



CHRISTOPHE ROUSSET CHAMPIONS THE FIRST PERFORMANCE IN MODERN TIMES OF *HERCULE MOURANT* BY DAUVERGNE TO MARK ITS 250th Anniversary.

Opera Royal, Palace of Versailles - 19 Nov

“With French baroque opera back on a London stage this autumn, this disc makes a compelling case for a more widespread resurgence”

-Alexandra Coghlan, *Early Music Today* on Bellerophon CD

Following the huge success of the revival of Lully's Bellerophon last year, **Christophe Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques** return to the Palace of Versailles for the first performance in modern times of another forgotten masterpiece - Dauvergne's *Hercule mourant*. The modern premiere will be presented on 19 November 2011 in the magnificent and historic Opéra Royal de Versailles marking the 250th anniversary of its first performance. The cast for *Hercule mourant* at the Royal Opera, which will be recorded by Aparte for release next year, is led by bass-baritone **Andrew Foster-Williams** in the title role and soprano **Véronique Gens** as Hercules's wife Déjanire.

The construction of the Royal Opera, created as a permanent theatre and completed in 1770, was the crowning achievement of the Sun King's son and successor, Louis XV, influenced by his father's vision. Used only rarely for public performances until the completion of the most recent renovations in 2009, regular programmes have now been reintroduced to this prestigious building, restoring the Sun King's grand scheme for Versailles as the centre of cultural excellence.

The full cast of *Hercule mourant* comprises **Andrew Foster-Williams** (Hercules), **Véronique Gens** (Déjanire), **Emiliano Gonzalez Toro** (their son Hilus), **Edwin Crossley-Mercer** (Philoctète), **Julie Fuchs** (Yole), **Jaël Azzaretti** (Dircé), **Alain Buet** (Jupiter), **Jennifer Borghi** (Juno), **Romain Champion** (Grand Prêtre) with **Les Chantres du CMBV**, accompanied by **Les Talens Lyriques**, conducted from the harpsichord by **Christophe Rousset**. **Veronique Gens'** long fruitful partnership with **Christophe Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques** includes a 3 CD set celebrating French operatic heroine roles entitled *Les Tragediennes*. The 3rd CD of *Les Tragediennes* is released in October coincides with a tour to Venice and is **Christophe Rousset's** first flirtation with Late Romantic repertoire.

Virtually unknown today, but the subject of a current revival of interest, Antoine Dauvergne (1713-1797), the composer of *Hercule mourant*, was born at the end of Louis XIV's reign and contributed to classical music at the court of Versailles as performer and composer. He studied violin with Leclair, becoming a virtuoso musician, and composition with one of the most important French composers

and music theorists of the baroque era, Rameau. *Hercule mourant (Dying Hercules)* was one of Dauvergne's many notable works written between 1752-1773 for L'Académie Royale de Musique (now known as L'Opéra de Paris), where it was first performed in April 1761, succeeding Rameau's final work, *Les Paladins*. His numerous achievements during this period showed him to be a true successor to Rameau, whose aesthetic he upheld.

Dauvergne loved to instil new life into ancient work, making it chime with current taste. For *Hercule mourant* he drew on the epic account of the death of the Roman mythical demi-god Hercules on the funeral pyre of Mount Etna. Dauvergne's librettist was the French historian and writer Jean-François Marmontel, whose collaborations with the composer include the lyric comedy *La coquette trompée*. The story concerns a test of fidelity with tragic consequences, written over a century beforehand in 1634 by the French poet and playwright Jean Rotrou, who in turn took his inspiration and characters from the Roman author Seneca's tragedy *Hercule sur l'oeta*. In his *Hercule mourant*, a noble work of dramatic intensity, Dauvergne displayed the virile and robust style in which he excelled in his tragédies lyriques, aspiring to the Enlightenment concept of 'sublime' and embodying the French ideal style, while in his lighter opera-ballets he was close to Mondonville.

A former chamber musician of the royal court in Paris, Antoine Dauvergne was simultaneously court composer and Maître de musique de la Chambre du roi Louis XV (1755-1792), director of Le Concert Spirituel (1762-1773) and thrice director of L'Académie royale de musique (commonly known as L'Opéra de Paris) between 1769-1790). At the Paris Opera he displayed an unerring instinct for identifying talent and was remarkable for opening the doors of the hitherto rather conservative Paris Opera to new faces, favouring foreign composers such as Salieri and Cherubini and performing works which had been overlooked - a happy connection with **Christophe Rousset's** personal zeal and achievements in uncovering and promoting forgotten masterpieces!

