



## L'ORFEO, Monteverdi

### Opera in 5 acts

Performance at: Teatro alla Scala, Milan  
 Date of performance: September 23rd 2009  
 Approximate running time: 2 hours & 10 minutes

Music: Claudio Monteverdi

Conductor: Rinaldo Alessandrini  
 Staging, Sets and Lights: Robert Wilson  
 Director's Collaborator: Giuseppe Frigeni  
 Costumes: Jacques Reynaud

Characters: Cast

Orpheus	Georg Nigl
Music, Eurydice	Roberta Invernizzi
Messenger, Hope	Sara Mingardo
First shepherd	Luca Dordolo
Second shepherd	Leonardo Cortellazzi
Third shepherd	Martin Oro
Charon	Luigi De Donato
Proserpine	Raffaella Milanese
Pluto	Giovanni Battista Parodi
Apollo	Furio Zanasi

In coproduction with the Opéra National de Paris

Known for its dramatic power and lively orchestration, Monteverdi's Baroque masterwork has obtained a position of supreme importance in the history of opera. This new production is staged and designed by Robert Wilson, who the New York Times has described as “a towering figure in the world of experimental theater, an explorer in the uses of time and space onstage”; conducted by Rinaldo Alessandrini, considered a can't miss in today's international early music scene, starring Georg Nigl in the title role, one of his favorite's and certainly a signature role. Also featuring Roberta Invernizzi, one of the most sought after soprano soloists in the field of early music.

## SYNOPSIS

### Prologue

Music introduces the subject of this dramatic story (Dal mio Parnasso amato”) and summons the cheering power of sounds, which – as happened to Orfeo with his song – halted the forces of nature.

### Act I

Orfeo and Euridice are about to celebrate their marriage. Gathered around them are nymphs and shepherds (“In questo lieto e fortunato giorno”) to rejoice with propitiatory singing (“Vieni, Imeneo, deh vieni”) and dancing (“Lasciate i monti, lasciate i fonti”). Orfeo sings to the stars, as witnesses to his happiness (“Rosa del ciel, vita del mondo e degna”) and is joined by Euridice. As they all move towards the temple, the chorus exhorts them never to succumb to discouragement (“Alcun non sia che disperato in preda”).

### Act II

Orfeo returns to his woods and fields (“Ecco pur ch’a voi ritorno”). While the shepherds accompany him with cheerful songs (“In questo prato adorno”), Orfeo basks in his own happiness (“Vi ricorda, o Boschi ombrosi”). But suddenly, cries of grief are heard from the Messenger Silvia (“Ahi caso acerbo”), announcing a dreadful accident: Euridice was bitten by a snake while picking flowers, and died in the arms of her companions. Beside himself, Orfeo expresses his intention to descend into Hades to recover his wife (“Tu se’ morta, mia vita, ed io respiro?”). The chorus bemoans their sad fate (“Ahi, caso acerbo, ah! fato empio e crudele!”).

### Act III

Orfeo, guided by Hope, has reached the entrance to the Underworld (“Ecco l’atra palude, ecco il nocchiero”). Alone here, he meets Caronte, ferryman to the souls of the dead. Caronte however bars his way (“Oh tu ch’innanzi morte a queste rive”). Orfeo endeavours to move him to pity (“Possente spirto e formidabil nume”). But on seeing that his efforts are to no avail, he lulls the stern guardian to sleep by singing a song to his own accompaniment on the lyre (“Ahi, sventurato amante”). Orfeo then sails the boat over the Styx, while the chorus of infernal spirits comments in amazement on his extraordinary and courageous action (“Nulla impresa per uom si tenta in vano”).

### Act IV

Proserpina is moved by Orfeo’s heartrending cries as he wanders through the infernal regions, and intercedes in his favour with her husband Plutone, begging him to restore Euridice to this wretched young widower. Plutone consents, but on one condition: that Orfeo shall never look back at Euridice before leaving the kingdom of the dead. Orfeo gives vent to his joy (“Quale onor di te fia degno”). But then, on his way back he is seized by a doubt that Euridice may not really be following him (“Ma mentre io canto, ohimé, chi m’assicura”). And so he turns to glance at his bride, thus infringing Plutone’s strict prohibition and irremediably losing her (“Dove te ‘n vai, mia vita?”). The chorus of spirits comments on the fact that Orfeo, though defeating the forces of nature, has failed to conquer his own will (“È la virtute un raggio”).

### Act V

Back among the living, Orfeo bitterly mourns his fate (“Questi I campi di Tracia e quest’è il loco”), while vowing forever to renounce love and the art of music. Apollo listens to his lament and, moved to pity, descends from the heavens to take the unhappy man back with him (“Saliam cantando al cielo”), granting him immortality. Among the stars, Orfeo will be able to contemplate Euridice’s face. The chorus (“Vanne, Orfeo, Felice appieno”) observes that sorrow on earth can be offset by happiness in heaven.

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