

Tafelmusik

Baroque Orchestra and Chamber Choir

January 19-22, 2012

Koerner Hall

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

Hercules

A Musical Drama

Words by Thomas Broughton

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Hercules	Sumner Thompson
Dejanira, his Wife	Allyson McHardy
Hyllus, his Son	Colin Balzer
Iöle, Princess of Oechalia	Nathalie Paulin
Lichas, a Herald	Mireille Lebel
Priest of Jupiter	David Roth
Chorus of Trachinians	

Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra

Tafelmusik Chamber Choir

Dancers from Atelier Ballet:

Jeremy Nasmith, Jack Rennie, Julia Sedwick, Edward Tracz,
Magdalena Vasko, Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg

Directed by Jeanne Lamon

Stage Direction by Marshall Pynkoski

Choreography by Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg

Lighting Design by Raha Javanfar

*There will be an **intermission** between Acts II & III*

SYNOPSIS

The Backstory

Hercules is the son of **Jove** (Zeus/Jupiter) by the mortal **Alcmene**. Hercules marries **Megara**, who bears him three sons. **Juno** (Hera), jealous of the progeny of her husband Jove's infidelity, strikes Hercules with a fit of madness, during which he kills his wife and sons. To atone for his heinous crime, Hercules consults the Delphic Oracle, who instructs him to serve **King Eurystheus**, and in so doing to undertake the famed Twelve Labours. Essential to this story is the Second Labour, in which he kills the **Hydra of Lerna**, a many-headed serpent, and keeps the blood of his victim to poison the tips of his arrows.

Upon completion of his Labours, Hercules seeks to remarry, winning an archery competition to gain the hand of **Iöle**, daughter of **King Eurytus** of **Oechalia**. Eurytus, however, refuses to hand over his daughter, fearing a return of Hercules' madness. Hercules eventually marries **Dejanira**, daughter of **King Oeneus** of **Calydon**, and with her has several children, among them **Hyllus**. They have to leave Calydon, as Hercules accidentally kills a servant boy. They proceed to **Trachis**, but *en route* have to cross the River Evenus, overseen by a ferryman, the centaur **Nessus**. Nessus attempts to rape Dejanira during the crossing, and Hercules shoots him with one of the arrows steeped in the poisonous blood of the Hydra. The dying centaur confides in Dejanira that the blood from his wound can be used as a love-charm should Hercules ever stop loving her; she dips a garment in the blood.

From Trachis, Hercules wages numerous wars, the last of which is in vengeance against Eurytus, the Oechalian king who had thwarted him over the hand of Iöle. He kills Eurytus and his sons, and sets off home to Trachis with prisoners, among them the distraught Princess Iöle.

Act One

Dejanira laments Hercules' long absence, fearing he has been lost in battle. Her son Hyllus consults an oracle, who predicts Hercules' death and sees flames arising from Mount Oeta. Hyllus determines to search for his father "through the travell'd globe," but is interrupted with news from the herald Lichas that Hercules returns victorious. A march announces his arrival, and he declares that he will lay down his arms henceforth and give "mellow age" over to love. He grants Iöle freedom within Trachis, but she laments the death of her father.

Act Two

Iöle regrets her royal status and yearns for a simple life. Dejanira confronts Iöle with her jealousy and rage, convinced that Hercules' aim in the battle against the Oechalians was to gain the princess. Iöle insists that the war was motivated purely by ambition, and warns Dejanira to beware of jealousy. Dejanira then confronts Hercules himself, who assures her she has been deceived. He leaves to attend to preparations for the solemn rites, a sacrifice to thank the gods for his victory. Dejanira remains unconvinced, but determines to win Hercules back with the potion given her by the centaur Nessus. She bids Lichas to give the garment dipped in the Hydra's blood to Hercules as a "pledge of reconciliation." She apologizes to Iöle for her frenzied accusations, and promises to secure Iöle's return to her paternal throne.

Act Three

Lichas recounts to the Trachinians the tragic events at the temple: he had given the "costly robe" to Hercules, who happily donned it. The heat from the altar flames melted the poisonous blood, which quickly coursed through his body. Hercules' agonizing cries of pain echoed through the temple. The Trachinians lament that the tyrants of the world will no longer be restrained by "the world's avenger." In his final agonies, Hercules rails against Dejanira, and bids Hyllus to carry his body to the top of Mount Oeta to be burned on a funeral pyre. On hearing the dreadful news, Dejanira, wretched with grief and guilt, bids the Furies take her. Iöle feels pity for her

captors.

