

Flying the Flag: L'amour
Thursday 9 October 2014
7pm
Queen Elizabeth Hall

Violin 1

Matthew Truscott
Margaret Faultless
Rodolfo Richter
Roy Mowatt
Claire Sansom
Joanna Lawrence

Violin 2

Alison Bury
Claire Holden
Debbie Diamond
Susan Carpenter-Jacobs
Catherine Ford
Henrietta Wayne

Violas

Jane Rogers
Annette Isserlis
Martin Kelly
Kate Heller

Cellos

Jonathan Rees
Catherine Rimer
Helen Verney
Jennifer Morsches
Anna Holmes
Poppy Walshaw

Double Bass

Chi-chi Nwanoku MBE

Flutes

Lisa Beznosiuk
Neil McLaren
Eva Caballero
Marta Goncalves

Oboes

Gail Hennessy
Richard Earle

Bassoons

Andrew Watts
Sally Jackson
Rebecca Hammond
Zoe Shevlin

Horns

Ursula Paludan Monberg
Martin Lawrence

Percussion

Serge Vuille

Harpsichord

Robert Howarth

Dancers

Annabelle Blanc
Ricardo Barros
Olivier Collin
Laurent Crespon
Sarasa Matsumoto
Lubomir Roglev
Gaudrun Skamletz

Rameau *Pigmalion* (1754)

Interval

Rameau *Anacréon*

Jonathan Williams conductor
Edith Lalonger choreographer

Pigmalion:

Daniel Auchincloss Pigmalion
Katherine Manley La Statue
Anna Dennis L'Amour
Susanna Hurrell Céphise

Anacréon:

Matthew Brook Anacréon
Anna Dennis Chloé
Agustin Prunell-Friend Batile

Choir of the Enlightenment
Les Plaisirs des Nations

Paula Kennedy surtitles

This concert will finish at approximately 9pm with an interval of 20 minutes

OAE Extras at 5.45pm, free admission
Queen Elizabeth Auditorium

Lisa Beznosiuk, OAE Principal Flute, and Chi-chi Nwanoku MBE, Principal Double Bass introduce the 2014-2015 season which they have curated.

Synopsis

Pigmalion

Scene I

Cursed by Amour (Cupid), Pigmalion endures a hopeless love for the statue he has created. Alone in his workshop, he bemoans his cruel fate, marveling at the beauty he himself fashioned and gazing at the figure in wonder and useless desire.

Scene II

Céphise enters. Concern for her lover's obsession with the statue quickly turns to disbelief when, instead of apologizing, he blames the gods for his pitiable state. Convinced that he must be concealing another woman, Céphise realises that she has lost him. When he reveals that the object of his love is indeed the statue, she leaves, distraught, calling on the gods to punish him.

Scene III

Even as Céphise departs, Pigmalion returns to the statue. Broken, he prays to Venus: may she release him from the love of the statue, the creation of which was motivated by Amour himself. Suddenly, wondrous sounds and light fill the air. Unseen, Amour brings the statue to life. Filled with love for Pigmalion, the statue devotes herself to her creator.

Scene IV

Amour descends and proclaims that Pigmalion's beautiful creation has been brought to life as an eternal reward for his devotion and artistic talents. Commanded to complete the statue's instruction, the three Graces show her how to dance.

Scene V

Pigmalion's neighbours arrive and celebrate the couple's new-found happiness with dance and song.

INTERVAL

Synopsis

Anacréon

Scene I

The aged poet Anacréon is alone in his gardens, designed for amorous intrigue and delight, enjoying the cool shades and breezes scented with fragrant myrtle blossom. He has organised a celebration for later that day, the reasons for which he has kept secret, and at which he has asked two of his young disciples, Batile and Chloé, to perform some of his poetry. He is amused by the two youngsters' growing affection for each other and reflects with pleasure on the discreet role he has played in nurturing their love. To help their love blossom openly would be his life's crowning achievement.

Scene II

Chloé has been enjoying practising the verse Anacréon has written for her and arrives hoping to discover both the inspiration behind such beautiful poetry and the reasons for the forthcoming *fête*. Still keeping his intentions hidden, Anacréon avoids answering and instead flatters and teases Chloé, saying that he has been inspired by Amour himself. Misunderstanding, Chloé believes that Anacréon has fallen in love – who is the lucky girl who had inspired such romantic and amorous feelings? Enjoying her charming confusion, he replies that it is she who has been chosen by Amour and the celebrations are, in fact, to be her wedding...!

