CONCERTO SOAVE
JEAN-MARC AYMES | ROMAIN BOCKLER

LA FAVOLA D'ORFEO

CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI

Semistaged opera in 5 acts - concertante version

LA FAVOLA D'ORFEO (THE TALE OF ORPHEUS)
CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI

First performance : Mantoue, 1607
Music : Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)
Booklet : Alessandro Striggio (ca 1573-1630)

CASTING

Orfeo Romain BOCKLER
Messaggiera María Cristina KIEHR
Euridice Louise THOMAS
Proserpina Julie VERCAUTEREN
Plutone Alexandre BALDO
Caronte Jean-Manuel CANDENOT
Apollo Imanol IRAOLA
Musica Lise VIRICEL
Ninfa Gabrielle VARBETIAN
Speranza Logan LOPEZ GONZALES
Pastore/Spirito Davy CORNILLOT – Olivier COIFFET – Samuel NAMOTTE
Pastore Estelle DEFALQUE

Marseille Opera Choir

Concerto Soave (16 instrumentistes)
Direction Jean-Marc AYMES
Mise en espace Jimmy BOURY

Premiere on the 2nd March 2025, Marseille Opera

MONTEVERDI'S ORFEO : BETWEEN BAROQUE AND RENAISSANCE

When Monteverdi composed his Fable of Orpheus for the court of Mantua, on a booklet of Striggio (a poet, diplomat and son of a great composer), he was certainly aware that he was laying the foundations for a new genre, after the Florentine attempts at the very beginning of the century.

This is borne out by the didascalies scattered throughout the work, the precise instrumentation, the violent contrast effects such as the arrival of the Messaggiera, the genuine dialogues such as that between Proserpine and Pluto or the exchanges between Caronte and Orpheus, and so many other features that anchor the work in the future of Baroque opera.

And yet, both in its musical writing and in the omnipresence of the choruses, this is a work that still has one foot in the previous century. The vocal writing, for example, is far from that of the future Venetian opera of the last Monteverdi or Cavalli, lively, sticking to the accentuation of the language, close to spoken theatre.

In the Orfeo, the writing and flow of the vocals reflect the experiments of the new style, without yet reaching the fluidity of the operas that would appear a few years later, while the ornamentation is very much in the spirit of the early monody of the Florentine Peri or Caccini. There is something mysterious, complex and fascinating about this work, which reminds us that it was intended for a select, cultivated audience.

Stemming from admiration for the virtues of ancient theatre, the essential role of the chorus further reinforces the impression that we are not witnessing the misadventures of poor Orpheus, but a great ceremony, a timeless celebration of the power of Love, Poetry and above all Music.

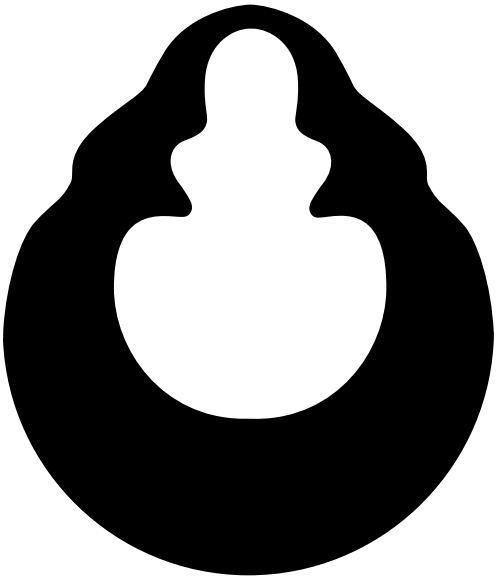
All these elements mean that the work cannot be approached as a traditional Baroque opera. Far from grand theatrical effects, Monteverdi's art demands great humility, allowing him to express the virtues and power of the text through the mystery of his writing.

We have therefore applied the same exacting standards to the choice of singers as to the choice of instrumentalists, both for the singers in the choir, who have a key role to play, as we have already mentioned, and for the singers playing the characters.

It is out of respect for this landmark work that we have surrounded ourselves with a team experienced in so-called 'historically informed' interpretation. Like this Orfeo slipping between 2 eras, the singers approaching this opera must be capable of handling virtuosity, expression and baroque rhetoric while having the qualities of listening, line and precision linked to the practice of the great polyphonies of the previous century.

The most striking example of this ambivalence is the lamento in Act 3, Possente Spirto, in which Orfeo attempts to convince Caron, the nocher of the underworld, by charming him with his music. Monteverdi himself wrote an ornate version of this supplication, full of virtuosity through the addition of notes, diminutions and other melismas characteristic of the Italian Seicento. By stretching the prosody to the extreme, it is no longer the text that counts but the agility of the voice. The music itself contains the emotion and drama, and the words are so elongated that it becomes difficult for the listener to understand the text, who then loses himself in the beauty of the ornaments, the harmonic sequences and the good taste of the performer: these characteristics bring us much closer to the great virtuoso diminutions of the late Renaissance than to the Recitar Cantando developed by the instigators of the seconda pratica, this new style that aims to be much closer to the text, the words, the affects and the human feelings. Here is further proof of the dichotomy that Monteverdi proposes in his Orfeo, straddling two eras, two aesthetics, and constantly juggling these two worlds.

Finally, it is vital that all the performers, singers and instrumentalists alike, are familiar with the practices of ornamentation and diminution described in the many treatises published in Italy during this period. In our opinion, this is the only way to restore Orfeo to its full expressive power, and give off that almost sacred emotion that overwhelms the listener when he hears an innovative masterpiece.



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