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RODELINDA IN SANTA FE

Graydon Beeks



Lucy Crowe (Rodelinda). Photo by Bronwen Sharp.

The Santa Fe Opera included five performances of Handel's *Rodelinda* in this year's season, and I saw the second on July 29, 2026. Musically, it was very successful. Soprano Lucy Crowe was spellbinding as Rodelinda, convincingly ringing the dramatic changes from sorrow to defiance, from desperation to rejoicing. In a role written for Cuzzoni, her technical command was absolute, and her high notes were especially impressive. During the first two acts I felt her mid-range was somewhat clouded and her diction unclear, but all this went away in the third act. Countertenor Iestyn Davies as Bertarido was masterful in the slow, lamenting arias that Senesino, for whom the role was written, was so renowned for, and his prison scene in act 3 was very moving. If his voice lacked the edge needed to sing his closing bravura aria, "Vivi, tiranno," most effectively, it was a minor flaw.

The English tenor Anthony Gregory sang musically and acted effectively, although I thought he was somewhat miscast

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THE ENGLISH CONCERT PERFORMS HANDEL'S *HERCULES* AT CARNEGIE HALL, MARCH 15, 2026

Fred Fehleisen

Earlier this year, Harry Bicket led The English Concert, The Clarion Choir, and fantastic team of soloists in a performance of Handel's *Hercules* at Carnegie Hall. What follows is less a review of that concert than a series of personal reflections on the performance and the work. My impressions of the concert were to an extent informed by The English Concert's performance of *Giulio Cesare* given the year before in May 2025. Both performances were excellent and well received by full (almost packed) houses. After hearing the performance of *Giulio Cesare*, my mind kept dwelling on the idea that there was something incredibly coherent about its complex and varied design.

The same thing happened to me again after *Hercules*. There was nothing accidental about this work, and its language was filled with riches worth exploring in greater detail. Not knowing *Hercules* very well, I brought a copy of the libretto with me in order to take notes on things that struck me about Handel's musical settings. The audience was able to follow the plot through supertitles projected on a screen above the stage. These were expertly done and smoothed out the transformation of Handel's original three-act design into a two-part performance with one intermission. The first half ended most effectively with Handel's famous "Jealousy" chorus, and the second half continued from there. This "musical drama," unlike *Messiah*, works well in two parts, dramatically and musically.

So varied were the movement-to-movement stylistic and affective changes that I soon found it difficult to make note of them all. Like *Giulio Cesare*, the musical language of *Hercules* becomes more intense as the work unfolds. I continue to marvel at the fact that Handel composed *Hercules* in just thirty days! (He began the work on July 19, 1744, and finished it on August 17, 1744.)

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