

Opera Guild of Rochester

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Christoph Willibald Ritter von Gluck 1714- 1787

- Gluck is the composer of the Reform Operas of the second half of the 18th Century that bridge the Operas of the Baroque period of the 17th and 18th century to the Romantic Operas of the 19th Century.
- He was born in Weidenwang Bavaria. His father, who was a hunter and would be today considered a conservationist, was in the services of Prince Lobkowitz in Bohemia.

 Bohemia was a cultural rich part of the Austrian Hungarian Empire.
- Gluck was educated from 1726-32 in the Jesuit seminary in a neighboring town. He learned to sing, play the violin, cello and organ. His father had a large family and limited means to support them, so Gluck had to earn money by giving music lessons and playing in churches

- In 1736 he went to Vienna and was befriended in a very cordial manner by the house of Lobkowitz. Musicians and other artists depended on the patronage of aristocratic houses.
- His new patron was Count Melzi, who carried him off to Milan, where he was placed under the tutelage of the celebrated Sammartini until 1741.
- Gluck was exposed to the Italian manner of Opera tradition and started to compose. His first Opera was Artaserse with a libretto by the celebrated Metastasio.
- In 1746 he worked in London and befriended the English musicologist and critic Burney.

- He subsequently returned to Germany, passing through Hamburg, my home town, which was celebrated for its operatic performances and had one of the oldest citizen sponsored opera houses since 1678. Gluck finally settled in Vienna, where he was appointed director of the Friday concerts in the Rofrano palace.
- Between 1741 and 1762 Gluck composed 32 dramatic works. During these years the Baroque Opera stagnated with presentations of long arias embellished by castrati, who took liberties to show off their art, often to the neglect of the original work's music. The Italian Opera style of the Comedia del Arte and the hollow stage-imitations of antiquity that made up the average Opera Seria, had little

- resemblance with the connection of the drama of the words expressed in the music.
- In 1762 in his 48th year, after having studied for 10 years literature and art, Gluck was now asking the aesthetic question of the natures of the poetry and music and their combination in Opera.
- In the 18th Century the musician was generally held in low esteem. He or she depended on the patron and the artist had little actual relation to the world. The artist had to minister to the enjoyment of the often ignorant and selfish wealthy and often had no more social status than a servant.
- Gluck lived through these conditions and out grew them. He set himself to make his music truthful to the words.

- In 1762 he chose Raniero di Calzabigi to be co-adjutor in the reform of the Opera. In the next 20 years he composed 5 operas, which conformed to his new idea, how poetry of the word should be expressed in Opera.
- Gluck presented his new works in Vienna in German and Italian language.
- By 1769 he received invitations to Paris and now presented his operas also in French and composed new operas in French. His first French librettist was Bailly Du Roullet, who did not write with the lyricism of Calzabigi.
- Gluck's life was not easy. In Paris 2 groups of fans formed:
 the Gluckists and a group Italian Opera fans of Piccini, the Piccinists. Gluck did get support from the great Rousseau.

• In 1779 Gluck left Paris for the last time and took up residence in Vienna. He was friends with many of the great artists of his time such as the German poet Klopstock and the Italian composer Salieri. Gluck died on November 15th 1787 from a stroke.

Gluck's 6 Reform Operas 1762-1778

I. Orfeo ed Euridice 1762 Vienna DV D
Libretto: Raniero di Calzabigi
French version Orphee et Eurydice 1774 Paris DVD
Libretto: Pierre-Louis Moline

II Alceste 1767 Vienna

Libretto: Raniero di Calzabigi French version 1776 Paris DVD

Libretto: Bailli Du Roullet

III. Paride ed Elena (Paris and Helena) 1769

Libretto: Raniero di Calzabigi

IV. Iphiginia in Aulis 1769' 72 Vienna

French version 1774 Paris

Libretto: Bailli Du Roullet, based on Racine and Euripides

Gluck's 6 Reform Operas continued

V. Armida 1777 Paris based on a poem poem by Quinault and Torquato Tasso

VI. Iphigenie en Tauride 1778 Paris DVD Libretto: Nicolas-Francois Guillard

Of these 6 opera only 4 are on DVD and are still in the repertory.

