
Christian Curnyn

Selected Reviews

HANDEL Semele

Royal Ballet and Opera, Covent Garden (June 2025)

“Unequivocal praise for the lively orchestral playing and Christian Curnyn’s astute conducting, which brings out the wonderful variety of Handel’s score.” - Rebecca Franks, The Times

“Meanwhile in the pit, the RBO’s orchestra under Christian Curnyn plays with superb stylish relish.” - Ivan Hewitt, The Telegraph

“Christian Curnyn supplied the most authoritative Handel conducting heard at this address for a good many years: expertly paced and drawing expressive singing and orchestral playing alike.” - Barry Millington, The Standard

“with a cast of such musical calibre, and Curnyn conducting the excellent orchestra with a real mastery of Handel’s radiant score” - Michael Higgs, Theatre Review

CD: Maurice Greene's Jephtha

Early Opera Company / Chandos Records CHSA0408(2) / (Apr 2025)

“It is fortunate that this premiere recording has fallen to the Early Opera Company, whose director Christian Curnyn has long shown that he knows how to bring such works to life. The overall pacing is good, the tempos well chosen” - Gramophone Magazine

DOUBLE BILL: PURCELL Dido and Aeneas /BLOW Venus and Adonis

Opera Collective Ireland / Akademie für Alte Musik (Aug 2024)

“The onstage orchestra was the redoubtable Akademie für Alte Musik from nearby Berlin, sensitively conducted by Christian Curnyn. The historically correct omission of a 16-foot bass line made for light textures that highlighted the music’s omnipresent dance-like qualities. The opening strains of Purcell’s overture were sounded in a haunting pianissimo that drew the audience irresistibly into proceedings, which were enlivened by an imaginative continuo combo that prominently featured the harp.” Carlos Maria Solare, Opera Now

HANDEL Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno

Buxton Festival (July 2024)

‘Aided by the Early Opera Company orchestra’s characterful playing under Christian Curnyn’ - Sarah Noble, The Guardian

‘None of this would work were the musical observation and the dramatic detail not so acute, and if the music under Christian Curnyn’s direction were not so aptly reflected on stage.’ – Nicholas Kenyon, The Telegraph

‘Christian Curnyn, leading a baroque band in the mainstage pit of Buxton’s Opera House, handled all that with real finesse and purpose.’ - Michael White, Opera Now

‘The musical side of the production was under the direction of Christian Curnyn, who elicited sensitive and dramatically compelling performances from the singers and The Early Opera Company orchestra, whose

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playing was clear and beautifully paced throughout, whilst maintaining a near-perfect balance between all the musical elements.' - Alan Neilson, *OperaWire*

HANDEL Orlando

Halle Opera House (May 2023)

"Christian Curnyn's conducting of the Handelfestspielorchester Halle was exemplary."

Sandra Bowdler, *Opera Magazine*

HANDEL Alcina

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden (November 2022)

"The orchestral playing is so deft, guided gently and without fuss by Christian Curnyn, especially enjoyable for its continuo sound with plucked theorbos. "

Nicholas Kenyon, *The Telegraph*

"In the pit, Christian Curnyn is an unfailingly stylish conductor."

Rebecca Franks, *The Times*

"Christian Curnyn, conducting at a very wide range of paces, from tortoise to hare, is an early music specialist, and this opera is right at home at the Royal Opera House."

Claudia Pritchard, *Culture Whisper*

Christian Curnyn and the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House kept things moving and well balanced with the singers.

David Karlin, *Bachtrack*

Under Christian Curnyn the ROH orchestra was transformed, fizzing and swirling in a buff, buoyant version of period style that wasn't afraid to flaunt its curves.

Richard Bratby, *The Spectator*

HANDEL Acis & Galatea

Early Opera Company, Buxton International Festival (July 2021)

"Christian Curnyn is a go-to man for this music and the arias fairly tripped along under his conducting."

Rupert Christiansen, *Opera Magazine*

"Conductor Christian Curnyn demonstrates complete mastery of Handel's idiom. The orchestra is superb."

George Hall, *The Stage*

"Christian Curnyn leads the Early Opera Company in a measured and solid reading of the score, maintaining an effective pace throughout."