Scene III

Alone, and realising only now that she has feelings and hopes for a future with Batile, Chloé appeals to Amour to save her.

Scene IV

Batile arrives, so engrossed in learning Anacréon's poem that he is unaware of Chloé's distress. He performs it to Chloé who, on hearing its sentiments of love, is reduced to tears. Fearing that they are to be separated forever, she tells a disbelieving Batile of Anacréon's plans; the poem she is to sing only seems to confirm Anacréon's intentions and her fears. Inspired by the verses and by their imminent separation, Chloé tells Batile for the first time of her love for him. Before he can reply, they are interrupted by the arrival of the wedding guests and the celebrations begin.

Scene V

Anacréon and his followers sing of the benefits of a life of pleasure and the importance of making the most of every opportunity for love and happiness. He calls on Chloé to perform her verse. Fearful and embarrassed, the two lovers begin to try to explain that their friendship has developed into something much greater. At last, Anacréon reveals that he has been teasing them; his purpose has been to make the friends realise and admit their love for each other and, by coming between them, to test the strength of their feelings. Overjoyed, the young lovers thank Anacréon and, for the first time, openly declare their love for each other. By bringing them happiness, he has shown his love for them.

Scene VI

The wedding celebrations begin with dancing and with Chloé's songs of the pleasures of being in love. The merriment concludes with a chorus in praise of Bacchus and Amour, the gods of wine and love; may they reign for ever!

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Pigmalion

Acte-de-ballet, 1748

Livret by Ballot de Sovot, after 'La Sculpture' from *Le Triomphe des arts* (1700) by Houdar de la Motte (1672-1731)

Anacréon

Acte-de-ballet, 1754

Livret by Louis de Cahusac (1706-1759)

**Words indicated by an asterisk are explained on page 42*

Pigmalion (1748)

While the majority of his operas are multi-act works, *Pigmalion* is the first in a small body of one-act operas (or *actes de ballet*) Rameau composed around 1750. It was commissioned by Berger, the director of the Paris Opera, who five years earlier had hit on the idea of building an evening's entertainment around a collection of separate acts by various composers, rather than on one entire work by a single composer. In many ways, this was a logical development of the *opéra-ballet*, the kind of composite opera made up of three or four self-contained acts linked by a common theme. Such constituent acts, or *entrées*, could be extracted and combined with others to form new operas, or 'fragments'; an act whose popularity seemed to be on the wane could be easily replaced, and a return to better ticket sales ensured.

So it was that in 1748 Rameau and his librettist, Ballot de Sovot, provided a new act to replace Mondonville's flagging *Titon et l'Aurore*. They turned to the well-known tale of the sculptor who, having rejected real women, falls in love with an idealised and unattainable woman in statue form. Rather than writing a brand new libretto though, they drew on 'La Sculpture', an *entrée* from Houdar de la Motte's *Le Triomphe des arts* of 1700, itself based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, that rich source of many a plot for the stage: *Dido and Aeneas* and *Orpheus and Eurydice* to name but two.

Despite the haste in which it was written ('in less than a week' according to one report), *Pigmalion* quickly became one of the most performed of Rameau's operas, loved by public and *philosophes* alike. D'Alembert recognised the progressive nature of the overture, whose quickly-repeating notes

portray the sculptor at work; the truth and nobility of the scene for *Pigmalion* and *Céphise* captivated the Baron von Grimm. Rameau himself considered 'L'Amour triomphe' to be one of his finest creations; with 'Fatal Amour' and 'Règne Amour', the score certainly boasts three of Rameau's finest tenor airs.

Just as remarkable is the integration of narrative and choreography. The Graces' step-by-step instruction of the Statue gives rise to an extraordinary sequence – part dance, part mime – in which twelve dances are performed, fragmented and hesitant at first, and then with increasing confidence. What's more, the symbolic ordering of the dances ensures that Statue's journey into adulthood and society is encoded more deeply: first are four dances associated with young people: a sarabande and a menuet, flanked by gavottes (one graceful and one lively). Next are two dances of the nobility (the chaconne and loure), and finally three of the people (passepiéd, rigaudon and tambourin), with an extra sarabande added for the Statue to express her love for *Pigmalion*.

