

OPERA ATELIER

timeless



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Jean-Baptiste Lully

Armide

April 14 – 21, 2012

Study Guide

Making of an Opera

March 5-9, 2012

www.operaatelier.com

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About Opera Atelier

Opera Atelier holds a unique place in the North American theatre community, producing opera, ballet and drama from the 17th and 18th centuries. These productions draw upon the aesthetics and ideals of the period, featuring soloists of international acclaim, period ballet, original instruments, elaborate stage decor, exquisite costumes and an imaginative energy that sets Opera Atelier apart. Opera Atelier is not in the business of “reconstruction” - rather, each production is a new creative effort and takes its own place in history. We strive to create productions that would have been recognized and respected in their own time while providing a thrilling theatrical experience for modern audiences.

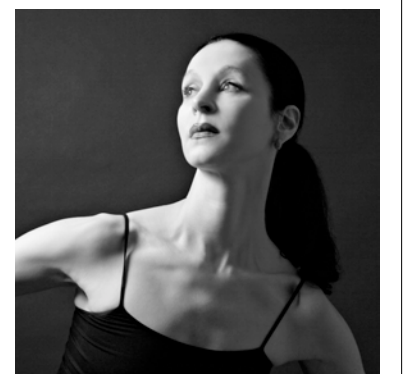
Founded by Marshall Pynkoski and Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg in 1985, Opera Atelier has been acclaimed throughout Canada, in Houston, Cleveland, New York, Stuttgart, Halle, Bremen, London (BBC Proms), Paris, Montreux, Citta di Castello, Singapore, throughout Japan and, most recently, in Seoul, Korea. We collaborate with some of early music’s most distinguished artists including Andrew Parrott, Trevor Pinnock, Hervé Niquet, Marc Minkowski and many others. Opera Atelier’s 2000 production of Lully’s *Persée* (performed for the first time since the 18th century) was hailed by William Littler of The Toronto Star as “the operatic event of the year, a triumph for director Marshall Pynkoski, choreographer Jeannette Zingg, their design team and their cast....”

Mr. Pynkoski and Ms. Lajeunesse Zingg also direct the School of Atelier Ballet (SAB) which operates under the umbrella of Opera Atelier. Graduates of the SAB are performing professionally in companies throughout North America and Europe, including the National Ballet of Canada and Opera Atelier.

Opera Atelier’s commitment to education extends to our Making of an Opera Program, which has introduced thousands of children to all aspects of production and performance. Opera Atelier has received four Lieutenant-Governor Awards for Excellence in Arts Management.



Marshall Pynkoski



Jeannette Lajeunesse
Zingg

Baroque Opera Explained

Baroque opera has its beginnings in the late Renaissance in Italy. It was originally conceived as an attempt to revive ancient Greek drama. Although no classical Greek music survived, Renaissance scholars were aware that Greek drama included declamation, and choral chanting. Consequently, early attempts at reviving this art form included these elements in addition to stories based on Classical themes and mythology.

As absolute monarchs throughout Europe identified themselves more and more strongly with Greek heroes and myth-makers, they appropriated these stories and frequently used them as a means of personal promotion.

By the 17th century, opera had become a highly respected and codified art form in its own right. The gorgeous and elaborate productions of the 17th and 18th centuries were expensive to mount and required exceptionally well-trained singers, instrumentalists, dancers, machinists and scenic artists.

The greatest composers of the world lent their talents to developing this art form which came to be seen as one of the sublime examples of human creativity. Opera encompasses all of the arts, and enjoyed unparalleled popularity from its conception right up to today.

Opera is the stylish, dazzling, often beautiful, often sad, warm-hearted, funny, serious and even sexy form of music that has enriched our lives for hundreds of years. Originally an art form for a privileged few, opera has evolved into an international multi-media crowd pleaser.

The word “opera” is Italian and comes from the plural for the word “opus” which means work.

Opera combines the best of all worlds: spectacular singing, rich orchestral sounds, drama, dance, beautiful sets, lavish costumes, elaborate lighting and special effects. These artistic qualities combine to make opera one of the most powerful and comprehensive art forms.