Dauvergne's first success as a composer was his premier stage work, an opera-ballet (or ballet héroïque), *Les amours de Tempé* (1752). This was succeeded in 1753 by his most famous work, *Les troqueurs (The Barterers)*, an opéra bouffon (comedy) in one act based on a fable by Jean de la Fontaine, which attained spectacular success, appearing at the height of the grand Querelle des Bouffons (the argument between rival partisans of French and Italian music) and having a major influence on the development of a French comic opera, making it receptive to a new aesthetic which renewed the genre. *Les troqueurs* was followed in quick succession by his lyrical comedy *La Coquette trompée*. Dauvergne also composed *Concerts de Simphonies* (1751), violin sonatas and motets. His notable theatre works in addition to those already mentioned include two lyric tragedies, *Enée et Lavinie* (1758) and *Polyxène* (1763) and an heroic ballet *Le prix de la valeur* (1771).

This performance of *Hercule mourant* will be recorded and is part of a series of presentations and performances of Dauvergne's work to be held during October/November this year in the Opera Royal.

Dauvergne at Versailles Opéra Royal, October/November 2011

- 8 October Concert version: *Les troqueurs* and *La Coquette trompée*
15 October Concert performance: excerpts from the lyric tragedy *Polyxène*
8 November World premiere concert version *La Vénitienne*, lyric comedy
19 October World premiere concert version: *Hercule mourant* lyric tragedy

These performances are co-produced by Château de Versailles Spectacles and the Centre de Musique baroque de Versailles (CMBV).

BACKGROUND

Louis XIV, the Sun King, whose emblem Apollo was also god of poetry and music, wished to be seen as a great emperor for the arts and was ambitious for French commerce and trade. Not only was the Palace of Versailles the centre of French political power, but a centre of excellence for all the arts. By importing skilled craftsmen to work at Versailles in addition to his patronage of French artists, he enhanced and promoted French culture to an enviable position of supremacy, ensuring that the magnificent jewellery, inlaid furniture, cloths and other luxurious items were all French made and that the Palace of Versailles became a showcase of superior French craftwork - and a lasting testimonial to his reign as much as to national glory.

L'Opéra Royal de Versailles (The Royal Opera of Versailles) is the original main theatre and opera house of the Palace of Versailles. Built after the death of Louis XIV by Louis XV to celebrate the marriage of the Dauphin, the future Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, it was constructed entirely of wood and painted to resemble marble. The inaugural performance on 16 May 1770 in honour of the couple was Lully's opera *Persée*. Like the restored Galerie de Glaces, (the Hall of Mirrors), where Rousset and his ensemble performed in December 2009, the Royal Opera is rarely used for public performances.

The Palace contains a series of rooms named after gods and mythical heroes. The creation of the Salon d'Hercule, begun during Louis XIV's final years, was interrupted by his death and was the first project to be completed by his son when he returned to Versailles. It boasts beautiful ceiling frescoes.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

- The argument known as **Querelle des Bouffons** pitted the French tragédie en musique form (as represented by Lully) against the Italian opera buffa, which was supported by Rousseau and the Encyclopaedists. It was sparked by the critical reaction to the revival of the Italian composer Pergolesi's *La serva padrona* in 1752 at the Paris opera (the venue being a crucial impetus for the controversy, since the style was considered not to be in keeping with French traditional musical values). The performance was given by a troupe of Italian actors known as 'buffoni', hence the name given to the quarrel.

An amusing anecdote to the success of Dauvergne's *Les troqueurs* is that Jean Monnet, commissioner of the piece and Intendant of the Théâtre de la Foire Saint-Laurent, where it was performed, claimed that he spread the rumour amongst the Italian faction that it was the work of a French speaking Italian living in Vienna, thus ensuring a warm reception, though he apparently owned up to trick afterwards.

Christophe Rousset Harpichordist, Conductor and Musicologist

Founder of the period instrument ensemble Les Talens Lyriques, Christophe Rousset is an inspirational musician and conductor specialising in the baroque and classical repertoire. Initially fired by an interest in archaeology, he diverted his exploration of the past to music. His distinct brand of musical archaeology has led him to uncover and breathe life into so much forgotten repertoire.

Growing up in Aix-en-Provence, Christophe Rousset developed a passion for the Baroque aesthetic. Attending rehearsals at the Festival d'Art Lyrique, he developed a love of opera and the stage, which became a life-long passion.

At the age of thirteen he took up the harpsichord. He progressed to the Schola Cantorum in Paris, where he studied with Huguette Dreyfus, then to the Royal Conservatory in The Hague, to work with Bob van Asperen. At twenty-two he won the prestigious First Prize, as well as the Public Prize, in the Seventh Bruges Harpsichord Competition (1983).

Christophe Rousset's performances as a harpsichordist soon attracted the attention of the international media and record companies. Initially joining orchestras such as Les Arts Florissants and then Il Seminario Musicale, Rousset decided to form his own ensemble, Les Talens Lyriques, in 1991. Firing the Orchestra with his enthusiasm as a conductor and musicologist, he established himself amongst the front-runners of the period instrument movement, creating historically-informed performances.