This way of adding deeper significance goes further still. For such philosophers as Diderot and Condillac, the Statue represents a blank slate, a tabula rasa. Here the 'senseless' being is brought to life by a series of marvellous chords whose notes are spaced according to the harmonic series, a naturally-occurring pattern of pitches which Rameau held to be the source of all harmony and melody, of music itself. New text by Rameau inserted into La Motte's libretto here ('D'où naissent ces accords?') draws attention to the significance of this moment and of the three main chordal building blocks with which this music is harmonised (on the tonic, subdominant and

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dominant). It's remarkable too that a character on stage hears the music that the audience hears.

On awakening, the Statue's first utterances extend Condillac's ideas further as she begins to acquire senses and feelings, one by one: 'Que vois-je? Où suis-je? Et qu'est-ce que que je pense?'. Thus this wonderful scene transcends any earlier setting to become music *about* music, music *about* philosophy.

Lasting just 45 minutes, and encapsulating so much character, *Pigmalion* is one of Rameau's most perfect creations. That it was composed during his busiest years – the years of *Platée*, *Le temple de la gloire*, *Zaïs*, *Les surprises de l'Amour*, *Naïs* and *Zoroastre* (1745–9) – is a remarkable testament to the 67-year-old composer at the height of his powers.

INTERVAL

Anacréon (1754)

Perhaps the first thing to note is that Rameau wrote two entirely different one-act operas called *Anacréon*. Being performed tonight is the earlier of the two, that with a libretto by Louis de Cahusac first heard in 1754. The second, already widely performed and recorded, and with a libretto by Gentil-Bernard, dates from 1757.

Like *Pigmalion*, *Anacréon* has come down to us as a miniature, an *acte de ballet*. However, it now seems probable that it, and another act 'La Naissance d'Osiris', were originally part of a new opera by Rameau and Cahusac entitled *Les beaux jours de l'Amour*. The many layers of revision found in the autograph score of a third act, 'Nelée et Mirthis', show that the project came into difficulty and work ceased. Rather than leave the two completed *entrées* languishing on a shelf, however, the ever-resourceful Rameau sought an opportunity to perform the two works separately. Such a chance soon arose – *Anacréon* performed at the beautiful château of Fontainebleau in October 1754.

In keeping his friends close and his enemies closer, Louis XV ensured that his several thousand courtiers were kept compliant with never-ending amusements and lavish official entertainments of the highest quality. The festival of music and drama which took place during the six-week *voyage* of 1754 was a particularly remarkable one, with the newly-written *Anacréon* given twice alongside favourites by Lully, Corneille, Voltaire, Marivaux and Rameau himself. Despite positive responses, *Anacréon* was not heard again until a Paris Opera production was given – in a much-revised form – in 1766, two years after Rameau's death. After another short run in 1771, it suffered the fate of Rameau's entire output, disappearing into obscurity. Only with the renewed interest in Baroque and Classical music in the 1890s was *Anacréon* rediscovered with an abridged version being conducted in 1909 by none other than Debussy. Other performances have been given since but it was not until November 2012, and the OAE's concert in Oxford, that this charming work received its first

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complete performance in modern times. For the first time since 1771, *Anacréon* will be performed this evening with eighteenth-century dance.

The score of *Anacréon* has ample evidence of the septuagenarian Rameau's undiminished creativity. In it we find many of Rameau's fingerprints: ravishing airs for flute and soprano, dances which play an integral part of the narrative, and rousing Bacchanalian choruses. Rameau's extraordinary wind writing features too, perhaps asking even more of his players than usual, able as he was to employ only the finest musicians for performances before the king. The two horn players of the Duc de Villeroy's retinue, in particular, must have been highly accomplished. What we also witness is Rameau seeking to keep his music in tune with the very latest musical imports, most interestingly here from Germany. The rising unison phrase in the very first five bars and the carefully controlled and thrilling crescendos, for example, are cutting-edge ideas drawn from the music of the Mannheim symphonists, Stamitz and Gossec, both of whom were working in Paris during the early 1750s.