The word “Baroque” was originally used as an insult to describe art or music which was overly extravagant, even slightly bizarre. It comes from the Portuguese word *barroco*, a misshapen pearl. In the 20th century it has become the respectable name for music from about 1600, when opera was born in Italy, until about 1750, the year of Johann Sebastian Bach’s death.

Armide Overview

Composed by Jean-Baptiste Lully in 1686, French libretto written by Philippe Quinault.

Armide was first performed at *Théâtre du Palais-Royal*, Paris, on February 15, 1686. It was one of their later works, written in Lully and Quinault's own *tragédie en musique/tragédie lyrique* style, which combined existing French stage traditions with Italian operatic elements. The libretto is based on *La Gerusalemme liberata* by Torquato Tasso, an Italian epic poem about the First Crusade's battle to take Jerusalem. In the opera, the invincible Christian knight Renaud and the Muslim warrior princess Armide play out their doomed love affair against a backdrop of hopeless obsession, jealousy and magic.

Opera Atelier's production of *Armide* will run April 14 – April 21, 2012, after which it will travel to the Royal Opera House of Versailles in France, and then on to The Glimmerglass Festival in up-state New York.

The Characters and Voice Types in *Armide*

Armide, magical warrior princess	Soprano
Hidraot, magician, King of Damascus, Armide's uncle	Bass
Phénice, Armide's lady in waiting	Soprano
Sidonie, Armide's lady in waiting	Soprano
Aronte, guard	Bass
Renaud, Christian knight	Tenor
Artémidor, a knight	Bass-Baritone
Ubalde, a knight	Bass-Baritone
Danish Knight	Tenor
La Haine, the manifestation of hatred	Bass
L'Amour, the manifestation of love	<i>silent</i>
Une Naïade (Water Nymph), Shepherdess	Soprano
Demon as Lucinde, Danish knight's beloved	Soprano
Demon as Melisse, Ubalde's beloved	Soprano

Armide Synopsis

Synopsis

Lully's *Armide* is a psychological drama. The action primarily concerns the warrior princess Armide and the Christian Knight Renaud. Despite her virginity Armide's greatest power lies in her sexual allure. Her mere presence eradicates the aggressive instinct in men and makes them capable of feeling only desire. Armide is personally protected by the fact that she herself has never experienced desire. Renaud also draws his strength from an almost mystic virginity which renders him impervious to Armide's allure.

ACT I

The action takes place in Damascus, in a public square decorated to celebrate Armide and her victory over the Crusaders whom she has taken captive. Armide's ladies in waiting (Phénice and Sidonie) express surprise at her agitation. Armide is obsessed by the fact she has been unable to subdue Renaud and she recounts a recurring dream in which she is annihilated by him.

Armide's uncle, the Sorcerer Hidraot encourages his niece to secure the Kingdom of Damascus by choosing a husband. Armide prevaricates by declaring she will only consider marriage to a warrior capable of destroying Renaud.

The people of Damascus celebrate Armide's triumph with an elaborate ballet and chorus only to be interrupted by the entrance of the Muslim warrior, Aronte. Mortally wounded, he informs the people of Damascus that the captive Knights have been miraculously rescued by Renaud. Armide and Hidraot swear vengeance.

ACT II

In the Second Act, we discover Renaud in the desert where he has separated himself from his fellow warriors. Artémidore (one of the Knights rescued by Renaud) appears and warns Renaud that he is near Armide's territory. Renaud assures Artémidore that his heart is safe from Armide's allure and sends him away.

Armide and Hidraot enter and with a magical spell transform the desert into a beautiful oasis meant to ravish Renaud's senses. Surrounded by trees, flowers, bird song and perfume, Renaud is lulled into a magical sleep. Demons disguised as beautiful young men and women appear and sensualize him in order to render him helpless when Armide makes her appearance.

Armide enters, dagger in hand, and prepares to kill the sleeping Renaud. However, when she sees him for the first time she succumbs to her own spell and it is her senses that are ravished by the beautiful young Knight. Armide attempts to convince herself that rather than murdering him, her greatest triumph would be to take Renaud as a lover. Unable to admit her infatuation, she nevertheless conjures demons to fly him away to her palace.

