

Sunday, February 12, 2006, 7pm
Zellerbach Hall

Les Violons du Roy with
Magdalena Kožená, *mezzo-soprano*
Bernard Labadie, *conductor*



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PROGRAM

- From *Dardanus* (1739) Jean-Philippe RAMEAU (1683–1764)
Ouverture
Menuet tendre en rondeau
Tambourins I/II
Air vif
Loure pour les Phrygiens
Tambourins I/II
- Christoph Willibald GLUCK (1714–1787)
From *Alceste* (1767)
«Où suis-je? O malheureuse Alceste!...Non ce n'est point un sacrifice»
«Ah, malgré moi, mon faible cœur...O Ciel, quel supplice, quelle douleur!»
- Rameau
From *Dardanus*
Entrée des Songes
Bruit de guerre pour Entr'acte
Air très vif
Gavottes I (gracieusement)/II (en rondeau)
Chaconne
- Gluck
From *Armide* (1777)
«Ah, si la liberté me doit être ravie»
- Gluck
From *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1774)
«Dieux puissants que j'atteste...Ma fille, je la vois...Jupiter, lance la foudre»
- INTERMISSION
- Rameau
From *Castor et Pollux* (1737)
«Tristes apprêts»
- Jean-Féry REBEL (1666–1747)
Les Élémens (The Elements) (1737)
Le Cahos
Loure I (La Terre et l'Eau)—Chaconne (Le Feu)
Ramage (L'Air)
Rossignols
Loure II (La Chasse)
Tambourins I/II
Sicilienne
Air pour l'Amour (Rondeau)
Caprice
- Rameau
From *Dardanus*
«C'en est trop... Troubles cruel... Quand l'aiglon fougueux»
- Rameau
From *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733)
«Cruelle mère des amours»

JEAN-PHILIPPE RAMEAU (1683–1764)

Although Jean-Philippe Rameau's compositional career spanned an extraordinary six decades, his first opera did not premiere until 1733, the year he turned 50. On Rameau's admission, it had been a lack of self-confidence that had delayed his operatic debut until late in mid-life: "Although I have attended the theater since I was 12," he wrote to an aspiring young composer, "I first worked for the Opéra only at 50, and even then I did not think myself capable." There are, however, few signs of insecurity in his first work for the stage, for *Hippolyte et Aricie* is an astonishingly confident composition. While it employed the same overall structure and many of the same musical forms and resources as any *tragédie en musique*, it was in many ways a radical departure for contemporary audiences accustomed to an operatic tradition still dominated by Jean-Baptiste Lully's late 17th-century archetypes.

Many hailed Rameau as "the new Orpheus of our century," but others were equally repelled by his seemingly over-abundant use of unexpectedly harsh dissonances and complex harmonic progressions. Some found the most infamous of all, the Fates' second trio at the end of Act II, so cacophonous that it was cut before the night of the first performance. In this trio, the Fates warn Theseus, saved from Pluto's fury by the intervention of his father Neptune, that he will return to find Hades in his own home. Not only do the sweeping upward scales, aggressive dotted rhythms and sudden silences make for a startling listening experience, but even more jarring were its starkly bizarre chromatic and enharmonic progressions, employed by Rameau "to inspire dread and horror" in the listener.

Phaedra's prayer, "Cruelle mère des amours," subsequently opens Act III at Theseus's seaside palace, and the Fates' warning to

Theseus resurges appropriately in the harmonies that contort the middle section. Phaedra, who has developed an incestuous passion for her stepson Hippolytus, prays for forgiveness, and although ridden with guilt, she cannot help but beseech Venus to make him susceptible to her love. Rameau paints her helpless lust in a surprising string of unresolved diminished harmonies that begin on "Mes feux me font horreur" and a long chromatic descent in the bass that dramatically intensifies the long-overdue cadence to the dominant. Perhaps Simon-Joseph Pellegrin's adaptation of Racine's *Phèdre* left something to be desired in its occasionally clumsy verse, but it is in moments such as these that the skills of both Pellegrin and Rameau in characterization come so boldly to the foreground.