Curtis Rogers, *Classical Source*

"Musically [...] the performance, under conductor Christian Curnyn, was practically perfect in every way..."

Robert Beale, *Theatre Reviews North*

HANDEL Amadigi

Garsington Opera (June 2021)

"Christian Curnyn conducted the English Concert in a performance so true to style and content as to make you marvel once again at Handel's singular, luminous orchestral sound, with some ravishing woodwind obbligatos."

Peter Reed, *Opera Magazine*

"The glory of the evening lies in the playing of the period-instrument English Concert under Christian Curnyn's direction. Handel's music is often ravishingly beautiful, and Curnyn and co manage to colour each aria's A-B-A structure with ever-changing hues."

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Michael Church, *inews.co.uk*

"The English Concert under Christian Curnyn made every shade glow as warmly or brilliantly as it should. Stand-out work came not only from the woods but from glittering last-act trumpets that anticipate the festive sound-world of the Water Music."

Boyd Tonkin, *The Arts Desk*

"Christian Curnyn and the English Concert [...] blaze with colour whether in the blood-red of military trumpets or the faded pastels of a pair of coaxing recorders. Dance rhythms are carved deep by lower strings, and the pit becomes the bubbling cauldron at the centre of Handel's musical spell."

Alexandra Coghlan, *The Spectator*

"In the pit, Christian Curnyn brings a gentle quality to Handel's vivid score, with lively playing from the English Concert."

Rebecca Franks, *The Times*

"Cementing its new partnership with Garsington, The English Concert plays crisply under the conductor Christian Curnyn [...] never a dull moment in this music."

John Allison, *The Telegraph*

HANDEL Ariodante

The Royal Opera House Covent Garden (November 2020)

"Christian Curnyn, inexhaustible and ubiquitous in this repertory, conducted this terrific cast with plenty of brio and the orchestra played with a fine sense of baroque idiom."

Rupert Christiansen, *The Telegraph*

"Christian Curnyn, a Handel specialist, got stylish playing from the reduced ROH orchestra."

Hugh Canning, *The Times*

"The Royal Opera's streamed concert version came in at 160 minutes with no interval. If the performers felt taxed by such heavenly length they showed no signs of it, nor indeed did the onstage ROH Orchestra under Baroque specialist Christian Curnyn. Neither singers nor musicians were from his regular Early Opera Company stable but they all responded to his direction with collegiate élan, and even the starriest of them melded into the tapestry he wove."

Mark Valencia, *Bachtrack*

"Elation at the miracles star musicians can achieve in an empty theatre; regret at not being there in person – both reactions made watching the Royal Opera's Ariodante live online a vital and bittersweet experience [...] This concert performance, conducted by Christian Curnyn, captured all its flickering moods, which can't have been easy."

Fiona Maddocks, *The Guardian*

"Long gone are the days when orchestras at London's opera houses fiercely resisted the influence of period instruments, and from the opening notes of the overture, Christian Curnyn drew stylish results from his players. Speeds were generally on the faster side, this was a performance which really flowed, and playing was crisp."

Robert Hugill, *Planet Hugill*

"Christian Curnyn summoned an immediacy and directness that made an 'in the theatre' vibe tangible. [...] With the smallish band of musicians from the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House placed on the reduced-sized wood-panelled stage, the instrumental sound was finely etched and vivid. Curnyn's tempos were fairly swift but never rushed, and the fluency with which he moved between meters and movements created an engaging drama. The players communicated the opera's frequent and striking changes of emotional tenor, textures and colours seemed endlessly varied, and in the recitatives there many beautifully expressive nuances. This was a truly lovely performance."

Claire Seymour, *Opera Today*

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HANDEL Apollo e Daphne

The Royal Opera House Covent Garden (October 2020)

"There's beautiful playing from the ROH Orchestra under Christian Curnyn in the Handel [...]."

Tim Ashley, *The Guardian*

MOZART Il nozze di Figaro

Theater Basel (February 2020)

"Christian Curnyn, conducting without a baton, took a firm and lively approach to the score – notably in the overture, which opened proceedings in fine style"

Opera Magazine

HANDEL Giulio Cesare

Opera North (September 2019)

"Christian Curnyn had his stylish orchestra sounding like period-instrument veterans, colourfully underlining the vacillating emotions of an evening in which sibling rivalry had the upper hand over sin and strife."

