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LA TRAVIATA
GIUSEPPE VERDI

“Poor Mariette Duplessis is dead... the first woman I ever loved, and now she's in goodness knows which cemetery, abandoned to the maggots of the sepulchre! It's as she said to me fifteen months ago: "I won't live: I'm a strange girl and I won't be able to keep living a life I don't know how to lead and that I don't know how to bear either. Take me, lead me wherever you want; I won't bother you, I sleep all day. In the evening, you'll let me go to the theatre and at night you'll do with me as you wish!" I've never told you of the singular attachment I felt for that charming creature. And now she's dead... And I don't know what strange old elegy echoes in my heart at her memory.”

Thus spoke Franz Liszt of Marie d’Agoult, the unforgettable ghost of the woman who would become the Dame aux camélias. After Dumas fils, it was Verdi who would give her immortality in his remarkable masterpiece, one of the repertoire’s most striking portraits of a woman, at once cruel and sublime. Following on from Werther, Benoît Jacquot directs Diana Damrau in this other opera about love and sacrifice.
THE GIRL OF THE GOLDEN WEST
OPERA IN THREE ACTS (1910)
MUSIC BY GIACOMO PUCCINI (1858-1924)
LIBRETTO BY GUELFO CIVININI AND CARLO ZANGARINI BASED ON DAVID BELASCO’S PLAY “THE GIRL OF THE GOLDEN WEST”
PLAYED IN ITALIAN
CARLO RIZZI Conductor
NIKOLAUS LEHNHOF Stage director
RAIMUND BAUER Sets
ANDREA SCHMIDT-FUTTERER Costumes
DUANE SCHULAR Lighting
JONAS GERBERING Video
DENNI SAYERS Choreography
PATTER MARIE AUBERT Chorus master
NINA STEMMIE Minnie
CLAUDIO SGURA Jack Rance
MARCO BERTI Dick Johnson
ROMAN SADNIK Nick
ANDREA MASTRONI Ashby
ANDRE HEYBOER Sonora
EMANUELE GIANNINO Trin
ROBERTO ACCURSO Sid
IGOR GNIDII Bello / ÉRIC HUCHEI Harry
RODOLPHE BRIAND Joe
ENRICO MARABELLI Happy
WENWEI ZHANG Larkens
UGO RABECK Billy Jackrabbit
ANNA PENNISI Wooble
ALEXANDRE DUHAMEL Jake Wallace
MATTEO PEIRONI José Castro
PARIS OPERA ORCHESTRA AND CHOIR
ORIGINAL PRODUCTION:
DUTCH NATIONAL OPERA, AMSTERDAM