At the time when *Castor et Pollux* was first staged on October 24, 1737, conflicts between the "Ramistes" on the one hand and the reactionary "Lullistes" on the other had long been widely reported in the press and, along with reverberations from the shock caused by *Hippolyte et Aricie*, had created a highly charged atmosphere surrounding the premiere. By the time of its second revival in 1764, *Castor* had come to be seen by many as Rameau's crowning achievement. Among the cast of this revival was a young Sophie Arnould as Telaira, a role eventually regarded as one of her finest. The work, increasingly disfigured by cuts and additions, remained in the repertory until 1785, longer than any of Rameau's other operas, and portions of the score were still being performed at the Opéra as late as 1817.

As Debussy later wrote, "we are gripped and moved by this tragic atmosphere" from the very first bars of the Chorus of Spartans lamenting the death of Castor (a chorus later adapted as Kyrie for Rameau's own memorial services). Alone with the Spartan princess Phoebe, Telaira, disconsolate, mourns over Castor's

tomb. Although his brother Pollux may avenge his death, vengeance is no compensation for her profound loss. In her monologue "Tristes apprêts," she renounces the light of day now that Castor can no longer experience it himself. Rameau captures the dignity of Telaira's sorrow by means of harmonic simplicity and a somber bassoon obbligato rather than more obvious deployment of chromatic extremes or a minor key. These means make the melodic appoggiaturas over major seconds in the accompaniment all the more expressive on such words as "affreux" and "lugubres." Dramatic leaps in the melody impart power and control to Telaira's lament, a power she will later exercise cunningly over Pollux. In an effective rhetorical contrast, Rameau renews the narrative drive by cutting short the contemplative tone of Telaira's scene with the victorious entry of Pollux and his retinue of athletes and soldiers, who have just avenged Castor's death. After they perform dances reenacting the battle, Pollux offers Telaira his love as a substitute for Castor's. Telaira is taken aback but exploits this revelation, persuading Pollux to ask his father Jupiter to restore Castor to life.

The appearance of *Dardanus*, Rameau's fifth opera, marked the climax of the dispute between the Ramistes and the Lullistes. It was given with a strong cast drawn from the Opéra's most celebrated performers, including Pierre de Jélyotte as Dardanus, Marie Péliissier as Iphise, François Le Page as Teucer and Ismenor, and the dancers Louis Dupré and Marie Sallé. Yet, despite the efforts of Rameau's supporters, a thousand of whom had pledged to attend every night to ensure that its run extended to forty performances, *Dardanus* had achieved only limited success by the end of its first run of 26 performances. When it was prepared for revival in 1744, Rameau and his librettist Charles-Antoine Le Clerc

de la Bruère took into account criticisms of the original plot by removing many of the supernatural elements that bogged down the story. This revised version, in which the last three acts were completely reworked, provoked little comment, but by the time it was revived again in 1760, *Dardanus* had rightly come to be regarded as one of the composer's finest operatic achievements, on a par with such masterpieces as *Castor et Pollux* and *Platée*.

These problematic supernatural elements—a sorcerer who could stop the sun in its tracks, a magic wand that allowed the hero to assume another form, a dream sequence, and two combats with monsters—were concessions to popular taste and conventions of the time. Eighteenth-century French opera required that there be a happy ending, frequent onstage supernatural or other spectacular events and, in each act, an elaborate divertissement comprising airs, choruses and, above all, ballet. La Bruère's failure was not to integrate the supernatural activities convincingly into the narrative. On the other hand, divertissements were very often criticized for their superfluity, but in *Dardanus*, La Bruère made them integral to the story. Nor did Rameau disappoint. The two ceremonies in Acts I and II—where Teucer and Antenor pledge allegiance, and where Ismenor demonstrates his occult power—contain music of immense strength and harmonic richness. Moreover, the dream sequence, Iphise's two tortured soliloquies, her consultation with the pseudo-Ismenor and Dardanus's encounter with the sea monster, are all among Rameau's finest scenes.