ACT III

The action takes place in the desert, where Armide grapples with the realization that she has fallen in love with Renaud, while he is bound to her only by her magic spells. In desperation, Armide conjures the spirit of Hatred in an effort to exorcize Love from her heart. Hatred and his attendants perform a satanic liturgy in which Love (also represented by a character on stage) is tormented and humiliated. At the last moment Armide is unable to go through with the exorcism and attempts to banish Hatred. Furious at her treatment of him, Hatred proclaims that Armide will be humiliated and abandoned by Renaud. He warns her that although she will beg Hatred to return to her heart, he will never again answer her prayer. As in her dream of Act One, Armide is fated to forever love the man who annihilates her.

ACT IV

Two of Renaud's companions pass through the desert in an effort to find and rescue Renaud from Armide's powers. Armed with a magic scepter and mirror the Knights resist the temptations Armide sets in their paths and continue on their quest to discover the location of Armide's palace.

ACT V

Within the confines of Armide's enchanted palace we witness the opera's only love scene between Armide and Renaud. After mutual declarations of passion, Armide leaves Renaud in order to consult the Underworld about her predicament. Renaud is left to be entertained by a divertissement of Pleasures and Lovers until her return.

The Knights appear in Armide's absence and break her spell over Renaud. She returns as Renaud prepares to escape and implores him to stay or to take her with him as a captive. The call of duty overwhelms Renaud and he abandons Armide who in her despair, collapses unconscious. While she is unconscious, Renaud, overcome with grief reappears and explains that although the spell has been broken, he does indeed still love her.

Armide awakens, never having heard Renaud's declaration. The curse of the spirit of Hatred proves to be true. In an agony of torment Armide destroys the palace, the desert and everything within her grasp. The only thing she cannot destroy is her love for Renaud.

Baroque Acting and Gesture

By Marshall Pynkoski, Opera Atelier Co-Artistic Director & Armide Director

Over the past 25 years Opera Atelier has developed an extremely detailed and recognizable performance style based on the gestural acting/oratorical technique of the 17th and 18th centuries. Essays in classical oratory by Quintillian and Cicero provided a model for Baroque actors, as did postures and gesture taken from both classical and contemporary paintings and sculpture. Rhetorical gesture was designed to accompany individual words of text, rather than to display the pervading emotions. Like the text, gestures were coherently and gracefully linked to provoke the maximum response from the spectator. Ideally, the use of gesture assists the actor in eliciting an emotional response from the audience, while he maintains control of his technique – a necessity when dealing with the sheer density of text of most Baroque opera and drama. The Baroque actor is a storyteller. It is his job to make the audience feel what he describes. The Baroque actor strives to ensure that audience members are not voyeurs, rather they are participants in the emotional journey of each player.

The gestures for both rhetoric and opera fall into the following categories:

- Emphatic gestures – in which the actor enforces the important words by gesture;
- Imitative gestures – in which the actor imitates, for example, the gentleness of a scene he talks about with a gentle gesture;
- Affective or expressive gestures – in which the actor expresses a particular passion such as fear or grief with specific gestures.

Some of the gestures can be combined to form a complex gesture expressing two or more meanings at once. Each of them can be performed in such a way as merely to suggest its meaning rather than to make it explicit. Baroque gesture and rhetorical speech patterns prevailed on the European stage throughout the nineteenth century

Armide Director's Notes

By Marshall Pynkoski, Opera Atelier Co-Artistic Director & Armide Director

Armide examines the conflict between the Muslim and Christian worlds during the First Crusade of 1099 A.D. and relates that conflict in an utterly human story. Despite the exoticism and magic, the climax of the drama is startling in its raw emotionalism.

During the course of the opera, the iconic images of the Muslim Princess Armide and the Christian Knight Renaud transform into human beings with identical weaknesses, fears and foibles. It is the humanity with which both protagonists are depicted that makes the opera so astonishing. There are no victors in *Armide*. By the end of the opera we are left with two shattered lives and protagonists (Christian and Muslim) who will never again be able to view their traditional enemy in the same light.