I will present to you these 4 Operas with the excerpts from the DVDs.

Orfeo ed Euridice 1762

- The part of Orfeo was sung by Guadagni, a castrato, who entered into the spirit of Gluck's work with perfect comprehension and refrained from defacing the music with any of the customary "embellishments", the employment of which, due in the first instance to the vanity and vulgarity of the singers, had been so long consecrated by customs. The chorus in this opera is not just commenting on the events but is moving them forward.
- After Berlioz almost 100 years later arranged the 1762 version for a Mezzo Soprano, Orfeo was sung first by the famous Pauline Garcia Viardot. In this production the role is sung by the legendary Janet Baker.

Orfeo ed Euridice continued

 Orfeo laments the death of his beloved wife Euridice in a grove by her tomb

Act I, Chapter 4

- "Chiamo il mio be cosi"
- Amore appears and tells him that Jupiter heard him and Euridice will be returned to him, but he can not look at her, when he leads her back to earth from Hades. Orfeo exclaims, he is ready for the test. Life is unbearable without Euridice.
- Orfeo descends to the Gates of Hell with his Lyre. The furies and specters attack him, but his pleading with them, placates them and they let him enter

Orfeo ed Euridice continued

Act II, Chapter 8
"Deh! Placateri con me"
stop when the gates of Hell open

- Orfeo enters the Elysian fields where the happy spirits dance and Euridice is restored to him. Orfeo tries to lead Euridice back to earth and does not look at her. She is heart broken, thinking he does not love her any more and pleads with him to look at her.
- Finally Orfeo can not take her pleading any longer and turns around and Euridice dies again. Orfeo sings his heart broken lament;

Act III, Chapter 17 "Che faro senza Euridice"

French Tenor version of the Lament

In the French version for Paris from 1774 Du Roullet and Gluck changed Orfeo to a Tenor role, since castrati were not part of the Paris Opera. Here is the same aria in the tenor version, sung by Roberto Alagna in a modern European production from Bologna

Act IIII, Chapter 22

- "Jai perdu non Euridice"
- Amore returns and tells Orfeo that Jupiter accepts his fidelity to Euridice and will let her live again. Orfeo, Euridice, the heroes and heroines dance before the temple of love, singing praise to the god of love.
- This happy version was created for the name day celebration of the future Austrian Emperor Joseph II.

Alceste 1776 Paris

- This is a Robert Wilson production from the Chatelet in Paris and conceived with stereo typed, static gestures like in a Greek chorus presentation. These are not Gluck's instructions
- Ning Admete, Alceste's husband is dying and the people and Alceste are overwhelmed with grief and despair. Alceste and the people pray to the god Apollo for Admete's life. Apollo's oracle speaks, that the god has heard them and Admete can live if another sacrifices himself in his place. Nobody comes forward.
- Alceste is willing to give up her life for love. She is crying out in triumph her decision to the gods of Styx.

Act I, Scene 7

"Ombres, larves pales compagnes de lamort"

Alceste continued

 Admete is crest fallen, he does not want to loose his beloved wife and begs her, not to leave him, he would rather die.

Duet Alceste and Admete

Act II, Scene 3

- "Bannis la clainte e les alarmes"
- Hercule, Admete's friend and the son of Jove (Jupiter) appears and offers to save him. He will go to Hades. Apollo appears and tells all that Admete will live.

Iphigenie en Aulide Paris 1774

- This is the French Version presented by the Nederlandse Opera with a production by Pierre Audi which omits the Ballets demanded by the Paris Opera, concentrating on the emotions of the characters of the legend expressed in the music they are singing and the orchestra.
- The Paris Opera wanted a happy ending. The goddess Diana lets Iphigenie live and Achille and Iphigenie can marry. In the legend Diana takes Iphigenie to Tauris to serve her and where Iphigenie is forced to sacrifice the victims brought to her temple.
- Gluck had to oversee every detail of the first production and teach the singers to express the emotions presented in the music simple and straight forward without the customary embellishments.

