

**There are plenty of recordings of Handel's**

late masterpiece, but most fail to respect the structure of Handel's masterful concept, although some excellent interpretations of individual movements are found on versions conducted by John Eliot Gardiner and, most recently, Daniel Reuss. Nicholas McGegan and his Göttingen Handel Festival forces (recorded live at the Frauenkirche in Dresden) present *Solomon* complete, unabridged, and in the order of movements which makes most sense of the libretto and musical scheme (a feat only achieved previously on disc by Paul McCreeh). McGegan conducts a warmly subtle and highly intelligent performance that grows and builds naturally through the course of the entire oratorio. Tim Mead's intonation is uneven (Handel wrote the title-role for a female singer, and one suspects that most countertenors struggle a little bit with the range of Solomon's mellifluous airs). Dominique Labelle's "Can I see my infant gored?" is the most dramatically impassioned account on disc. Roderick Williams' comfortably assured and communicative singing proves beyond doubt that the Levite's arias are an important element of the oratorio. Winchester Cathedral Choir perhaps lacks enough bite in the grandest double choruses, but its singing is particularly beautiful in the softer choruses (such as "May no rash intruder"). Most satisfying of all is the superb playing of the FestspielOrchester Göttingen (a hand-picked group of instrumentalists from most of Europe and North America's best period-instrument orchestras). McGegan's return to recording Handel's major works has been worth waiting for.

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