Martin Dreyer, *Opera Magazine*

"Baroque specialist Christian Curnyn elicits eminently stylish playing from the orchestra."

The Reviews Hub

"All are accompanied with flair by the Opera North Orchestra under Christian Curnyn's idiomatic direction."

Richard Morrison, *The Times*

"The Orchestra of Opera North responded with gusto to Christian Curnyn's fast-paced yet elegantly phrased direction"

Melanie Eskenazi, *Music OMH*

HANDEL Solomon

Royal Opera House with Early Opera Company (October 2018)

"[...]the players revealed all the experience they have in Handel performance, directed with customary verve and passion by Christian Curnyn."

Melanie Eskenazi

MONTEVERDI The Return of Ulysses

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, Kilkenny Arts Festival (August 2018)

"...the restrained, elliptical cadences of Monteverdi's score, fluently conducted by Christian Curnyn, who also plays the harpsichord. [...] a Ulysses to remember, which is unlikely to be equalled on these shores for some time."

Max McGuinness, *Financial Times* (5*)

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CD: HANDEL Acis and Galatea

Early Opera Company, Chandos (released June 2018)

"Latest into the fray is Christian Curnyn's Early Opera Company, and against strong competition this 2017 account snatches the crown."

"Curnyn 'speaks Handel' with a penetrating fluency and naturalness."

"Curnyn's, in short, is a performance that leaves you savouring every note... and then some!"

- Paul Riley, *BBC Music Magazine Feb 2022* ("the best recording")

"Christian Curnyn brings us the best Acis and Galatea – ever! In the past, critics have named William Christie's 2012 recording as 'the best', but this performance leaves Christie in the dust. Curnyn hits on a secret that eluded previous interpreters of this work: it was conceived specifically to showcase the beauty of the English language [...] Channelling Handel's enthusiasm, Curnyn and his fellow artists forge a musical rhetoric powered by native sonorities."

- Berta Joncus, *BBC Music Magazine* (5*)

MOZART Die Zauberflöte

Garsington Opera (June 2018)

"The musical side of things is unalloyed delight. Early music specialist Christian Curnyn stirs the Garsington Opera Orchestra to exuberant heights, adding a zest of Handelian energy to the Mozartean stew, and galvanises a wonderfully distinguished cast."

- Mark Valencia, *WhatsOnStage*

"Christian Curnyn conducts with springy Mozartian grace." - Michael Church, *The Independent*

"Musically, the show is strong. The conductor Christian Curnyn opts, as is the fashion, for period textures but romantically nuanced tempos." - Richard Morrison, *The Times*

"Musically, Flute sounds well under the experienced baton of Christian Curnyn." - David Mellor, *Daily Mail*

"Christian Curnyn brought his wealth of experience to his musical direction of the score, and the Garsington Opera Orchestra played with style. The overture and the great choral pieces were solemn and dignified, and the duets sparkling."

- Melanie Eskenazi, *Music OMH*

HANDEL Giulio Cesare

Early Opera Company (April 2018)

"Christian Curnyn was a superbly stylish guide of his long-established, and now seemingly indispensable, artistic enterprise."

- Roy Westbrook, *Bachtrack*

MONTEVERDI The Return of Ulysses

Royal Opera Covent Garden at the Roundhouse (January 2018)

"Supported by Christian Curnyn's lyrical, subtly coloured conducting[...]"