Opera Atelier's Set Design

The proscenium stage that we know today was invented in the 17th century. Before this time theatrical events took place out of doors on movable carts and platforms or in the banqueting and reception halls of palaces and great homes. Opera as we know it was invented in this period as an entertainment for rich and powerful patrons wealthy enough to commission these spectacular and frequently allegorical dramas set to music. An increasing demand for these entertainments led to the creation of public theatres with seating arranged around a stage that very much resembled a picture in a frame. The scenic designer of these productions (who often worked as an architect, engineer and painter) treated the stage as his canvas and the carved and gilded proscenium as his frame.

Part of the challenge in designing the various locations specified in an opera was creating the illusion of depth on a frequently shallow stage. We need only to look at the painting of the period to discover the inspiration for theatrical designers of the day. Artists since the Renaissance had perfected the study of perspective drawing and painting. These principles were used by stage designers to create painted scenery that reduced in scale as it approached the back of the stage. This "forced perspective" was employed on painted backdrops, side panels that slid back and forth into the wings and borders that were raised or lowered from the ceiling. Using these elements the designer could create changeable scenes of pastoral landscapes, turbulent seas, cloudscapes (often people with gods and goddesses) or virtually any desired location. Wooden clockwork machinery operated by stagehands was concealed below or above the stage and moved the scenery and provided the means for many special effects; hand-cranked waves could churn a painted sea, chariots flew through the air on ropes, and demons and dragons ascended from hell through trap doors. All theatres at the time were lit with candles or oil lamps and it is not surprising that most eventually burnt to the ground. A famous and perfectly preserved example with original machines and scenery is the Drottningholm Court Theatre in Sweden.

Opera Atelier is a company devoted to the production of period inspired opera, ballet and drama. As part of a creative team, the set designer's task is to understand and visually interpret the style and technology of the Baroque stage. While never recreating historical designs, Opera Atelier produces original sets and costumes inspired by these early sources.

Having researched the conventions of the early stage, the designer must then study the storyline of the opera by reading the libretto and determining the changes of location from scene to scene. At this point he or she must consult with the director about an overall visual concept for the piece.

Ultimately, a good design is one that is both beautiful and functional. To ensure that it works in conjunction with the movements on stage required that the designer work closely with the director from the start. Drawings, painting, and scale models are employed to establish the mood of each scene and to determine entrances, exits, and special effects. Generally a complete miniature set is created in advance so that the designer, director, carpenters and scenic artists can consult on the practicality and cost of the design. The designer must work with a technical director who oversees the construction and installation of the set, a lighting designer who will help create the changing atmosphere on the stage and prop-makers who build furniture and objects handled by the singers or actors.

A Glossary of Opera Terms

Aria: Italian for ‘air’, an aria is the major vocal piece where one singer expresses feelings and showcases the voice. Called a “static” moment in the scene, an aria freezes the action of the plot to focus on the emotion or thought.

Duet: An aria composed for two. Two singers express their feelings to each other or to the audience.

Libretto: Italian for ‘little book,’ a libretto refers to the script of an opera, written by the librettist. There is much debate over which is written for which: libretto for the music, or vice versa!

Recitative: Speech-singing, where the singer semi-chants the words in rhythm of free speech. Recitative is used to further the plot (“kinetic”) or set up an aria and can be seen as a precursor to hip hop music and spoken word poetry.

Singspiel: A German term, a singspiel is a highly theatrical opera involving fantasy and has spoken dialogue between arias.

Chorus: A group of singers who perform the vital role of providing support to the principle singers. The chorus sets the scene and creates the mood for an opera, much like the way a Greek chorus furthers the plot and propels the action. It is composed of all voice ranges.

Voice Categories and Types

Bass: The lowest of the male voices.

Basso Buffo: Italian for “buffoon bass”, who plays comic roles.

Baritone: A middle-range male voice.

Castrati: Castrati flourished during the period 1650-1750 singing both male and female roles in the soprano range. Their popularity was due to the strength and flexibility of their voices.

Coloratura Soprano: Singer with the highest range of notes.

Contralto: The lowest range of the female voice, rich voice quality. Mezzo and Contralto singers are almost interchangeable, and for this reason we almost never hear of contraltos.