Christophe Rousset quickly established his reputation as a highly- talented conductor and musicologist with a flair for the voice and opera, tutoring his own ensemble in forgotten performance practices. He was invited to create the soundtrack to the film *Farinelli* about the famous castrato. This brought further acclaim and led to numerous recordings for Harmonia Mundi, L'Oiseau-Lyre, Fnac Music, Emi-Virgin, Decca, Naïve and Ambrosie.

Particularly inspired by European music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (opera, cantata, oratorio, sonata, symphony, concerto, suite...), Rousset has rediscovered forgotten operas such as *Antigona* by Traetta, *La Capricciosa Corretta* by Martín y Soler, *Armida Abbandonata* by Jommelli, *La Grotta di Trofonio* by Salieri, *Temistocle* and by Jean-Christien Bach.

His many recordings include the complete harpsichord works of François Couperin, Jean-Philippe Rameau, d'Anglebert and Forqueray, and his interpretations of works by J. S. Bach (*Partitas, Goldberg Variations, Harpsichord Concertos, English Suites, French Suites, Klavierbüchlein für Wilhelm Friedemann*) are regarded as references.

With his ensemble Les Talens Lyriques, his great successes on disc include Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*, Mozart's *Mitridate*, *Overtures* by Rameau, *Persée* and *Roland* by Lully.

Christophe Rousset has received honorary awards from the French government for his pioneering efforts work in classical music.

Les Talens Lyriques

The vocal and instrumental ensemble Les Talens Lyriques was founded in 1991 by harpsichord virtuoso conductor Christophe Rousset. The conductor's choice of title for his orchestra attests to his passionate interest in the repertoire of the 18th Century, in particular operas many of which had been forgotten and which Les Talens Lyriques has re-introduced to audiences. Furthermore, his strong held belief, born out of a lifetime in the theatre, is that every instrument should be treated in the same way as the voice.

Their operatic repertoire ranges from Monteverdi (*L'Incoronazione di Poppea*) to Handel (*Scipione, Riccardo Primo, Rinaldo, Admeto, Giulio Cesare, Serse, Tamerlano, Alcina, Ariodante*), Lully (*Persée, Roland*), Cimarosa (*Il Mercato di Malmantile, Il Matrimonio Segreto*), Traetta (*Antigona, Ippolito ed Aricia*), Jommelli (*Armida abbandonata*), Martín y Soler (*La Capricciosa Corretta*) and even Mozart (*Mitridate, Re di Ponto*).

Integral to success of these operatic performances has been Les Talens Lyriques' collaboration with a wide range of directors including Jean-Marie Villégier, Philippe Lénaël, Jean-Claude Berutti, Pierre Audi, Jean-Pierre Vincent, Lindsay Kemp, Marco Arturo Marelli, Éric Vigner, Jérôme Deschamps, Marcial di Fonzo Bo, Francisco Negrin, Irina Brook and Lukas Hemleb.

Les Talens Lyriques' repertoire extends beyond opera to other musical genres from the same period, such as motets (Dumont, Daniélis), madrigals, cantatas (Clérambault, Brossard, Montéclair) and French court arias (Dumont, Lambert, de La Barre). In exploring this repertoire, Christophe Rousset surrounds himself with a regular group of singers and instrumentalists who have come to symbolize the "new baroque generation". By building these close partnerships with individual artists, this enables the ensemble to perfect specific stylistic details and adapt them for both the sacred or secular repertoire of the period.

One of Rousset's key aims is to illustrate some of the masterpieces of their French musical heritage, especially music created along the Paris-Naples axis.

Les Talens Lyriques has recorded for DECCA (Universal Music), Naïve, Ambrosie and Virgin Classics. In 1994, the ensemble has realised the original sound track of the film *Farinelli il Castrato*. In 2001, it won the Classical Music Victory.

Les Talens Lyriques are supported by the French Department of Culture and Communication. They also receive support from the City of Paris and from the Annenberg Foundation. The ensemble is member of the FEVIS and PROFEVIS (Fédération et Syndicat des Ensembles Vocaux et instrumentaux Spécialisés).

Veronique Gens

A prominent Baroque performer in recent years, soprano Véronique Gens has also become recognized as one of the world's finest opera singers in the Baroque and Classical repertoire. Her success in the role of *Donna Elvira* in **DON GIOVANNI** at the Aix-en-Provence Festival under Claudio Abbado and Peter Brook was followed by appearances at the major European opera houses and festivals. She has worked with such orchestras as the Berlin Philharmonic, Age of Enlightenment, Orchestre National de France, Orchestre de Paris, Rome's Santa Cecilia, the Royal Flanders Philharmonic Orchestra, the Lyon Opera Orchestra, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, les Arts Florissants and Les Talens Lyriques and with conductors including Claudio Abbado, Charles Dutoit, Frans Brüggen, Louis Langrée, William Christie, Marc Minkowski, John Neschling, Wyung-Whun Chung, Ivor Bolton, Jean-Claude Malgoire, Jean-Claude Casadesus, Christophe Rousset, Trevor Pinnock, Sir Neville Marriner, Marek Janowski, Marcello Viotti, Thomas Hengelbrock, Serge Baudo and Sebastian Weigle. Elected "Singer of the Year 1999" by the French "Victoires de la Musique", Véronique Gens has made over 60 recordings, a selection of which has been awarded international prizes. In 2006, Véronique Gens was nominated "Chevalier" by "L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres".

