae Solennes de Dominica* with the Master Singers of Milwaukee, excerpts from Vivaldi’s *Gloria* with the Orchestra of the Redeemer, Mozart’s *Exsultate Jubilate* through the Civic Music Association of Milwaukee, and in recital at Alice Tully Hall. She recently participated in the Lute Society of America Festival, Early Music Vancouver’s Baroque Vocal Programme, Haymarket’s Summer Opera Course, and performed as a finalist in the 2015 Handel Aria Competition. Ms. Knutson has performed with the Florentine Opera, Aspen Opera Theatre Center, Opera New Jersey, Main Street Opera, Fresco Opera Theatre, the Skylight Music Theatre, the Fireside Theatre, and the New Group. She is a graduate of The Juilliard School.



JILL DEWSNUP specializes in the dramatic coloratura soprano repertoire, triumphing as Konstanze in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, the Queen of the Night in *Die Zauberflöte*, the title role in *Anna Bolena*, Queen Elizabeth I in *Roberto Devereux*, and *Norma* (excerpts in concert), as well as others. In 2014, she performed in the Metropolitan Opera’s production of *Prince Igor*. This season she returns to Lyric Opera of Chicago in *Les Troyens*, *Norma*,

and *Carmen*. Last season, she performed in Lyric's highly acclaimed production of *Nabucco*. In concert she has performed as the soprano soloist in *Messiah*, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, Verdi's *Requiem*, and Mozart's *Coronation Mass*. She sang the role of Gabriel in a trio from Haydn's *The Creation* for a live television broadcast with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Ms. Dewsnup has received numerous awards including: winner of the Young Artist Division of Classical Singer Magazine's Audcomps Competition, the Encouragement Award in the Fritz & Lavinia Jensen Vocal Competition, finalist and Carnegie Hall debut with the Nico Castel International Meistersinger Competition, finalist in the Liederkrantz Opera Division Competition, and semi-finalist in the Oratorio Society of New York Solo Competition.



Bass-baritone **PETER VAN DE GRAAFF** has appeared the symphonies of Chicago, Houston, New Orleans, San Antonio, Utah, Boulder Bach Festival, and Colorado Springs. He has sung internationally with the Chicago Symphony in Berlin, Czech State Philharmonic, Budapest Concert Orchestra, Israel Chamber Orchestra and the Czech Symphony. He has appeared in festivals internationally in Tokyo, China and Costa Rica and in the United States at the festivals of Grand Teton, San Luis Obispo and Bloomington Early Music, among many others. In Chicago and the Midwest he has appeared with Music of the Baroque, Northbrook Symphony, Rembrandt Chamber Players, Chicago Chamber Musicians, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Haymarket Opera, Florentine Opera, Milwaukee Opera, Chicago Opera Theater, and Cedar Rapids Opera. Mr. van de Graaff has made a specialty of the baroque repertoire and this has brought him as soloist to the San Luis Obispo Mozart Festival, Costa Rica International Music Festival, Pittsburgh Bach Choir, Grand Teton Music Festival, St. Louis Early Music Festival, and the Boulder Bach Festival. He and his soprano wife have given the modern day premieres of several early 18th-century chamber operas, making recordings on the Naxos and Cedille labels. Peter has been a host of numerous programs at WFMT for 28 years.



Artistic Director **CRAIG TROMPETER** has been a musical presence in Chicago for more than twenty years, performing in concert and over the airwaves with Second City Musick, Music of the Baroque, the Chicago Symphony, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago Opera Theater, the Cal Players, the Newberry Consort, and the Oberlin Consort of Viols. As chamber musician, he has appeared at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Glimmerglass Festival, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and the Valletta International Baroque Festival in Malta. He has performed as soloist at the Ravinia Festival, at the annual conference of the American Bach Society, with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and with Music of the Baroque.

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