

## André Campra (1660-1744)

Suite from *La Carnaval de Venise*

- I Overture
- II Passepieds 1&2
- III La Vénitienne
- IV La Vilanelle
- V 2ième Air pour les Suivants de Fortune
- VI Marche des Gondoliers
- VII Orfeo Sinfonia
- VIII Airs des esprits
- IX Chaconne
- X Forlan

André Campra was born in Aix-en-Provence in the south of France, where he received his earliest musical instruction as a choirboy. When he took church music positions in Arles and Toulouse as an adult, it looked as though Campra's career would remain within ecclesiastical confines.

Thankfully for the sake of music theatre in France, that proved not to be the case. While working as Director of Music at Notre Dame in Paris, Campra was writing music theatre works under various pseudonyms, even borrowing his younger brother's name. His employers at the cathedral would never have sanctioned Campra writing incidental music for the Comédie-Française and operas for the Académie Royale de Musique (the forerunner to the Paris Opera).

Campra noticed that these were opportune times for opera in France, which was in dire need of new blood. The nation's totemic musical figure Jean-Baptiste Lully had died in 1687, but his legacy was creaking on; there was no obvious innovating successor around to move the French tradition of operatic 'tragédie lyriques' forward.

Step forward Campra, outstandingly talented while benefitting from his outsider status as both a southerner and a church musician. With *L'Europe galante* (1697) and *Le Carnaval de Venise* (1699), Campra administered a shot in the arm to music theatre in France. He became the most popular and significant composer of French opera of the first three decades of the 1700s and a vital link between Lully and Rameau. The year after *La Carnaval*, Campra resigned his position at Notre Dame to focus on his work in the theatre.

Campra's musical style was built on firm foundations: the splendor of the Louis XV years, the eloquence of Lalande and Lully and, vitally, the new sounds coming out of Italy courtesy of Cavalli, Corelli and Scarlatti. Many of his twenty-something theatre works proved wildly successful, as notable for their ferocious dramatic impetus as for the melodic bravura he tailored to the finest voices of the Académie Royale.

Perhaps more than any other work, *Le Carnaval de Venise* illustrates Campra's originality and cosmopolitanism - his linking of the Grand Siècle of Louis XIV to the new, enlightened, cosmopolitan world of European music in the 1700s.

'European' in this case, denotes 'Italian'. It was a fashion of the Académie Royale to lead audiences across borders, and particularly across the Alps. A taste for opera in the Italian style had seen 'dacapo' arias (a

solo song in which repeated music surrounds a contrasting middle section) from Italy inserted into various operas including those by Lully. Campra had even included one in his own *L'Europe galante*.

Meanwhile, a Frenchman named Jacques Chassebras had been sending dispatches home from Venice, recounting the various splendors of the Venetian Carnival and its opera season. The carnival, he wrote in 1683 in his publication *Mercure Galant*, is 'an assemblage of all sorts of entertainments, with comedies, opera, gambling, balls, feasts, bull races, and bullfighting, rope dancers, puppets, boatmen and jesters.'

This was the context for the success of Campra's *Le Carnaval de Venise*, a celebration of the event comprising a festive play-within-a-play, in which Isabelle and Léandre (stock characters from popular French literature who many believed had been absent from the main stages for too long) seek refuge from their detractors in a theatre which is itself preparing to stage an Italian opera. The work represented the only foray into opera from librettist François Regnard, who had written several plays for the Comédie-Italienne in Paris.

This suite of orchestral highlights gives a flavor of the piece (minus voices), right from the opening overture, grand and florid in the French style. Two 'Passepieds' follow, a three-time dance heard first on nimble strings and then on sprightly winds and percussion. Venetian and Neapolitan dances follow, before a spacious air 'for the followers of fortune' and a fulsome two-step march for gondoliers complete with drums and high winds.