“In those strange days, people coming from God knows where, joined forces in that far Western land, and, according to the rude custom of the camp, their very names were soon lost and unrecorded, and here they struggled, laughed, gambled, cursed, killed, loved and worked out their strange destinies in a manner incredible to us of to-day. Of one thing only are we sure— they lived.” Puccini prefaced his score with this quotation and, indeed, it is life itself that he aimed to capture, in a trail that would lead him to Paris in La Bohème, to Japan in Madame Butterfly and then as far as the Far West in a tale of passion, certainly, but also of humanity, brotherhood and compassion. In a saloon bar known as The Polka, gold diggers brood over mothers left behind in Italy whilst Minnie, behind the bar, reads to them from the Bible. Love will come to Minnie in the guise of a criminal but, seeing beyond mere appearances, she will recognise the true heart beneath the rough exterior and realise the possibility of happiness. In the wake of the first literary westerns and as cinema began to exploit the genre, Puccini gave opera happiness. In the wake of the first literary westerns and as cinema began to exploit the genre, Puccini gave opera happiness. In the wake of the first literary westerns and as cinema began to exploit the genre, Puccini gave opera happiness. In the wake of the first literary westerns and as cinema began to exploit the genre, Puccini gave opera happiness. In the wake of the first literary westerns and as cinema began to exploit the genre, Puccini gave opera happiness. In the wake of the first literary westerns and as cinema began to exploit the genre, Puccini gave opera happiness. In the wake of the first literary westerns and as cinema began to exploit the genre, Puccini gave opera happiness. In the wake of the first literary westerns and as cinema began to exploit the genre, Puccini gave opera happiness. In the wake of the first literary westerns and as cinema began to exploit the genre, Puccini gave opera happiness. In the wake of the first literary westerns and as cinema began to exploit the genre, Puccini gave opera happiness. In the wake of the first literary westerns and as cinema began to exploit the genre, Puccini gave opera happiness. In the wake of the first literary westerns and as cinema began to exploit the genre, Puccini gave opera happiness.
With its fascination for Egypt, 19th century Europe seems to have embarked on an intoxicating voyage down the Nile, marvelling at the colours of that great river and of the Egyptian sky, rediscovering monuments that are not so much palaces and towns but enigmatic sanctuaries of both the genius and the folly of humanity. Aida is one of the most celebrated examples of this “Egyptomania” albeit one of the most contradictory: commissioned by Ismail Pasha, the project of a work to be performed in honour of the inauguration of the Suez Canal was initially rejected by Verdi. However, a second commission for an operatic work to be performed in the new theatre in Cairo was later, somewhat condescendingly, accepted. Verdi had no inclination for exoticism and any concessions were, for him, out of the question. This opera, intended as a celebration of universal concord and harmony between nations with all the pomp and ceremony appropriate to such solemn occasions, is in fact entirely about conflict: the war between Egypt and Ethiopia is nothing compared to that which opposes the characters to each other. Their bloody confrontations give way, in turn, to the conflict within each individual. A work both flamboyant and hieratic, spectacular and intimate, and one of Verdi’s most beautiful masterpieces, Aida returns to the Paris Opera after more than half a century’s absence.

In his preface to Angelo, Tyrant of Padua, one of his rare prose plays, Victor Hugo says that drama has to be both noble and real. In transposing the play to operatic form, Amilcare Ponchielli and Arrigo Boito remained faithful to Hugo. Their Gioconda, first performed at La Scala Milan in 1876, is one of the most flamboyant of classic operas. At that time, it was difficult for a composer to live in the shadow of Verdi, but Ponchielli was one of the rare artists to carve out a place and an identity for himself, not too far removed from the Master but different nonetheless. At his side, Boito, who had already demonstrated his talent as a composer with Mefistofele, proved to be even more skilled as a librettist, and he soon went on to work with Verdi. Lying somewhere between great French opera and Verdi-style drama, La Gioconda portrayed broken hearts and shattered destinies in 17th century Venice. Power and love, sacrifice and betrayal, poison and revenge: the opera brings together all the elements of melodrama and infuses them with a new lease of life, grandiose and operatic. Violeta Urmana, Luciana D’Intino, Orlin Anastassov, Alvise Badoero, Maria José Montiel, Enzo Grimaldo, Marcelo Alvarez and Sergey Murzaev appear together under the baton of Daniel Oren and Pier Luigi Pizzi’s direction in this rare and spectacular masterpiece.
In 1881, the twenty-seven-year-old Engelbert Humperdinck became Richard Wagner’s assistant in Bayreuth. Wagner had two more years to live. These two years of intense artistic collaboration on Parsifal indelibly marked the young composer’s life and style. In 1883, the Master died, leaving his disciple “incomplete”. He became a wanderer, traveling throughout Europe, eventually becoming a renowned teacher.

