



Handel's opera presents the original Material Girl in the character of Semele

Lady Linda Wong Davies, 2009

'One might ask at what point does a recurring dream become a reality? In the case of 'Semele', the object of my desire became intricately linked to the subject of my dream.

'My thoughts repeatedly turned to Handel's 'Semele', the operatic answer to my vision of bringing great baroque music to the land of my ancestors. This classical Greek myth, based on Ovid's 'Metamorphoses', seemed the perfect ethereal story for China, a country whose tradition is hardly bereft of errant deities. The story plays on the consequences of passion and jealousy and the blurred line between reality and dreams. It resonates today with the courtship China is having with the rest of the world.

'Handel's opera presents the original Material Girl in the character of Semele. Despite being betrothed to the ultimate prize, Jupiter, king of the gods, the vain Semele remains dissatisfied, placing unrealistic demands on her immortal lover, which ultimately leads to her destruction. It is the perfect allegorical tale for the ambitious China of today. In the same way that 'Semele' would have resonated with Handel's audience as it emerged from the economic collapse of the South Sea Bubble in 1720, our own recent experiences put us in touch with the character. 'Semele's rebirth as a phoenix tells us that avarice can never be destroyed, simply transformed.

'Zhang Huan, partnered with one of the great baroque conductors, Christophe Rousset, has directed a magnificent reinterpretation of this opera. Together they have made new operatic history.'

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