Iphigenie en Aulide continued

- The chorus of the Greek soldiers moves the action forward crying out for the sacrifice of a victim, so that they can have the wind to sail to Troja.
- I will present two excerpts from this opera, which are characteristic of Gluck's musical expression of the words in the libretto.
- In act I Agamemnon ,Iphigenie's father, is grief stricken that the goddess Diana demands the sacrifice of his daughter, before the Greeks can sail to Troja. The natural feeling of the father wins over the religious duty to obey the goddess. He sends Arcas, his servant, to give his wife Clytemnestra a letter to turn back to Argos with Iphigenie under the pretext that Iphegenie's fiancee Achille has

Iphigenie en Aulide continued

 Another love. The letter reaches them too late and they both appear in Aulis both heart broken by the presumed betrayal of Achille.

Chapter 4 and part 5

Agamemnon's lament, stop when Calchas lifts his stave

The next excerpt is the duet between Achille and the crest fallen Iphigenie. It shows that Gluck foreshadows the Classical Period of Mozart like in the Abduction from the Seraglio and the Romantic Period of Weber's Der Freischuetz. Achille is surprised to see his fiancee in Aulis and in the duett finally convinces her that he loves her and was true to her.

Chapter 14,15,16,17, Stop after they exchanged their rings

Iphigenie en Tauride 1778 Paris

- This is considered Gluck's master piece. While Du Roullet's translations were stiff in expression compared to the Italian Calzabigi, Guillard's French was again lyrical.
- This production from the Zurich Opera accompanies the singers with a pantomime which suppose to express their thoughts and distress.
- This opera has in the highest degree the combinations of high dramatic power with genuine musical sufficiency. Gluck gives greater unity to his scenes, carrying out one dramatic idea from the beginning to the end.
- In the first act Iphigenie and the priestesses of Diana entreat the gods to moderate their anger against the Scythian people and their obsession with human sacrifice.

Iphigenie en Tauride continued

- Iphigenie tells the priestesses of her terrible dream of the death of her father Agamemnon by the hand of his wife Clytemnestra.
- King Thoas of Taurus appears and demands more human sacrifice. An oracle had prophesized his life was in danger, if a stranger came to their shores and two strangers had been taking prisoners, who turned out to be Orestes and Pylades.
- In the dungeon of Diana's temple, Orestes is in despair, tormented by the furies for his mother's murder. He blames himself, that he will be the cause of his friend's Pylades' death.

 Pylades sings about their friendship and childhood and how he hopes they will be united in their fate.

Act II, chapters 14 and 15
"Dieux! Qui me pour suivez"
Unis des la plus tendre enfance"

The minister of the sanctuary separates Pylades and Oreste against their protests. Orestes is alone, first he falls asleep but then the furies pursue him in his sleep for the murder of his mother.

- Iphigenie asks Orestes about himself trying to find out some news from her homeland. He tells her, he is from Mycenae and that Agamemnon is dead, killed by his wife Clytemnestra and that Orestes killed her to avenge the death of his father, but he tells her, he is dead.
- Iphigenie and the priestesses mourn the loss of their homeland and her family

Act II, Chapter 23

- "O malheurese Iphigenie!"
- Iphigenie tells Pylades and Orestes she can safe one of them and the one saved can carry a letter to her sister Electra.
- Orestes and Pylades quarrel, who should die. Orestes finally wins and Pylades goes off with the letter.

Orestes is blind folded, prepared for the sacrifice. Iphigenie prays to Diana in despair to steady her hands holding the sacrificial sword. Orestes blind folded expecting the sword cries out:" So did you die Iphigenie, my sister". Iphigenie suddenly recognizes her brother Orestes.

Act IV chapter 37, Recognition scene

- "Chaste fille de Latone"
- Thoas suddenly appears and demands she sacrifices the prisoner. She tells him, it is her brother. Pylades arrives with Greek soldiers and kills Thoas with the sacrificial sword.
- Diana appears and tells Orestes, he is saved and tells the Scythians to look forward to a better future.