The libretto, like that of *Pigmalion* and the three *entrées* of *Les fêtes d'Hébé*, celebrates the power of the arts, in this case, the poems of the pleasure-seeking Greek poet. Cahusac's libretto seeks to inhabit Anacréon's world by imitating his poetic style in the verses for Chloé and Batile (most overtly in 'Des Zéphyr' and 'Mille fleurs') and he infuses it with references to mythological personages to create a multi-layered environment. Numerous deities and their powers are alluded to: Flora (goddess of fertility and the season of spring), Hymen (god of marriage), Hebe (god of youth), Erigone (fertility) and the

ubiquitous Zephyr, god of the seductive west winds. At the head of this dynasty are Amour (Cupid or Eros) and Bacchus. Often depicted blindfolded, carrying his bow in one hand and a torch in the other, the interventions of Amour, the god of desire and erotic love, often have tragic consequences (as in *Dido and Aeneas*); here though his influence is much happier. The opera concludes with songs and dances in praise of Amour and Bacchus; Anacréon, Batile and Chloé, together with the satyr-like Égipans, the drunken sage Silène and the Bacchantes, all celebrate the many benefits of love and wine.

A plot without recourse to the usual life-or-death struggles, deities or spectacular theatrical effects is unusual, and may seem rather whimsical to the modern opera-goer: two friends are galvanised into admitting their love publicly only when their relationship is threatened (and when under the influence of Anacréon's heady poetry, cleverly imitated by Cahusac). All hangs on Chloé's inability to confront her mentor in scene 2, and the knot tightens until Anacréon himself provides the *dénouement* in scene 5. Nowadays, Batile and Chloé's deference is problematic; seen in the light of the hierarchal society found at court (or Anacréon's poetry academy) though, where etiquette and status were rigorously observed, this aspect on which the entire plot hinges becomes more credible.

As in several of Rameau operas (including *Pigmalion*), *Anacréon's* plot is structured around a narrative triangle: two lovers and plus one dominant character in whose hands rest everyone's happiness. This allowed Cahusac several options. The *dénouement* could be comic (with a jilted Anacréon humiliated at the altar), tragic (with Anacréon or Chloé and/or Batile committing suicide)

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or supernatural (with Amour descending from on high to resolve matters). However, as the audience knows from the start, it has never been Anacréon's intention to separate the lovers. No, what we have here is a fourth triangle motivated by sentiment and generosity, one found in Rameau's 'Turc généreux' from *Les Indes galantes* (and in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*) where the enlightened Pasha Osman releases a member of his harem to be with her lover. Batile and Chloé's marriage completes Anacréon's *ouvrage*.

Another controlling figure may have influence here too (though one behind the scenes rather than on stage) – the powerful courtier and king's mistress since 1745, Madame de Pompadour. As it became clear that Louis was losing interest in her, she attempted to influence him through newly-commissioned allegorical

sculpture, objets d'art, poetry, plays and several operas, all with the common theme of the relationship between love and friendship. Perhaps the libretto of *Anacréon* was intended as a thinly-disguised message to Louis that he should resume, and openly declare, his loving relationship with Pompadour, his truest friend?

A note of thanks

This evening's performance is part of the Rameau Project, a major collaboration between the University of Oxford, the OAE and scholars, musicians and dancers worldwide. Begun in 2012, the Rameau Project is playing a leading role in advancing our understanding of Rameau's music, particularly through the reappraisal of composer-specific approaches to the performance of his operas. Most significant in this process is the reintroduction of the beautiful choreography which plays such an important role in Rameau's spectacular stage works. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank those whose generosity and kindness has enabled Les Plaisirs des Nations to be part of this evening's performances: Arts Council England, Early Dance Circle, David Laing Trust, Helen Hamlyn Trust, Matthiesen Foundation, Sheila Forbes, Paul Salmon and Helen Swift. I would also like to thank Robert and Laura Cory, James Flynn QC, Andrew and Cindy Peck and Mark, Rosamund, Benedict & Emily Williams. Funding permitting, the Rameau Project will continue next year with performances of *Les fêtes d'Hébé*.

Jonathan Williams

Director of the Rameau Project