A Priest of Jupiter arrives and announces that Hercules has been “raised to the court of Jove,” his soul borne to Mount Olympus by an eagle. He tells Iöle that she is to marry Hyllus. They are united, and the Priest invites the chorus of Trachinians to sing in praise of Hercules as emissary of liberty.

George Frideric Handel

Hercules

Libretto by Thomas Broughton

ACT ONE

Overture

Scene 1 – A Royal Apartment in the Palace in Trachis, Thessaly.

Dejanira, Lichas & Trachinians.

Accompagnato: Lichas

See, with what sad dejection in her looks,
indulging grief, the mournful princess sits!
She weeps from morning's dawn to shades of night,
from gloom of night to redd'ning blush of morn,
uncertain of Hercules' destiny,
disconsolate, his absence she laments.

Air: Lichas

No longer, fate, relentless frown,
preserve, great Jove, the hero's life!

Accompagnato: Dejanira

O Hercules! Why art thou absent from me?
Return, return, my hero, to my arms!
O gods, how racking are the pains of absence
to one who loves, who fondly loves, like me!

Air: Dejanira

The world, when day's career is run,
in darkness mourns the absent sun;
so I, deprived of that dear light
that warm'd my breast and cheer'd my sight,
deplore in thickest gloom of grief
the absence of the valiant chief.

Recitative

(Lichas) Princess, be comforted, and hope the best:
a few revolving hours may bring him back,
once more to bless your longing arms.

(Dejanira) Ah no, impossible! He never will return!

(Lichas) Forbid it, heav'n, and all ye guardian pow'rs,
that watch o'er virtue, innocence and love!

Scene 2 – To them Hyllus.

(Dejanira) My son, dear image of thy absent sire!
What comfort bringst thou to thy mother's ear?

(Hyllus) Eager to know my father's destiny,
I bade the priests with solemn sacrifice
explore the will of heav'n. The altar smok'd,
the slaughter'd victim bled, when lo, around
the hallow'd walls a sudden glory blaz'd!
the priest acknowledg'd the auspicious omen,
and own'd the present god, when, in a moment,
the temple shook, the glory disappear'd,
and more than midnight darkness veil'd the place.

(Lichas) 'Twas dreadful all!

(Hyllus) At length the reverend flamen,
full of the deity, prophetic spoke:

Air: Hyllus

I feel, I feel the god, he swells my breast.
Before my eyes the future stands confest:
I see the valiant chief in death laid low,
and flames aspire from Oeta's lofty brow.

Recitative

(Hyllus) He said; the sacred fury left his breast
and on the ground the fainting prophet fell.

(Dejanira) Then I am lost! O dreadful oracle,
my griefs hang heavy on my tortur'd soul,
and soon will sink me to the realms of night!
There once again I shall behold my Hercules,
or whirl the lance, or bend the stubborn bow,
or to the listening ghosts his toils recount.

(Hyllus) Despair not, but let rising hope suspend
excess of grief, 'till I have learn'd the certainty
of my dear father's fate. Tomorrow's sun
shall see your Hyllus bend his pious steps
to seek the hero through the travell'd globe.
If he yet lives, I will restore him to you,
or perish in the search.

Air: Hyllus

Where congeal'd the northern streams
bound in icy fetters stand,
where the sun's intenser beams
scorch the burning Lybian sand,
by honour, love and duty led,
there with daring steps I'll tread.

Chorus of Trachinians

O filial piety, O gen'rous love!
Go, youth inspir'd, thy virtue prove!

Scene 3

Recitative

(Lichas) Banish your fears! Alcema's godlike son
lives, and from sacked Oechalia, which his arms
have levell'd with the ground, returns a conqueror!

(Dejanira) O joyful news! welcome as rising day
to the benighted world, or falling showers
to the parched earth! Ye lying omens, hence!
Hence, every anxious thought!

Air: Dejanira

Begone, my fears, fly hence, away,
like clouds before the morning ray!
My hero found, with laurels crown'd,
heav'n relenting, fate consenting,
springing joys my griefs control,
and rising transports swell my soul.
Begone, my fears &c ...

Recitative

(Lichas) A train of captives, red with honest sounds,
and low'ring on their chains, attend the conqueror;
but, more to grace the pomp of victory,
the lovely Iöle, Oechalia's princess,
with captive beauty swells the joyful triumph.

(Hyllus) My soul is moved for the unhappy princess,
and fain, methinks, I would unbind her chains.

But say, her father, her haughty Eurytus?