Thereafter we enter the territory of the play-within-a-play, a telling of the story of Orpheus's descent into the underworld, beginning with a Sinfonia (overture) whose urgent disposition is interrupted by a mourning slow section. An air for the spirits plunges the music into minor key purgatory, before a Chaconne - doleful variations over a looping bass line - and a Forlan, a dance form popular in Venice with a relaxed feel despite its six beats to the bar. This example was originally danced by a solo female.

### **François Francoeur (1698-1787)**

Suite from *Symphonies pour le Festin Royal du Comte d'Artois*

I Air des furies

II Air Grave

III Marche des Américains

IV Air Pour la Vieillesse

V Chaconne

François Francoeur's father Joseph was a member of the elite string ensemble Les Violins de Roi, probably the best instrumental ensemble on earth at the time. Thus Francoeur senior was in a good position to train his son, who by the age of 12 had earned himself a position with the orchestra of the Académie Royale de Musique, in which capacity he may well have come into contact with Campra.

More importantly, in that ensemble Francoeur junior met François Rebel, eldest son of Jean-Féry Rebel and himself a gifted violinist. When the two travelled to Prague to attend the Coronation of Emperor Charles VI, they forged a professional partnership and personal friendship that would last 49 years and prove career defining for both men.

Francoeur's career was also shaped by the reign of Louis XV. In 1727 he left the orchestra of the Académie Royale to become Composer of the King's Chamber, joining his father and brother in Les

Violins de Roi in 1730 and becoming Superintendent of the Royal Music in 1744. In 1757, Francoeur embarked upon a decade-long stewardship of the Paris Opera in partnership with Rebel. Both men, during that time, worked hard to promote the works of Jean-Philippe Rameau but also had to contend with the factional dispute between supporters of Italian and French opera known as the Querelle des Bouffons (perhaps, in part, a legacy of Campra's pushing Italian ideals).

As a young composer Francoeur published sets of violin sonatas and wrote copious *tragédies*, often in collaboration with Rebel. Though he effectively stopped composing in 1756 as his administrative burdens grew, he would still be called upon to organize musical events and performances.

That was the case in 1773, when the French court celebrated the marriage of the Count of Artois to Thérèse of Savoy. The 16-year-old Count was grandson of Louis XV and brother of Louis XVI. For the five years until the revolution of 1830, he would sit on the French throne as Charles X.

In his capacity as Superintendent of the Royal Music, Francoeur was required to dish-up a feast of music to accompany the general festivities that followed the wedding ceremony. Having not written any music of his own for two decades, Francoeur assembled a menu of assorted instrumental sinfonias and dances drawn from his own operas - many of them from the catalogue of successful works he and Rebel had written between 1726 and 1747 - and those of others including Rameau. There were precedents in the German trend for 'tafelmusik' ('table music', to accompany dining) and Richard De Lalande's Symphonies for the King's Suppers.

Much of the music used for the 1773 event is found in two collections still lying in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France: 'French Concert, arranged by Mr Francoeur, Superintendent of the King's Music' and 'Collection of Different Airs of Symphonies of Mr Farancoeur'. All the music we hear tonight was drawn from the operas Francoeur composed himself or with Rebel, but the final 'Chaconne' is identified by Nicholas McGegan as coming from *Le Ballet de La Paix*, a theatre work the two composers co-authored in the late 1730s.

Francoeur's own music may not be as melodically captivating as Rameau's (he doubtless knew that), but it yielded to little in its grandiosity, poetry and capacity for entertainment. The processional-feeling 'Air de Furies' is a lofty enough substitute for an overture, and the 'Air Grave' leads neatly on from it, following its own stern opening with faster music buoyed by horns.

'Marche des Américains' keeps the horns in employ while shining the light on woodwinds in bushy-tailed music full of resolve. The more introverted 'Air Pour la Vieillesse' becomes steadily more vulnerable in its depiction of 'the elderly', before Francoeur proves what he can do with variation form in a splendid 'Chaconne' in which the music shifts in color and texture above a looping harmonic sequence.