Ten years later, in Weimar, Humperdinck completed his masterpiece, Hänsel and Gretel. His sister wrote the libretto, inspired by the Grimms’ fairy tale. The opera premiered at Christmas under the enthusiastic baton of Richard Strauss. Humperdinck had retained a Wagnerian taste for continuous melody and leitmotiv. However, his fairy-tale opera also drew on children’s songs and scenes from Germanic legends but at the same time tend to become lost in the mists of time. The result is music that astounds, as deep as the lakes of Germanic legends but at the same time strangely familiar. It conjures up memories of our forgotten childhoods as though once, long ago we ourselves were that very brother and sister lost in the forest, trapped in the grasp of the witch with her gingerbread house.
Music needs to be “Mediterraneanized”. That is what Nietzsche wrote – in French! – after hearing Carmen for the twentieth time. He was grateful that Bizet, ten years after Tristan, had composed its antithesis – even its antidote. Far from the heady aura of the Wagnerian ideal, Bizet had brought to the stage of the Opéra-Comique a deadly passion, violently revealed and crushed by the Spanish sun. The philosopher saw its as a revelation and deliverance. “The work has retained Mérimée’s logically moving passion, concise lines, and implacable precision. Above all, it possesses what is distinctive to hot countries, namely, the dryness of the air. A different sensuality, a different sensibility, a different, and more confident gaiety speaks there. The music is gay, but this is no French or German gaiety. It’s gaiety is African. Blind fate weighs down on her, her happiness is brief, sudden, merciless. Then, finally, love; love re-transposed into its original nature! Love conceived as a fatum, a fatality, cynical love, innocent, cruel! Love, harbinger of war; the mortal hatred of the sexes its very principle.”

Philippe Jordan conducts Bizet’s masterpiece for its long-awaited return to the Paris Opera.

PARIS OPERA BALLET

DANCES AT A GATHERING

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN Music
JEROME ROBBINS Choreography
JOE EULA Costumes
JENNIFER TIPTON Lighting

PSYCHÉ
CÉSAR FRANCK Music (Symphonic poem for orchestra and chorus)
ALEXEI RATMANSKY Choreography
(Opéra national de Paris, 2011)
KAREN KILIMNIK Sets
ADELINE ANDRÉ Costumes
MADJID HAKIMI Lighting

ÉTOILES, PREMIERS DANSEURS AND CORPS DE BALLET

PARIS OPERA ORCHESTRA

FELIX KRIEGER Conductor
CHOEUR ACCENTUS – LAURENCE ÉQUILBEY Musical director

Two ballets, both of them delicate, luminous and enchanting and yet from very different worlds, are combined for this programme. Created in 1969, Dances at a Gathering brings together five pairs of dancers who meet, pass and intermingle to the rhythm of Chopin’s waltzes and mazurkas for piano. The precise choreography seems to spring from the music itself and creates a romantic atmosphere tinged with nostalgia. In Psyché (2011), his first work for the company, Alexei Ratmansky revisits the realm of the supernatural and plunges into the enchanting world of Apuleius’ tale. Drawing inspiration from the symphonic poem for orchestra and chorus by César Franck, he has created a work of profound lyricism and, with the complicity of the painter and installation artist, Karen Kilimnik, he unveils a dreamlike world that lends itself to reverie.
This encounter between two great French composers and two choreographers from the New York City Ballet, its founder George Balanchine and former student Benjamin Millepied, highlights the similarities and dissonances between them. In 1947, George Balanchine paid tribute to the company and to the French tradition with his first production for the Paris Opera Ballet, Le Palais de Cristal, in which he choreographed an early work by Georges Bizet, the Symphony in C. Characterised by its architectural design and sense of dialogue with the music, this ballet is a model of academic virtuosity, to which Christian Lacroix, an artisan of light and colour, has brought new shape. Benjamin Millepied’s third creation for the Paris Opera Ballet, in collaboration with the conceptual artist Daniel Buren, revisits the myth of Daphnis and Chloe. In the tradition of Balanchine, Millepied draws his inspiration from the rhythms and colours of Ravel’s “choreographic symphony” for chorus and orchestra. Accompanying the dancers of the Paris Opera Ballet for the first time, Philippe Jordan conducts these masterpieces of French music.

