

Les Arts florissants by... William Christie and Les Arts Florissants !

SATURDAY

11

JULY
7 P.M

AMPHITHÉÂTRE
FERNAND-LINDSAY

PROGRAM

> MARC-ANTOINE CHARPENTIER

(1643-1704)

LES ARTS FLORISSANTS – 45'

INTERMISSION – 20'

LA DESCENTE D'ORPHÉE AUX ENFERS – 60'

SEMI-STAGED OPERAS

Presented by



In collaboration with



ARTISTS

William Christie, harpsichord,
organ and conductor

Les Arts Florissants

Dancers

Zarina Stahnke, Claire Graham,
Andrea Scarfi, Tom Godefroid

Stage direction

Stéphane Facco
and Marie Lambert-Le Bihan

Choreography

 Martin Chaix

Assistant choreographer

Eleanor Freeman

Laureates of the 12th Jardin des Voix

Josipa Bilić – Peace,
Daphne

Camille Chopin – Music,
Eurydice

Sarah Fleiss – Poetry,
Proserpine

Tanaquil Ollivier – Oenone

Sydney Frodsham –
Architecture, Arethusa

Richard Pittsinger –
Painting, Ixion

Bastien Rimondi – Orpheus

Attila Varga-Tóth – Tantalus

Olivier Bergeron – Discord,
Apollo, Tityus

Kevin Arboleda-Oquendo –
a Warrior, Pluto

SYNOPSIS

LES ARTS FLORISSANTS H. 487

This allegory stages four Arts—Music, Painting, Poetry and Architecture—placed under the protection of Peace against the assaults of Discord. Behind the fable lies a tribute to Louis XIV, guarantor of harmony and protector of the arts.

Prologue

Rising from the underworld, Discord delights in the chaos she spreads among mortals. Determined to silence the Arts, she summons War to her side.

Scene 1

The four Arts appear, weakened, sensing their world falter. They sing of their fear of being annihilated by the approaching brutality.

Scene 2

War answers Discord's call. It glorifies violence, lays claim to destruction and proclaims the imminent end of the Arts.

Scene 3

Cornered, the Arts implore the gods. Their song, at first plaintive, turns to prayer: rather than meeting force with force, they choose light over darkness.

Scene 4

Peace descends from the heavens and silences the weapons. Discord retreats, War fades. The Arts may flourish once more—but only for a time.

Scene 5

The Arts celebrate their victory, aware of its fragility: nothing is won for good, and the threat lies barely dormant beneath the restored surface.

LA DESCENTE D'ORPHÉE AUX ENFERS – H. 488

ACT I

Scene 1

In a pastoral setting, Orpheus weds Eurydice. Nymphs and shepherds celebrate their union with bright, dancing music: the world seems in perfect harmony.

Scene 2

The celebration turns to tragedy: bitten by a serpent, Eurydice dies before the eyes of a devastated Orpheus. Joy gives way to weeping.

Scene 3

Alone with his grief, Orpheus refuses to resign himself. Rather than accept his loss, he resolves to brave the underworld to reclaim the one he loves.

ACT II

Scene 1

Orpheus enters the subterranean realm, where he meets the great figures of eternal punishment—Tantalus, Ixion and Tityus—condemned to endless torment.

Scene 2

His song gradually works its magic: the torments subside, the infernal guardians soften, and at last so do the Furies themselves.

Scene 3

Before Pluto, Orpheus pleads his cause through the sole power of his art. Won over by Proserpine, the god relents: Eurydice may follow him toward the light, on one condition—that he not look back before leaving the underworld.

Scene 4

The work breaks off before the denouement. The fatal glance, should it come, remains offstage. This silence suspends the myth, leaving it open.

PROGRAM NOTES

On June 6, 1982, to close the 8th G7 Summit, François Mitterrand invited his distinguished counterparts to take their seats in the sumptuous Royal Opera of the Palace of Versailles. The curtain then rose on one of the most delicate jewels of French opera: *Les Arts florissants*, by Marc-Antoine Charpentier. Performed for the occasion by Les Arts Florissants under the direction of William Christie, in a staging by Jorge Lavelli, the production left lasting memories with the heads of state and their guests. The message of perpetual peace carried by the libretto was no small matter in the polarized context of the 1980s.

Marc-Antoine Charpentier's music deftly unites the French and Italian "tastes." Trained in Rome under Giacomo Carissimi, Charpentier was also a theorist of the keys (*Règles de composition*, 1690). A true maverick who took many risks, he confronted Jean-Baptiste Lully's stranglehold on official music with an original body of work that left neither the court nor the religious institutions indifferent. Yet it was precisely this freedom that allowed Charpentier to develop a more expressive style, recognizable among all those of his contemporaries. Engaged in 1670 by Marie de Lorraine, Duchess of Guise, Charpentier enjoyed at the Hôtel de Guise—today's Palais Soubise—a platform for creation that he shared notably with the Corneille brothers. It was at the heart of Marie de Guise's small court that Charpentier first tried his hand at opera.

As the Académie royale de musique was beginning to develop King Louis XIV's public image in the wider world, Marie de Guise's small court boldly defied the Sun King. Indeed, Mademoiselle de Guise, granddaughter of Henri le Balafré, retained toward the grandson of Henri IV a certain disdain tinged with insolence. At this independent princess's establishment, Charpentier had at his disposal an ensemble of six instrumentalists and eight to ten solo singers, himself among them as an *haute-contre*. Thus the composer was able to create chamber gems that reveal his mastery of the vocal art and the quality of his performers.

Written and first performed, in all likelihood, in 1685, *Les Arts florissants* is an “idyll in music.” This votive form made it possible to celebrate, within the private circle of Marie de Lorraine-Guise’s court, the completion of the policy of the Réunions—the annexation of territories such as Strasbourg and Luxembourg—ratified on August 15, 1684 by the Treaty of Ratisbon. The anonymous libretto gathers the major arts—Poetry, Architecture, Music and Painting—who sing of the “flowering” they recover through the return of Peace, thanks to Louis XIV. Though battles with Discord and her acolytes ensue, the order of the world is restored by Jupiter himself, one of the avatars of the absolute monarch. Charpentier composes music of striking contrasts. The score is by turns an evocative gentleness for times of peace and a thunderous brilliance for the bluster of Discord and her sycophants.

Immediately after this *Arts florissants*, Charpentier wrote for Mademoiselle de Guise’s court a chamber opera of ambitious proportions: *La Descente d’Orphée aux enfers*. Composed and premiered between 1686 and 1687, this score forms a particularly interesting counterpart to the diplomatic idyll that preceded it. *La Descente d’Orphée* recounts the death of Eurydice, the despair of Orpheus and his descent to Taenarus. This score remains mysterious, for specialists are divided as to whether it was ever completed. Some believe it may have included a third act, lost in the chaos of the ages. In any case, like his near-contemporary Henry Purcell, Charpentier deploys all his dramatic skill to depict, with a miniaturist’s finesse, the kaleidoscope of passions felt by Orpheus. One finds in the vocal writing and dramatic construction of the music the very formulas that Marc-Antoine Charpentier would apply in his great vocal works *David et Jonathas* (1688) and *Médée* (1693).

As Jean-Baptiste Lully’s star gradually waned from 1684 onward, that of Marc-Antoine Charpentier shone with a fine light. In 1685, with the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the Sun King set aside his mask and his dancing shoes for the crucifix of Louis the Most Christian. It was then that, in the elegant Marais quarter, within the ancient Hôtel de Guise, the arts flourished in music, ready to be gathered for the centuries to come.

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