- Richard Bratby, *The Spectator*

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"Christian Curnyn gets expressive playing from the Early Opera Company musicians. There is a Shakespearean emotional directness to this myth-telling and it is very effective." - **Richard Fairman, *Financial Times***

"The production is simple, focuses on the central dilemmas and is very finely accompanied by Christian Curnyn and the orchestra of the Early Opera Company, playing with unforced nobility in the more solemn parts and sparking verve in the more light-hearted ones." - **Melanie Eskenazi, *MusicOMH***

"Curnyn's players glittered, danced, scythed and at times improvised their way through a fuller version of the score than we usually hear. Monteverdi has never sounded more persuasive." - **David Nice, *The Arts Desk***

"Baroque specialist Christian Curnyn superintends the music, keeping things stylish and moving steadily forwards." - **George Hall, *The Stage***

"...an altogether well integrated cast, expertly supported by Christian Curnyn and the Early Opera Company's chamber orchestra." - **Rupert Christiansen, *The Telegraph***

"In the pit presides Christian Curnyn surrounded by his crack team of continuo players on violin, viola, theorbo, lutes, guitars, harps, harpsichords, an organ and a lirone: all this creates a lovely efflorescence of plucked, bowed, and blown sounds." - **Michael Church, *The Independent* (5*)**

"Right at the centre of this massive Victorian space sits the orchestra of Christian Curnyn's Early Opera Company: 15 fine players who caress the bare bones of Monteverdi's score into wonderfully luscious, responsive accompaniments." - **Richard Morrison, *The Times* (5*)**

"An outstanding cast, then, and one that's beautifully steered by Christian Curnyn and his Early Opera Company orchestra. As well as featherbedding the singers with lyrical warmth these expert musicians let Monteverdi speak to us like a contemporary. Indeed, on an aural level this was a haloed evening." - **Mark Valencia, *WhatsOnStage***

HANDEL *Rodelinda*

English National Opera (January 2018)

"[The production] offers genuine and persuasive dialogue with the musical performance – which was led incisively and with great sensitivity by Christian Curnyn. On the opening night, he drew finely shaded phrasing from a pared-down ENO orchestra (Baroque-like playing throughout) as well as moments of visceral, gritty continuo drama, particularly from Eligio Luis Quinteiro's theorbo." - **Flora Wilson, *Opera Magazine***

"Jones's production never falters, the stage transforming itself again and again to match the character of the score which, thanks to Christian Curnyn's direction in the pit, runs the gamut with magisterial ease from tempestuousness to the most exquisite tenderness." - **Michael Church, *The Independent***

"Beginning with the excellent conducting of Baroque specialist Christian Curnyn, the evening's musical credentials are exceptionally strong." - **Sam Smith, *Music OMH***

"If the evening belongs to anyone, though, it's probably Christian Curnyn in the pit, spinning Baroque gold from an ENO Orchestra at the top of its game. Curnyn's transparent love of Handel's music is highly contagious and he rightly received the loudest ovations on opening night." - **Nick Marlowe, *ArtMuseLondon***

"Perhaps best of all, however, was the music itself, with the orchestra, under Handel specialist Christian Curnyn, giving a sublime

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account of this composer's glory." - **William Hartston, *The Express***

"Christian Curnyn draws stylish, judiciously paced playing from the orchestra." - **Barry Millington, *Evening Standard***

"To do justice to English National Opera's *Rodelinda*, close your eyes and it's a world-beater. One of Handel's most captivating scores is treated like musical royalty by Christian Curnyn and the ENO Orchestra; they provide an evening of ideal tempo choices, sweet dynamics and vivacious dramatic energy." - **Mark Valencia, *WhatsOnStage***

"Christian Curnyn conducts with exemplary flair." - **Edward Bhesania, *The Stage***

"Christian Curnyn draws admirably stylish playing – strings thrillingly passionate, woodwinds mellifluous and the continuo group provides secure and responsive anchorage." - **David Truslove, *Classical Source***

HANDEL *Alceste*

Early Opera Company (March 2017)

"In the company of an inventive little serenade by Boyce and a great Concerto grosso, it gave us an evening of "endless pleasure, endless love" under the ever-stylish guidance of Christian Curnyn. [...] In the Concerto grosso Op. 6 No. 1, ripieno soloists Catherine Martin and Oliver Webber gave a spirited lead to the small but meaty string ensemble - a very different sound to the airy elegance Curnyn is currently extracting from the ENO Orchestra in a peerless *Partenope*." - **David Nice, *The Arts Desk***

"The Wigmore Hall was packed to hear Christian Curnyn's Early Opera Company present spirited and stylish performances." - **Richard Morrison, *The Times***

"If "incidental music" suggests something insubstantial, this performance by Christian Curnyn and his Early Opera Company was near enough top-drawer Handel." - **Evening Standard**

"[Handel] lives on through his music, of course, played and sung by peerless professionals such as Christian Curnyn's Early Opera Company. And on Wednesday we revelled in the taut, tangy sound of their playing."