The “Ballet of ballets” as Rudolf Nureyev described it, Sleeping Beauty remains one of the jewels in the heritage of dance. First performed in 1890 at the Mariinsky Theatre in Saint-Petersburg, the work combined the talents of choreographer Marius Petipa and composer Tchaikovsky. Inspired by Charles Perrault’s tale, they imagined a “fairy-tale ballet” in which dream and reality overlap and where fairies and godmothers, and the forces of Good and Evil fight over the fate of two young people. It was not until 1989 that Rudolf Nureyev restaged the work based on the original choreography for the Paris Opera Ballet. Readopting the original order and structure of the piece, passed on by generations of dancers, he devised a choreography of dazzling academic virtuosity, alternating between lavish ensembles and pas de deux. The sumptuous sets and costumes by Ezio Frigerio and Franca Squarciapino recreate the splendour of one of the most outstandingly accomplished masterpieces in the classical repertoire.
The entire edifice of John Neumeier’s work is built around a profound musical sensibility. However, the choreographer, in his constant questioning of the human condition, probably finds the closest reflection of his own humanist concerns in the works of Gustav Mahler, several of whose symphonies he has set to dance. On the wings of the emotions inspired by the monumental Third Symphony, written as “a great hymn to the glory of all creation”, he enters the composer’s tormented and contrasting universe to sculpt images of a powerful and profound lyricism. The piece is an osmosis between music and dance, shot through with a palette of emotions, from existential angst to mystical faith. Chorus and soloists accompany the dancers’ elegant movements, curved lines and vertiginous lifts, reminding us yet again of the richness of inspiration that powers Neumeier’s choreography.
“The Knight of the Sad Face” and his faithful squire, Sancho Panza, are mixed up in the wild love affairs of the stunning Kitri and the seductive Basilio in a richly colourful, humorous and virtuoso ballet. Marius Petipa’s Don Quixote premiered in Moscow in 1869 with music by Ludwig Minkus and met with resounding success from the start. The novelty lay within its break from the supernatural universe of romantic ballet. Written as if it were a play for the theatre, the work had realistic heroes and a solidly structured plot and scenes. The libretto and the choreography were handed down without interruption in Russia, but Petipa’s version remained unknown in the west for a long time. In 1981, Rudolf Nureyev introduced his own version of the work into the Paris Opera’s repertoire. While retaining the great classical pages and the strong, fiery dances, the choreographer gave greater emphasis to the comic dimension contriving a particularly lively and light-hearted production. In 2002, Alexander Beliaev and Elena Rivkina were invited to create new sets and costumes specially for the Opera Bastille. Drawing their inspiration from paintings by Goya, they unfold a series of magnificent scenes lit up by the warm Spanish colours of the costumes and the iridescent tutus of the magical world of the dryads.

Invited in 2004, Trisha Brown contrived O złożony / O composite to an original score by Laurie Anderson. Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz’s verses inspired the choreographer to develop a language where the complexity of post modern dance blends with classical writing in a totally new alchemy. The starlit sky, envisioned by the scenographer Vija Celmins, opens up the dance to infinity...
Created for the dancers of the Paris Opera Ballet, *Un Jour ou Deux* was the first work Merce Cunningham ever composed for a company other than his own. To pay tribute to this great artist and to his fellow traveller John Cage, the centenary of whose birth will be celebrated this year, the work has been revived with a new generation of dancers directed by some of Cunningham’s close collaborators.

Fascinated by all aspects of creativity and youth, Cunningham’s curiosity and open-mindedness are echoed in the Opera Ballet’s commission of a first choreography by Danseuse Étoile Marie-Agnès Gillot, *Sous Apparence*. If *Un Jour ou Deux* brings together artists who have never ceased to revolutionise the art of dance, similarly, Marie-Agnès Gillot has associated talented artists whose approach is just as novel. They include the visual artist Olivier Mosset who imagined the set and Laurence Équilbey who has proposed a musical dramaturgy around works by Bruckner, Feldman and Ligety performed by the Ars Nova Ensemble and the Accentus Choir.
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