Recent performances have included **ALCINA** in Hamburg, **DON GIOVANNI** in Barcelona and Madrid, **LE NOZZE DI FIGARO** in Aix-en-Provence, in Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and in Tokyo, **CLEMENZA DI TITO** in Dresden und Barcelona (new production with Vesselina Kasarova), a tour in France of **AGRIPPINA** as well as in Madrid, **COSI FAN TUTTE** in Tokyo, a new production of Cavalli's **LA**

CALISTO, DON GIOVANNI, PELLÉAS ET MÉLISANDE at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Lully's **ALCESTE** in Paris, and a new production of **LA FINTA GIARDINIERA** at the Salzburg Festival 2006, as well as numerous concerts and recitals in Amsterdam, Dresden, Copenhagen, Paris, Luxembourg, Lille, Salzburg, Lisbon, New York, Wigmore Hall London, and at the Tanglewood Festival, Sao Paulo, Rome, Los Angeles, Boston. In the passed season she broadened her repertoire in Lyon with **THE MERRY WIDOW**, which will be published on DVD and she did her role debut as *Alice* in **FALSTAFF** at the Baden-Baden Festival.

Recent projects include new productions of Martin y Soler's **IL BURBERO DI BUON CUORE** at the Teatro Real Madrid and Rameau's **CASTOR ET POLLUX** at the De Nederlandse Opera Amsterdam, **DON GIOVANNI** in Dresden and Barcelona, **IPHIGENIE EN AULIDE** at the Theatre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, **IPHIGENIE EN TAURIDE** in Vienna. Future projects include **LA CALISTO** at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées (May 2010), **ALCESTE** in Aix-en-Provence and Salzburg (July-August 2010), **NIOBE** at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden (September 2010), **DON GIOVANNI** at the Wiener Staatsoper, **DIALOGUES DES CARMELITES** at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, **COSI FAN TUTTE** in Baden-Baden, and numerous concerts and recitals.

In 2009, Gens made an important role debut as *Eva* in a new production of **DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG**.

Her recordings include French songs with Roger Vignobles, Mozart arias with Ivor Bolton, Handel Cantatas, Ravel's **ALYSSA** with Plasson, Berlioz's **LES NUITS D'ÉTÉ** with Langrée, Scarlatti's **SANTISSIMA TRINITÀ** with Biondi, **DON GIOVANNI** with Harding, **L'ORFEO** with Haïm, all for EMI/Virgin, as well as **LE NOZZE DI FIGARO** and **COSI FAN TUTTE** with Jacobs for Harmonia Mundi, **AGRIPPINA** with Malgoire for Dynamic and **LES CHANTS D'Auvergne** (Vol. 1 - *Jean-Claude Casadesus* - Naxos Best Seller 2006) (Vol. 2 - *Serge Baudo* - Naxos).

Andrew Foster-Williams

Andrew Foster-Williams has established himself as an exciting, young talent in the Classical Music world on the concert platform and in the opera house..

Andrew Foster-Williams studied at, and is now to be made a Fellow of, the Royal Academy of Music. He made his US opera debut as Leone in Handel Tamerlano with Placido Domingo at Washington National Opera, prompting the following Washington Post review: "Andrew Foster-Williams was a delightful surprise, nearly stealing the show with his brilliant Act II aria".

Current and future concert plans include solo orchestral recitals of Mozart and Handel arias for the Hong Kong Philharmonic and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra with Nicolas McGegan; Brahms Requiem with Philippe Herreweghe and l'Orchestre des Champs-Élysées; title role in *Hercule Mourant* by Antoine Dauvergne with Christophe Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques; Haydn *Die Jahreszeiten* with Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival and The Gulbenkian Orchestra Lisbon with Paul McCreech; *Messiah* for the New York Philharmonic with Bernard Labadie, and with Nicholas Kraemer and the Toronto Symphony and Minnesota Orchestra; *Bach Lutheran Mass* with The Cleveland Orchestra and Franz Welser-Möst; *Catel's Sémiramis* with Le Concert Spirituel and Hervé Niquet;

Mozart Requiem with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-Séguin; and Tippett A Child of our Time with the Strasbourg Philharmonic and Carlo Rizzi.

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