The musical quality of the ballet movements, almost 30 in all, remains consistently high. Noteworthy are the two pairs of tambourins—18th-century French character-pieces supposedly based on a Provençal folk dance accompanied by pipe and tabor. The bass part simulates a drum by sharply accentuating the

rhythm and by the repetition of a single note, while an upper voice imitates the pipe with a fast-moving melody. Rousseau described the tambourin as “a kind of dance much in style today in the French theatre,” adding that it must be lively and well accented, and “swinging.” Rameau’s tambourins usually occur in pairs, one in a major key and one in the minor, with the first repeated da capo.

The *Sommeil de Dardanus*, a rondeau that introduces the dream sequence in Act IV, draws from a popular tradition of slumber scenes found in many French stage works of the 17th and 18th centuries, starting with Lully’s *Les amants magnifiques* of 1670. The chaconne is a dance in triple meter and was usually the longest and most impressive piece in a divertissement. The *Chaconne* that brings *Dardanus* to a close is no exception. Rameau treats the recurring bass line very freely and achieves contrast through variation of material, variety of mood and a very resourceful sense of orchestration.

Before things can begin, however, Venus first invites the Pleasures to reign in Cupid’s palace on Cythera in the prologue of *Dardanus*. To her chagrin, their soporific dance causes Cupid, his retinue, and the Pleasures themselves to fall asleep. She turns the destructive Jealousy and her followers loose to rouse them, but their havoc proves more than she can bear, and she insists that they show Cupid proper respect in the recitative beginning with “C’en est trop.” Things take a more fiery turn with her analogy of the violent north wind freed from his chains in the air “Quand l’aquilon foughueux,” a virtuosic showpiece replete with wind-imitating runs.

CHRISTOPH WILLIBALD GLUCK (1714–1787)

Just as Rameau had to win over a conservative and fickle public still bewitched by Lullian

opera, so too was Christoph Willibald Gluck haunted by the specter of Rameau, whose works continued to dominate the Paris Opéra’s repertoire well after his death. Also like Rameau, Gluck did not produce his first opera in Paris until late in life, at the age of 60, though his operas had been produced successfully in several other cities. Aided by the influence of his former singing pupil, the Dauphine Marie Antoinette, wife of the future Louis XVI, Gluck was able to convince the directors of the Opéra to mount the first of his operas written expressly for the French stage.

Iphigénie en Aulide eventually opened in April 1774, after nearly six months of intensive rehearsal. Gone was the elaborate mannerist vocabulary of Rameau’s musical idiom, with its many subtleties of word-painting, mood-change and his inventive orchestration. Instead came a new sobriety of style and an Italianate lyricism tempered by a more simple and direct expression of human sentiment.

The forceful potential of Gluck’s reformed style is strongly apparent in Clytemnestra’s aria from Act 3. Having accepted the necessity of her sacrifice and bid farewell to Achilles, Iphigenia, alone, reflects on her fate, hoping that it will bring favorable winds to the Greek fleet and ward off any further carnage. She is interrupted first by the Greek mob, impatient for her sacrifice, and then by Clytemnestra, who expresses her willingness to die in place of her daughter. When Iphigenia departs resolute in her decision, Clytemnestra gives vent to her rage in the recitative “Dieux puissants que j’atteste.” An extraordinary arioso follows in which she has a vision of the sacrifice. She begins hesitantly, “Ma fille! Je la vois,” becoming more impassioned, her voice rising with the oboe phrases and string tremolos, until she sees Agamemnon about to kill Iphigenia. Propelled by motorized waves of string ostinati, she bursts into a passionate plea to Jupiter, her

father, to send thunderbolts into the Greek camp in “Jupiter, lance la foudre!”

The first version of *Alceste* premiered in Vienna in 1767 in response to political circumstances. In August 1765 the Viennese theaters were closed following the death of the emperor. Two further royal deaths prolonged the mourning, and *Alceste*—the story of a wife who offers to sacrifice her life to save her husband’s—was devised as a tribute to the widowed empress. This work marks a decisive stage in Gluck’s reform of opera. As soon as the success of the opera was established in Vienna, the librettist Ranieri de’ Calzabigi began to plan for the publication of the score, “with an introduction that explains the motives behind the extensive changes we have made to dramatic compositions of this sort.” When the score was published, two years after the first performance, it was prefaced by one of the most celebrated statements of artistic approach in the 18th century. The reforms Gluck advocated in the preface included the abolition of lengthy orchestral introductions to arias, the use of informal aria structures that reflect the dramatic situation, the declamatory vocal style, free from superfluous ornamentation, and an overture that prepares the audience for the mood of the drama. Gluck prepared his French audience with a letter in the *Mercur de France* preceding his arrival at the end of 1773. He announced his plan to create “a type of melody that is noble, expressive and natural, and declaimed exactly according to the prosody of each language and the character of each nation.”