(Lichas) He fell in single combat by the sword of Hercules.

(Dejanira) No more, but haste, and wait thy lord's arrivall!

Exeunt Dejanira & Hyllus.

(Lichas) How soon is deepest grief exchang'd for bliss!

Exit Lichas.

Scene 4 – A square before the Palace. Hercules & attendants.

Iöle & Oechalian virgins, led captive.

March

Recitative

(Hercules) Thanks to the pow'rs above, but chief to thee,
father of gods, from whose immortal loins
I drew my birth! Now my long toils are o'er,
And Juno's rage appeas'd. With pleasure now,
at rest, my various labours I review.

Oechalia's fall is added to my titles
and points the rising summit of my glory.

(Turning to Iöle) Fair princess, weep no more!

Forget these bonds, in Trachin you are free, as in Oechalia.

(Iöle) Forgive me, generous victor, if a sigh
for my dear father, for my friends, my country,
will have its way. I cannot yet forget
that such things were, and that I once enjoy'd them.

Air: Iöle

My father! Ah, methinks I see
the sword inflict the deadly wound:
he bleeds, he falls in agony,
dying he bites the crimson ground.
Peaceful rest, dear parent shade,
light the earth be on thee laid!
In thy daughter's pious mind
all thy virtues live enshrin'd.

Exeunt Iöle & Oechalians.

Scene 5

Recitative

(Hercules) Now farewell, arms!
From hence, the tide of time
shall bear me gently down to mellow age.
From war to love I fly, my cares to lose
in gentle Dejanira's fond embrace.

Air: Hercules

The god of battle quits the bloody field,
and useless hang the glitt'ring spear and shield,
while, all resign'd to conqu'ring beauty's charms,
he gives a loose to love in Cytherea's arms.

Chorus of Trachinians

Crown with festal pomp the day,
be mirth extravagantly gay,
bid the grateful altars smoke,
bid the maids the youths provoke

to join the dance, while music's voice
tells aloud our rapt'rous joys!

ACT TWO

Scene 1 – An apartment, Iöle & Oechalians.

Recitative

(Iöle) Why was I born a princess rais'd on high,
to fall with greater ruin? Had the gods
made me the humble tenant of some cottage,
I had been happy.

Air: Iöle

How blest the maid ordained to dwell
with sweet content in humble cell,
from cities far remov'd,
by murm'ring rills on verdant plains
to tend the flocks with village swains,
by every swain belov'd.

Scene 2 – To her Dejanira.

Recitative

(Dejanira, aside) It must be so! Fame speaks aloud my wrongs,
and every voice proclaims Hercules' falsehood;
love, jealousy and rage at once distract me!

(Iöle) What anxious cares untimely thus disturb
the happy consort of the son of Jove?

(Dejanira) Insulting maid! I had indeed been happy,
but for the fatal lustre of thy beauty!

(Iöle) Whence this unjust suspicion?

(Dejanira) Fame of thy beauty, so report informs me,
first brought Hercules to Oechalia's court.

He saw, he lov'd, he ask'd you of your father.

His suit rejected, in revenge he levell'd

The haughty town, and bore away the spoil:

But the rich prize, for which he fought and conquer'd,
Was Iöle.

(Iöle) Ah, no! It was ambition,
Not slighted love, that laid Oechalia low
And made the wretched Iöle a captive.
Report, that in the garb of truth disguises
The blackest falsehood, has abus'd your ear
With a forg'd tale; but oh, let me conjure you
For your dear peace of mind, beware of jealousy!

(Dejanira) It is too sure that Hercules is false.

Scene 3 – Enter Lichas.

(Lichas) My godlike master?

(Dejanira) Is a traitor, Lichas.

Traitor to Hymen, love and Dejanira.

(Lichas) Hercules false? Impossible.

(Dejanira) In vain you strive his falsehood to disguise.

Exit Dejanira.

(Lichas) This is thy work, accursed jealousy.

Chorus

Jealousy! Infernal pest,
Tyrant of the human breast!
How from slightest causes bred
dost thou lift thy hated head!
Trifles, light as floating air,
Strongest proofs to thee appear!

Exit Lichas.

Scene 4 – Another apartment, Hercules & Dejanira.

Recitative

(Hercules) You are deceiv'd! Some villain has bely'd
my ever-faithful love and constancy.

(Dejanira) Would it were so, and that the babbler fame
had not through all the Grecian cities
spread the shameful tale!