## **Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1784)**

Suite from *Les surprises de l'Amour*

Act 1: *L'Enlèvement d'Adonis*

I Overture

II Gavottes tendres pour les Grâces

III Entrée de Nymphes, Chasseurs [et Chasseuses]

IV Rondeau tendre

V Ier et 2ième Airs  
VI Gavotte  
VII Déscente de Diane  
VIII Sommeil d'Endymion  
IX Air pour Diane  
X Sarabande  
XI Symphonie/Gavotte

Act II: *La Lyre Enchantée*

I Entrée des Sirenes  
II Gavottes  
III Loure  
IV Menuet  
V Tambourin  
VI Gavottes  
VII Mouvement de Chaconne  
VIII Contredanse

Campra, and even more Francoeur, prepared the ground for the pivotal figure of eighteenth-century French music theatre: Jean-Philippe Rameau. A contemporary of Bach and Handel, Rameau wrote a treatise on harmony before putting theory into practice, mostly via a string of remarkable keyboard works.

Like Campra, Rameau came to the Parisian theatre scene via church music and as something of an outsider. With a career built in the provinces, he only visited the capital to check on the publication of his treatise. But when Rameau's first opera was unveiled in Paris as the composer turned 50, the effect was seismic.

The year was 1733 and the work was *Hippolyte et Aricie*, its stark innovations dividing Parisian intellectuals but revitalizing the French opera stage. At the premiere, Campra reportedly commented that 'there is enough music in it to make 10 operas.' Some 12 more followed, in fact, most of them characterized by the colorful orchestration, striking melodies (often highlighted through that orchestration), richness of detail and harmony, exploitations of contrast and sure characterization inherent in the composer's highly inventive music. It was the harmonic innovations that proved, in particular, too much for some.

Rameau persevered, and was well into his stride by November 1748 when his opera-ballet commissioned by Madame de Pompadour *Les surprises de l'Amour* was first performed at the palace of Versailles outside Paris. As was customary, the work consisted of a prologue and two separate narrative 'acts': *La Lyre enchantée* and *L'Enlèvement d'Adonis* (Rameau added a third, *Anacreon*, in later version of the piece). The libretto by Pierre-Joseph Bernard was frequently unintelligible in its depiction of the constant scheming of Cupid and the gods, but as always Rameau transcended it, indulging his admiration for the Italian style most obviously in the direction of his star soprano, who was given florid arias ripe for vocal display.

Of the two acts, *L'Enlèvement d'Adonis* is more traditional, depicting a young hero possessed of a certain calm. Still, what we consider a characteristically French musical style is evolving in Rameau's hands. He asks for extremes of speed (the score's first instruction is 'as fast as possible') and huge variety of colors

in *La Lyre Enchantée*. Rameau's orchestra sounds warmer and more seductive than any that had gone before it. The composer even frees himself from the orthodoxy of a string group of five sections, dividing his instruments more freely, asking string players in *La Lyre* to pluck their strings and negotiate three-part chords - the latter, perhaps, in evocation of the magic lyre itself.

The mostly ballet movements we hear today would have felt extraordinarily modern at the time and to some extent still do: full of momentum and intensity, sometimes not even deigning to repeat musical material (as would have been expected) before lunging into the next number. In *Adonis*, Rameau loses no opportunity to reflect the hunters with his braying horns in 'Entrée de Nymphes [et Chasseuses]', while the serenity and purity of 'Sommeil d'Endymion' stands in direct contrast. Time can appear to stand still in the 'Sarabande', even as Rameau's first and second 'airs' are resolutely on the front foot.

*La Lyre* deepens character and contrast still further with its guarded 'Gavotte' and imposing 'Loure' launching with thrashing chords (the title suggests a slow dance originating in Normandy). We hear a stomping 'Tambourin', and elegant and brief chaconne and a frolicking 'Contredanse' to finish.

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