To achieve this end, Gluck’s revision of *Alceste* for performance in Paris in 1776 amounted almost to a new composition. The French *Alceste* had a new text by Marie François Louis Gand Leblanc Roulet, Gluck’s librettist for *Iphigénie en Aulide*, based on Calzabigi’s libretto. Obsessed by his desire for the title role

to be interpreted as he intended, Gluck urged his leading soprano, Rosalie Levasseur, to await his arrival in Paris before committing her part to memory, “otherwise the correction of bad habits acquired during my absence would be infinitely troublesome to both of us.”

At the end of Act I, Alcestis resolves to die for Admetus so that the people of Thessaly can retain their king. Her resolution takes place in a recitative followed by an air, “Non, ce n’est point un sacrifice,” in which she declares that she could not live without Admetus. The refrain alternates with expressions of her sorrow at leaving her husband and children. Her request accepted, Admetus miraculously recovers but is appalled to discover that it is because someone else has agreed to take his place. He presses Alcestis for the name of the victim. When he discovers that it is she, he threatens to annul her vow in suicide while the people grieve to hear they will lose their queen. Alcestis finally gives way to profound despair in the two arias “Ah, malgré moi” and “O Ciel, que supplie.” The stately resolve invoked by the first aria gives way to full expression of her anguish in the second, as the increased tempo and metrical change from 4/4 to 6/8 make clear.

Armide, Gluck’s fourth commission for the Paris Opéra, was first heard at the Académie Royale de Musique on September 23, 1777. In choosing to reset the same libretto written by Philippe Quinault 91 years earlier for Lully in 1686, Gluck was deliberately competing with a work considered by many the perfect expression of French operatic tradition. Rousseau’s *Lettre sur la musique française* of 1753, with its detailed musical analysis of Lully’s setting of Armide’s monologue “Enfin, il est en ma puissance,” gave Gluck compositional direction. Diderot and Rousseau both claimed that classical drama dealt with human situations in such a stylized manner that they seemed too

far from reality to be able genuinely to move an audience. The way to achieve realistic representation of the emotions in music was by employing a vocal style that conveyed feelings of sorrow in melodic fragments that, far from being pleasant to the ear, were occasionally harsh, and writing an orchestral accompaniment that came forward to express the character's unspoken feelings. It was no longer the case, as in Lully, of relying only on declamation as the means of expression, but of giving voice to the character's inner feelings with music capable not only of reinforcing the meaning of the text, but also, if necessary, of contradicting it.

At the beginning of Act III, Armide is alone in the desert where she has had herself transported. She is in despair, not only because the hated Renaud has escaped her vengeance, but also because he has conquered her heart. In "Ah, si la liberté," Gluck's consistent sweetness of musical tone here makes clear that, despite any torment in her words or her attempt to find solace in the desert, this conflict does not mar her affection for him.

JEAN-FÉRY REBEL (1666–1747)

Jean-Féry Rebel was the most famous member of a family of musicians who served in the corps of the king's musicians and in the opera for over one hundred years. His knowledge of the ballet was a natural by-product of his participation in the 24 Violons du Roy—first as a member of the orchestra and later as its *batteur de mesure*. Out of this experience, Rebel created the first choreographic and programmatic symphonies, testaments to his extraordinary imaginative power. *Les Éléments* of 1737 is certainly one of the most spectacular. Its opening movement begins a vivid depiction of the distillation of the four elements from primordial chaos by the simultaneous attack of every note in the D minor harmonic scale. The nine var-

ied ballet movements that follow may be less obviously novel in harmonic or orchestral terms, but they maintain an exuberant freshness of invention.