- Diana tells Orestes to go back to Mycenae and be King.
 Orestes, Pylades and Iphigenie are going to the shore for their journey home.
- Even in Gluck's Reform Operas the stories are going back to the Greek myths with the gods determining the fate of the humans.
- Not until the 19th Century and the Romantic period did the humans finally are responsible for the outcome of their fate.

References

Leipzig, Friedrich Fleischer 1854

Leipzig, Friedrich Fleischer 1854

II.Gluck and the Opera: A Study in Musical History

Author: Ernest Newman

London: Bertram Dobell, 77 Charing Cross Road 1895



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Playlist

Christoph Willibald Gluck Reform Operas 1762 to 1778

I (Orfeo	ed	Euridice	176	2

Libretto: Raniero di Calzabigi

Glyndebourne Festival Opera: Conductor Raymond Leppard

The London Philharmonic Production: *Peter Hall* 1982

Orfeo Janet Baker, Euridice Elisabeth Speiser

Kultur DVD D 2100

Act 1, Chapter 4

"Chiamo il mio bencosi" 7'

Act 2, Chapter 8

" Deh! Placatevi con me" 7'

Stop when the Gates of Hell open

Act 3, Chapter 17

" Che faro senza Euridice"

4'50

Then stop

II Orphee ed Eurydice 1774

Libretto: Pierre-Louis Moline

Theatrical and musical adaption in one prologue

And three acts by David Alagna based on the

Academie Royale de Paris

Teatro di Bologna, Conductor Giampaolo Bisanti

Orphee Roberto Alagna, Eurydice Serena Gamberoni

Bel Air Classiques DVD BAC052 2008/2009

Act 3, Chapter 22

"Jai perdue mon Euridice"

4'23"

III. Alceste 1776

Libretto: Bailli Du Roullet

Theatre Musical de Paris-Chatelet Production *Robert Wilson* 2000 Conductor *Sir John Eliot Gardiner*

Alceste Anne Sofie von Otter

Admete *Paul Groves* Apollo *Ludovic Tezier*

High Priest Dietrich Henschel

EMI DVD 50999 2 16570 9 2 2000

Act I, Scene 7

"ombres, larves pales compagnes de lamort" 5'

Act 2, Scene 3

"Bannis la clainte e les alarmes" 5'

IV. Iphigenie en Aulide Paris 1774

Libretto: Bailli Du Roullet after Racine and Euripides

Les Musiciens Du Louvre Grenoble Chorus of De Nederlandse Opera

Conductor: Marc Minkowski

Dirctor: Pierre Audi

Iphigenie: Veronique Gens Agamemnon: Nicolas Teste

Clytemnestre: Anne Sofie von Otter

Achille: Frederic Antoun Diane: Salome Haller

Calchas (Priest): Christian Helmer

Arcas: Laurent Alvaro
Patrocle: Martijn Cornet

Opus Arte DVD OA 1099 D 2013

"Brillant auteur de la lumiere Agamemnon's lament, stop when Calchas lifts stave 2'33" Scene 8, Chapter 14,15,16,17 **Duet of Achille and Iphigenie** 10'54" Stop when they exchange their rings. V. Iphigenie en Tauride Paris 1778 Libretto: Nicola-Francois Guillard Zurich Opera's Orchestra La Scintilla Conductor William Christie Stage and Costume Design Christian Schmidt Production Bernhard Fleischer Iphigenie Juliette Galstian **Orestes** Rodney Gilfrey Pylades Deon Van der Walt Diana Martina Jankova Kultur DVD D29939 2001 Act 2, Chapter 14 and 15 "Dieux! Qui me poursuivez" " Unis des laplus tender enfance 7' Chapter 23 "O malheureuse Iphigenie! 4'35" Act 4, Chapter 37, Recognition scene " Chaste fille de Latone" 6' 62'95" **Total Music time about**