- **Stephen Pritchard, *The Guardian* (5*)**

HANDEL *Partenope*

English National Opera (March 2017)

"Taking charge in the pit, meanwhile, conductor Christian Curnyn superintends a performance combining vivacity with delicacy." - **George Hall, *The Stage***

"There is an archness to the whole thing that is lightly worn and worked into everything, including Christian Curnyn's pacy conducting of the ENO orchestra, playing with period style on modern instruments." - **Erica Jeal, *The Guardian***

"They are all admirably sustained by Christian Curnyn, whose buoyant conducting draws vivacious playing from the band." - **Rupert Christiansen, *The Telegraph***

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"Christopher Alden's Handel is back at ENO, making inconsequentiality seem wondrous. Christian Curnyn's conducting sets the tone, with orchestral playing as light as air." - **David Nice, *The Arts Desk***

"...with terrific ensemble playing under Christian Curnyn of the Early Opera Company." - **Cara Chanteau, *The Independent***

"Christian Curnyn, who conducted ENO's production when it first appeared in 2008, returns to give a most eloquent account of Handel's refulgent score. He draws playing of variegated beauty from the versatile ENO Orchestra and makes their predominantly modern instruments sound like an extension of his own Early Opera Company players."

- **Mark Valencia, *WhatsOnStage***

"Christian Curnyn conducts the ENO orchestra with a light touch. [...] Everything works. Everything is a delight."

- **Richard Fairman, *The Financial Times***

ROSSI Orpheus

Royal Opera House Covent Garden at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse (November 2015)

"Powered by Christian Curnyn and his brilliant Early Opera Company band, this is an absolutely entrancing show."

- **Michael Church, *The Independent***

"Peerless young cast and musical ravishment from Christian Curnyn in a Rossi delight... the melting beauty of Christian Curnyn's Early Opera Company Orchestra up in the gallery (one of early music's true heroes)." - **David Nice, *The Arts Desk***

"Now that it's teamed up with Christian Curnyn's Early Opera Company, the Royal Opera seems unable to put a foot wrong with its forays into early music. Curnyn draws glorious colours from his orchestra and makes the ten-strong period band sound like a parallel aural universe. The score itself is a panoply of musical delights: Curnyn easily convinces me that this Orpheus (Orfeo in the original, an appellation the Royal Opera may have resisted in order to avoid confusion with Monteverdi) is a masterpiece."

- **Mark Valencia, *WhatsOnStage***

"Sympathetically underlined by Christian Curnyn's orchestra of the Early Opera Company, it was the most beautiful moment of this beautifully judged production.." - **Hannah Nepil, *The Financial Times***

"In the gallery, Christian Curnyn conducted musicians of his Early Opera Company from the harpsichord: they are very accomplished." - **Rupert Christiansen, *The Daily Telegraph***

"[Orpheus's] presentation in the exquisite candlelit Sam Wanamaker Theatre by Christian Curnyn and the orchestra of his Early Opera Company... is a revelation. Rossi's score, chock-full of ariosos, ensembles and love duets, is realised superbly by Curnyn and nine musicians perched in a gallery. Music and staging breathe together and the result is constantly engaging, often magical."

- **Barry Millington, *The Evening Standard***

"Leading a small gallery band from the Early Opera Company, Curnyn boldly encourages his singers to turn baroque arioso, where appropriate, into something close to speech. Yet when fullblooded lyricism is required, they deliver."

- **Richard Morrison, *The Times***

RAMEAU Castor et Pollux

Early Opera Company (November 2015)

"Find anything exciting happening in period opera in the UK and Curnyn will be involved, whether it's conducting at the Wanamaker or ENO, recording Handel or directing his own projects. Last week's concert performance of Rameau's Castor et Pollux was a perfect

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example. This is a work that simply shouldn't work in concert, so reliant is it on spectacle and physicality to drive the drama. Yet such was the rhetorical clarity of Curnyn's players, the dramatic skill of his young singers, that you felt no lack. With such vivid, compelling persuasion, surely the UK can't continue to hold out against the charms of Rameau, Lully and Charpentier?"