Countertenor: A male alto who trains his falsetto voice rather than the lower range. Countertenors specialize in parts originally written for castrati.

Haute Contre: The “high tenor” usually sings higher than the other tenor roles.

Helden Tenor: Literally a “heroic tenor” with a strong voice and great stamina.

Mezzo-Soprano: A middle-range female voice.

Soprano: Singer with a high range of notes. Lyric sopranos are light in quality while dramatic sopranos have a full rich tone.

Tenor: Has the highest range of notes of the male voices.

The Orchestra

Excerpts from Tafelmusik's study guide, *Go for Baroque* by Allison Mackay.

How is a Baroque orchestra different from a modern orchestra?

1. Opera Atelier's orchestra, Tafelmusik, plays on so-called "original instruments" - the instruments which the composers of Baroque music played themselves. Orchestral instruments have changed over the years to reflect changing tastes in sound production. Modern violins have to be loud enough to be heard in the back row of a large concert hall; the violin of Bach's time was usually played in a small church or the salon of a palace and the warm sound of gut strings (made from sheep intestines) was loud enough to fill the intimate space.
2. One of the most striking features of a Baroque orchestra is the continuous presence of the harpsichord. It doubles the line played by the cello and bass in the left hand and makes the orchestra sound louder by filling out the harmonies with chords. The harpsichord's distinctive sound is created by quills made from bird feathers which pluck the strings, making the bass line sound clearer and the rhythms more driving.
3. Baroque orchestras were usually directed by one of the players instead of a separate conductor (although at Opera Atelier, we have a conductor because there are soloists and choristers who need direction).

The Orchestra - A Baroque Innovation

In Renaissance instrumental ensemble music, each part was played by one musician. Baroque composers continued to compose solo and chamber music but they also experimented with creating a fuller sound by putting several performers on one part to form an orchestra.

Baroque composers began to compose more extended instrumental pieces than in earlier times and they created forms in which several movements could be grouped together. Sometimes these movements were in contrasting but related keys. Our modern system of major and minor keys is an invention of the Baroque period; Baroque composers were the first to think of their music as a series of chords built above a bass line, each having a relationship with the main note of the key.

Dance Terms

Corps de ballet: A group of dancers in a ballet company separate from soloists and principals.

Renaissance Dance: Renaissance dance was the first dance style to be recorded. The High Renaissance dates from approximately 1400 to 1600 although none of these periods can be pinned down to exact dates. Renaissance social dancing varied from lively group dances such as the Branle, to stately court dances such as the Pavane. Theatrical dances were often versions of social dances with complex patterns. The dances of the Commedia dell'Arte were very acrobatic in contrast to the court ballets.

Baroque Dance: The Baroque period 17th and 18th centuries developed both theatrical and court choreographic styles greatly due to the Academy of Dancing established during the 1660's at the behest of Louis XIV. Many Baroque dances have come down to us through dance notation. The vocabulary of steps is huge and far more virtuosic than in earlier periods.

Early Ballet: Early ballet began to evolve out of Baroque toward the end of the 18th century. It shares many aesthetic principles with the Baroque but is also an attempt to reflect Greek and Roman antiquity due to the discoveries at Pompeii and Herculaneum.

Romantic Ballet: Romantic ballet (approximately 1830 - 1860) was a revolutionary change in aesthetic with story ballets and a change from Greek myths to European fairy tales as subject matter.

Classical Ballet: Classical ballet came after the Romantic and is characterized by brilliant virtuosic technique, the short tutu, and the predominance of the ballerina.

Pas de deux: A dance for two.

Armide Choreographer's Notes

By Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg, Opera Atelier Co-Artistic Director & Armide choreographer

Armide (1686) represents the work of Lully and Quinault as a perfectly integrated form including music, drama, dancing and design. Opera Atelier's production is true to our mandate in that it is period-sensitive yet newly imagined. Lully, who was an excellent dancer himself, provides the choreographer with beautiful evocative music which is a great pleasure to work with.