Especially memorable are the shifting phrase lengths of *Tambourin II*, the languorous canon of the *Sicilienne*, and the novel orchestration throughout. In Rebel's preface to the published edition of the piece, he wrote: "The Bass expresses the Earth by notes tied together, and which are played in jerks; the flutes, by lines moving up and down, imitate the murmur of running Water; Air is depicted by long-held notes followed by trills on the small flutes; finally, the violins, by means of lively and brilliant music, represent the activity of Fire." Rebel's version of chaos immediately calls to mind the more restrained representation later to be heard in Haydn's *The Creation*.

Notes by Scott L. Edwards

Scott L. Edwards is a PhD candidate in the music department at UC Berkeley.



The chamber orchestra **Les Violons du Roy** borrows its name from the renowned string orchestra of the court of the French kings. The group, which has a core membership of 15 players, was brought together in 1984 by artistic director Bernard Labadie and specializes in the vast repertoire of music for chamber orchestra, performed in the stylistic manner most appropriate to each era. Although the ensemble plays on modern instruments, its approach to the works of the baroque and classical periods has been strongly influenced by current understanding of performance practice in the 17th and early 18th centuries; in this repertoire Les Violons du Roy uses baroque bows and bowing technique. The orchestra has been widely acclaimed for the exceptional energy, brilliance and vitality of its performances.

A pillar of the music scene in Québec City, and well-known throughout Canada for its concerts and its recordings for the French and English networks of the CBC, Les Violons du Roy has made over 100 concert appearances in Austria, Belgium, Canada, Ecuador, England,

France, Germany, Mexico, Morocco, Norway, Spain and the United States since 1988. Its performances of Handel's *Messiah*, regularly presented in Québec City, Montréal, Ottawa and Toronto always create a critical and public sensation. The group also performed Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in April 2000 and *St. John Passion* in April 2004, in Québec City, Montréal and Toronto. After a first visit in 1997, Les Violons du Roy played at Lincoln Center in March 2001 as part of their North American tour with American counter-tenor David Daniels, and also in September 2001 presenting Mozart's Requiem and Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass* in the same setting; they returned in August 2004 during the Mostly Mozart Festival. Tours of the United States and Europe are scheduled through 2007, including a return to the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and appearances the Rheingau and Schleswig-Holstein festivals.

From 1992 to 2003, Les Violons du Roy made 12 recordings for the Dorian label. Seven of them (*Simphonies des noëls*, *Stabat Mater*, *Music of Bach's Sons*, Vivaldi's concerti

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for strings, Handel's *Apollo e Dafne*, Bach's *The Art of Fugue* and Mozart's Requiem) have been nominated for Juno Awards, and two (*Apollo e Dafne* and Mozart's Requiem) won the Juno for Best Classical Album, Choral or Vocal Performance. Their latest CD, featuring Bach's Cantata No. 82 and setting of Psalm 51, was released in 2004 by ATMA Classique. Future recordings are planned with Virgin Classics.

Les Violons du Roy won the 2003–2004 Prix Opus, awarded by Le Conseil québécois de la musique for the Concert of the Year in Québec City (Handel's *Alcina*).



Conductor **Bernard Labadie** was born in Québec City and completed most of his musical training there. He has become a remarkable ambassador for his native city through the work of two groups, the chamber orchestra Les Violons du Roy and the chamber choir La Chapelle de Québec, which he founded respectively in 1984 and 1985. He conducts them in regular concert seasons in Québec City and Montréal, and on tour throughout Canada, the United States and Europe in prestigious venues such as the Barbican Centre in London, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Massey Hall

in Toronto and Lincoln Center, as well as the Salzburg, Schleswig-Holstein and Rheingau festivals. Mr. Labadie features regularly in radio and television broadcasts on Radio-Canada and has released 12 CDs on the Dorian label, two of which have won Juno Awards. He now records for Virgin Classics and ATMA Classique.

In May 2003, Mr. Labadie left L'Opéra de Québec, where he had been Artistic Director since July 1994, to take up a new position at L'Opéra de Montréal, where he was appointed in April 2002. During the 2004–2005 season, he conducted Handel's *Agrippina* and Bizet's *Carmen*.