- **Alexandra Coghlan, *The Spectator***

HANDEL Rodelinda

English National Opera (March 2014)

"Curnyn sets up a sleek, muscular sound which the classy principals are more than able to emulate, filling the Coliseum with authentic Handelian style."

- **David Nice, *The Arts Desk***

"Christian Curnyn conducts with his usual infectious enthusiasm." - **Rupert Christiansen, *The Daily Telegraph***

"Bickley is formidable throughout and Christian Curnyn's conducting is well-nigh flawless, as always."

- **Tim Ashley, *The Guardian***

CAVALLI L'Ormino

Royal Opera House Covent Garden at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse (March 2014)

"L'Ormino enjoyed an initial surge of popularity half a century ago in the somewhat saccharine edition by Raymond Leppard. In Curnyn's hands, the score sounds no less enchanting, though his realisation, executed with just eight players (including himself on continuo), is more attuned to the Cavalli style [...] Above all it's a dynamic partnership between Curnyn and Holten, bringing the piece alive as music theatre."

- **Barry Millington, *The Evening Standard***

"But what makes the evening magical is the delicate balance maintained between the raunchiness on stage and the exquisite tissue of arias, duets, and intermezzi spun out under Christian Curnyn's musical direction, perfumed by the dark suggestiveness of the theorbo and the sweetness of the harp."

- **Michael Church, *The Independent***

"Christian Curnyn, a master of this repertoire, directed from the harpsichord with energy, flair and control."

- **Fiona Maddocks, *The Observer***

CHARPENTIER Medea

English National Opera (February 2013)

"All credit to the chorus too, and to the conductor Christian Curnyn, who gave the music swagger and bounce."

- **Rupert Christiansen, *The Daily Telegraph***

"...supported by an orchestra that sounds more naturally attuned to baroque style than the imported period bands proliferating elsewhere. That's not just because ENO's ensemble has mastered the instruments, but also because it knows how to follow singers."

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Under Christian Curnyn, the sound blossoms in the tricky Coliseum acoustic, with ravishing recorder accompaniments."

- **Andrew Clark, *The Financial Times***

"None of it would work half as well, though, without Christian Curnyn, whose exquisite conducting is near-perfect. Unmissable."

- **Tim Ashley, *The Guardian***

HANDEL Julius Caesar

English National Opera (October 2012)

"No argument, however, about the stylish orchestral playing under Christian Curnyn's superb direction."

- **Richard Morrison, *The Times***

"Christian Curnyn's conducting, as one might expect, is wonderfully passionate."

- **Tim Ashley, *The Guardian***

"...with the singers and conductor Christian Curnyn on such wondrous form, there is nothing to beat the musical output."

- **Barry Millington, *The Evening Standard***

Rameau, Gluck and Vivaldi

Scottish Chamber Orchestra (May 2012)

"It was a collective triumph: it could only have happened in this way, at that moment, with Curnyn and the mind-blowing SCO unanimous in their thought and execution."

- **Michael Tumelty, *The Herald Scotland***

"Conductor Christian Curnyn's precise, energetic direction ensured a warm, luminous sound from the SCO that was all rounded edges and elegant phrasing...Curnyn really came into his own in a sparkling suite from Rameau's opera *Les Paladins*, which he managed to make both poignant and hilarious."

- **David Kettle, *The Scotsman***

"Christian Curnyn confirmed himself as a remarkably successful period practitioner, responding to each nuance with flair and grace. He drew a clipped, precise sound from the orchestra and his approach to the grace notes in the Gluck lent each phrase an individual air. Both the martial and contemplative aspects of *Orfeo* sounded vigorous and alive in his hands and you never lost the sense that we were listening to ballet music...Curnyn massaged the sound [of the Rameau] with elegance and flair."

- **Simon Thompson, *Seen and Heard International***

"It is always a bit of a treat when an unfamiliar conductor pulls off one of those just-the-right-moment starts, as Christian Curnyn did with the Gluck overture."

- **Peter Cudmore, *Musical Criticism***