(Hercules) The priests of Jupiter
prepare with solemn rites to thank the god
for the success of my victorious arms:
The ready sacrifice expects my presence.
I go. Meantime let these suspicions sleep
Nor causeless jealousy alarm your breast!

Exit Hercules.

Scene 5

(Dejanira) Dissembling, false, perfidious Hercules!
Did he not swear, when first he woo'd my love,
the sun should cease to dawn, the silver moon
be blotted from her orb, ere he prov'd false?

Air: Dejanira

Cease, ruler of the day, to rise,
nor, Cynthia, gild the evening skies!
To your bright beams he made appeal,
with endless night his falsehood seal!

Recitative

(Dejanira) Some kinder pow'r inspire me to regain
his alienated love, and bring the wand'rer back!
Ah, lucky thought! I have a garment
dipped in Nessus' blood, when from the wound he drew
the barbed shaft, sent by Hercules' hand.
It boasts a wondrous virtue, to revive
th'expiring flame of love. So Nessus told me,
when dying to my hand he trusted it.
I will prevail with Hercules to wear it
and prove its magic force.
'Till then be still, my jealous fears,
and let my tongue dissemble
the torture of my heart. The princess Iöle!

Scene 6 – To her Iöle.

(Dejanira) Forgive me, princess, if my jealous frenzy
too roughly greeted you! I see and blame
the error that misled me to insult
that innocence and beauty.

(Iöle) Thank the gods
that have inspir'd your mind with calmer thoughts,
and from your breast remov'd the vulture, jealousy!
Live, and be happy in Hercules' love,
While wretched Iöle ... *(weeping)*

(Dejanira) Princess, no more! but lift those beauteous eyes
to the fair prospect of returning happiness.
At my request Alcides shall restore you
to liberty, and your paternal throne.

Duet

(Dejanira) Joys of freedom, joys of pow'r,
Wait upon the coming hour,
and court thee to be blest.

(Iöle) What heav'nly-pleasing sounds I hear,
how sweet they steal upon my ear
and charm my soul to rest!

Exeunt.

Chorus

Love and Hymen, hand in hand,
come, restore the nuptial band!
And sincere delights prepare
to crown the hero and the fair.
Love and Hymen &c ...

ACT THREE

Sinfonia

Scene 1 – Lichas & Trachinians.

Recitative

(Lichas) Ye sons of Trachin, mourn your valiant chief,
return'd from foes and dangers threat'ning death
to fall, inglorious, by a woman's hand.

(Trachinian) Oh, doleful tidings!

(Lichas) As the hero stood,
prepar'd for sacrifice, and festal pomp
adorn'd the temple, these unlucky hands
presented him, in Dejanira's name,
a costly robe, the pledge of reconcilment.
With smiles that testified his rising joy,
Hercules o'er his manly shoulders threw
the treach'rous gift. But when the altar's flame
with warmth began to dew his moisten'd limbs,
the clinging robe, by cursed art envenom'd,
through all his joints dispers'd a subtle poison.
Frantic with agonising pain, he flings
his tortur'd body on the sacred floor,
then strives to rip the deadly garment off,
but with it tears the bleeding, mangled flesh;
his dreadful cries the vaulted roof returns!

Air: Lichas

O scene of unexampl'd woe,
O sun of glory sunk so low!
What language can our sorrow tell?
Gallant, unhappy chief, farewell!

Chorus of Trachinians

Tyrants now no more shall dread
on necks of vanquish'd slaves to tread.
Horrid forms of monstrous birth
again shall vex the groaning earth.
Fear of punishment is o'er,
the world's avenger is no more!

Scene 2 – The Temple of Jupiter. Hercules, Priests & Attendants.

Accompagnato: Hercules

O Jove, what land is this, what clime accurst,
By raging Phoebus scorch'd? I burn, I burn,
Tormenting fire consumes me. Oh, I die,
Some ease, ye pitying powers! — I rage, I rage,

With more than Stygian pains.
Along my feverish veins,
Like liquid fire the subtle poison hastes.
Boreas, bring thy northern blast,
And through my bosom roar!
Or, Neptune, kindly pour
Ocean's collected flood
Into my breast and cool my boiling blood!

Recitative

(Hyllus) Great Jove, relieve his pains!

(Hercules) Was it for this unnumber'd toils I bore?

O Juno and Eurystheus, I absolve ye!

Your keenest malice yield to Dejanira's;

mistaken, cruel, treach'rous Dejanira!

Oh, this cursed robe! It clings to my torn sides

And drinks my vital blood.

(Hyllus) Alas, my father!