The dancer's role in French Baroque opera is to act as a framework of movement and as a visualization of the music, enhancing the piece through grace, virtuosity and a stylish display of highly trained physiques, gorgeously costumed. Festive scenes with dances and choral singing alternate with dramatic scenes as when *Armide's* initial triumphant celebration is interrupted by the messenger bringing news that Renaud has released her prisoners. The dramatic situation created by this juxtaposition greatly enhances the emotional impact of the story as it unfolds.

The opening dances "March and Sarabandes for the People of Damascus" are created according to the "Noble Style" developed in the Royal Academy established by Louis XIV in 1661. This style is sophisticated and elegant, subtle and refined, and has been preserved in many pictures, manuals and in a form of dance notation. The courtiers at Versailles would have deeply appreciated this style as they were proficient dancers themselves. The inclusion of swordplay underlines the martial aspect of the scene. Once we enter *Armide's* magic world of lovely fairies and demons representing the pleasures of the senses, the style becomes more free with athletic jumps and gestures which distort the "noble" carriage. ``In the 17th century the dancers of the Commedia dell'Arte were very popular in France, with their acrobatic movements and characteristic poses. The crucial character of Love is portrayed by a dancer, with choreography that matches his wings as he floats lightly until the character of Hatred (a singer) appears at *Armide's* bidding to exorcise love from her heart. Where Love was accompanied by beautiful spirits, dancing lightly, Hatred has a retinue of leaping demons.

Lully chose the traditional final Passacaille to accompany *Armide's* visionary creatures' last entertainment for Renaud, and the dances are once again in a more formal style. A pair of happy lovers opens the Passacaille, followed by dancers representing Music, then Food and Wine, then Poetry, and finally Love. These characters attempt to seduce Renaud into staying forever in their kingdom of earthly delights. The charming idea of dancers carrying, or even wearing, literal symbols of the character which they depict was very popular in 17th century France and offers the present-day audience a delightful glimpse into the past.

A Convincing Fight!

By Jennifer Parr, Fight Director

What is stage fighting? It is exactly that, fighting for the stage; but what does that mean?

Perhaps we should start with what it is not. It is not fencing. Although a stage fight should look as though it is being made up before your eyes, it is, in reality, a very carefully choreographed set of movements similar to a dance. Stage fighting is sometimes referred to as 'combat mime' because fighters must work together to create an illusion of spontaneity, an illusion of danger for the audience while doing their best to protect each other from any real danger of injury.

In the 17th and 18th centuries the 'Science of Arms' or 'Art of Self Defense' was an inescapable part of the life of every man of the upper classes. Not only was the ability to handle a sword necessary for war but it was also fashionable. Duels were constantly fought throughout this period although they were against the law, and boys would be taught from a young age 'the art of elegantly dispatching a neighbour to the next world.' Some girls managed to share their brothers' lessons, or otherwise learned the skills necessary to protect their own honour; some even fought duels, but they were the exception not the rule.

When a stage fight is choreographed for an Opera Atelier production it draws on this wealth of historical material and then goes beyond the reality. A fight is always a 'spectacle', a display of virtuoso skill with the apparent chance of danger similar to a trapeze or tightrope act. At the same time a stage fight must also be something more than spectacle; it must tell the audience something important about the characters involved, and must advance, or give a new twist to, the story.

The process of creating a stage fight always begins with the libretto and music of the opera and with research into the historical period. The next step involves in-depth discussions between the director and fight director to determine the role of the fight in the director's overall vision of the opera, followed by discussions of set and costume design and casting. The fight director then prepares the choreography of the fight and teaches the performers (singers and/or dancers) working constantly with the director.

Opera Atelier stage fights have sometimes featured the use of broadsword and spear but usually focus on the rapier, either single rapier, or in combination with a second rapier, dagger, buckler, or cape – typical weapon combinations of the period. The first Opera Atelier production to feature stage fights was the gala performance of *The Loves of Mars and Venus* in 1990. Since then many more fights have been featured in productions ranging from Mozart's ever popular *Don Giovanni* and *The Marriage of Figaro*, to the exciting 'new Baroque' performances of Charpentier's *Medée*, Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* and Lully's *Persée* (on both stage and film).