As a guest conductor, Mr. Labadie has directed all of the major symphony orchestras in Canada, and his career in the United States has developed considerably since his debut appearance with the Minnesota Orchestra in 1999. He has been a guest conductor with the Los Angeles, Detroit, St. Louis, Seattle, Indianapolis, Utah and Oregon orchestras, the New World Symphony in Miami, the St. Paul and Los Angeles chamber orchestras, the Oregon Bach Festival orchestra and the orchestra of the Mostly Mozart Festival in New York. In 2005 and 2006, he will conduct the San Francisco, Atlanta, Columbus and New Jersey orchestras for the first time.

Mr. Labadie has also conducted opera productions at the Glimmerglass Opera (Handel's *Orlando*) and the Mostly Mozart Festival in New York (*Così fan tutte*). In summer 2005, he appeared for the first time at the Santa Fe Opera, conducting Susan Graham in Mozart's *Lucio Silla*. As a recognized specialist in baroque and classical music, he has also conducted early music groups such as the Philharmonia Baroque (San Francisco), the Handel and Haydn Society (Boston), the New York Collegium and Chicago Baroque.

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Mezzo-soprano **Magdalena Kožená** was born in Brno, studied at the Brno Conservatoire and continued her studies with Eva Blahová at the College of Performing Arts of Bratislava, graduating in 1995. She was awarded several major prizes in both the Czech Republic and internationally (culminating in the Sixth International Mozart Competition in Salzburg in 1995). In 1996–1997, she was a member of the Vienna Volksoper and, in 1998, she sang Paride in Gluck's *Paride ed Elena* in her debut at the Drottningholm Festival.

Ms. Kožená has established herself as a major concert and recital artist. Her recitals have taken her to London, the Schubertiade Schwarzenberg, Brussels, Paris, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Munich, Prague, Tokyo, Yokohama and Sapporo. Last season, she appeared in recital at Carnegie Hall and in San Francisco, London, Brussels, Lisbon, Vienna, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Hamburg and Prague.

Her operatic engagements have included notable debuts: at the Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, in the title role of Gluck's *Orphée* with John Eliot Gardiner; at the Vienna Festival as Nerone (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*) with Minkowski; at the Edinburgh Festival as Sesto (*La clemenza di Tito*); at the Leipzig Opera as Mélisande (*Pelléas et Mélisande*) with

Minkowski; at the Aix-en-Provence Festival as Cherubino (*Le nozze di Figaro*); at the Netherlands Opera as Sesto (*Giulio Cesare*); and at the Salzburg Festival as Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*) under Nikolaus Harnoncourt. She sang the centenary performance of *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Opéra-Comique, Paris, under Minkowski and most recently appeared with Minkowski as Cleopatra in *Giulio Cesare*.

Her recent engagements include: Idamantes (*Idomeneo*) at the Glyndebourne and Salzburg festivals with Simon Rattle; Cherubino at both the Bavarian State Opera and the Metropolitan Opera under James Levine; Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*) with Rattle at the Salzburg Easter Festival and in Berlin; and her return to the Metropolitan Opera as Varvara (*Kátja Kabanová*) and Dorabella under Levine. In the coming season, she will sing Zerlina with the Metropolitan Opera and Levine in Japan, and will return to the Salzburg Festival as Idamantes with Roger Norrington and to the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées as Mélisande with Bernard Haitink.

Ms. Kožená's recordings include Bach arias, Handel's Roman motets, Italian cantatas and *Messiah* with Marc Minkowski for DG/Archiv, and her first solo recital disc (Dvořák, Janáček and Martinů with Graham Johnson—Gramophone Solo Vocal Award, 2001) for Deutsche Grammophon, with whom she has signed an exclusive contract. Her most recent discs are recitals of arias of Mozart, Gluck and Mysliveček (with the Prague Philharmonia and Michel Swierczewski), of French arias with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and Minkowski, *Paride ed Elena* under Paul McCreech, a recital disc with Malcolm Martineau and an acclaimed disc of cantatas by members of the Bach family (*Lamento*) with Musica Antiqua Köln and Reinhard Goebel. She is the 2004 Gramophone Awards Artist of the Year.

In 2003, Ms. Kožená was awarded the title of Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French government.