(Hercules) My son, observe thy dying sire's request:

while yet I live, bear me to Oeta's top;

there, on the summit of that cloud-capped hill,

the tow'ring oak and lofty cypress fell,

and raise a funeral pile. Upon it lay me.

then fire the kindling heap, that I may mount

on wings of flame, to mingle with the gods!

(Hyllus) O glorious thought! Worthy the son of Jove!

(Hercules) My pains redouble — Oh, be quick, my son.

and bear me to the scene of glorious death!

(Hyllus) How is the hero fall'n!

Air: Hyllus

Let not fame the tidings spread

To proud Oechalia's conquer'd wall!

The baffled foe will lift his head,

And triumph in his victor's fall.

Let not fame &c ...

Exeunt. Hercules borne off.

Scene 3 – The Palace. Dejanira alone.

Accompagnato: Dejanira

Where shall I fly? Where hide this guilty head?

O fatal error of misguided love!

O cruel Nessus, how art thou reveng'd!

Wretch that I am! By me, Hercules dies!

These impious hands have sent my injur'd lord

Untimely to the shades! Let me be mad!

Chain me, ye Furies, to your iron beds,
And lash my guilty ghost with whips of scorpions!
See, see, they come! Alecto with her snakes,
Megaera fell, and black Tisiphone!
See the dreadful sisters rise,
Their baneful presence taints the skies!
See the snaky whips they bear!
What yellings rend my tortur'd ear!
Hide me from their hated sight,
Friendly shades of blackest night!
Alas, no rest the guilty find
From the pursuing furies of the mind!

Scene 4 – To her Iöle

Recitative

(Dejanira) Lo, the fair fatal cause of all this ruin!
Fly from my sight, detested sorceress, fly,
lest my ungovern'd fury rush upon thee,
and scatter thee to all the winds of Heav'n!
Alas, I rave! The lovely maid is innocent,
and I alone the guilty cause of all!
(Iöle) Though torn from every joy, a father's love,
my native land and dear-priz'd liberty,
by Hercules' arms, still must I pity
the countless woes of this unhappy house.

Air: Iöle

My breast with tender pity swells
at sight of human woe.

Scene 5 – To them the Priest of Jupiter, Hyllus, Lichas & Trachinians.

Recitative

(Priest of Jupiter) Princess, rejoice, whose Heav'n-directed hand
Has rais'd Hercules to the court of Jove!
(Dejanira) Speak, priest, what means this dark, mysterious greeting?
That he is dead, and by this fatal hand,
too sure, alas, my bleeding heart divines.
(Priest) Borne, by his own command, to Oeta's top,
stretched on a funeral pile, the hero lay.
The crackling flames surround his manly limbs,
when lo, an eagle, stooping from the clouds,
swift to the burning pile his flight directs,
there lights a moment, then, with speedy wing,
regains the sky. Astonish'd, we consult
the sacred grove, where sounds oracular

from vocal oaks disclose the will of Jove.
Here the great sire his offspring's fate declar'd:
"His mortal part by eating fires consum'd,
His part immortal to Olympus borne,
There with assembl'd deities to dwell."

(Dejanira) Words are too faint to speak the warring passions
that combat in my breast: grief, wonder, joy
by turns deject and elevate my soul.

(Priest, to Iöle) Nor less thy destiny, illustrious maid,
is Jove's peculiar care, who thus decrees:
"Hymen with purest joys of love shall crown
Oechalia's princess and the son of Hercules."

(Hyllus) How blest is Hyllus, if the lovely Iöle,
consenting, ratifies the gift of heav'n!

(Iöle) What Jove ordains, can Iöle resist?

Duet

(Iöle) O prince, whose virtues all admire,
since Jove has every bar remov'd,
I feel my vanquish'd heart conspire
to crown a flame by Heav'n approv'd.

(Hyllus) O princess, whose exalted charms
above ambition fire my breast,
how great my joy to fill those arms,
at once with love and empire blest!

(Iöle) I grieve no more, since now I see
all happiness restor'd in thee.

(Hyllus) I ask no more, since now I find
all earthly good in thee combin'd.

Recitative

(Priest) Ye sons of freedom, now, in every clime,
with joyful accents sing the deathless chief,
by virtue to the starry mansions rais'd.

Chorus of Trachinians

To him your grateful notes of praise belong,
the theme of liberty's immortal song!
aw'd by his name, oppression shuns the light,
and slavery hides her head in depths of night,
while happy climes to his example owe
the blessings that from peace and freedom flow.
To him *&c* ...

FINIS