CHRISTOPH WILLIBALD GLUCK

ORFEO ED EURIDICE

CONDUCTOR
Mark Wigglesworth

PRODUCTION
Mark Morris

SET DESIGNER
Allen Moyer

COSTUME DESIGNER
Isaac Mizrahi

LIGHTING DESIGNER
James F. Ingalls

CHOREOGRAPHER
Mark Morris

Opera in three acts
Libretto by Ranieri de’ Calzabigi
Sunday, October 20, 2019
3:00–4:30pm

First time this season

The production of Orfeo ed Euridice was made possible by a generous gift from Mr. and Mrs. Wilmer J. Thomas, Jr.

GENERAL MANAGER
Peter Gelb

JEANETTE LERMAN-NEUBAUER
MUSIC DIRECTOR
Yannick Nézet-Séguin
The Metropolitan Opera
2019–20 Season

The 99th Metropolitan Opera performance of
CHRISTOPH WILLIBALD GLUCK’S

ORFEO ED EURIDICE

CONDUCTOR
Mark Wigglesworth

IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

ORFEO
Jamie Barton

AMORE
Hera Hyesang Park*

EURIDICE
Hei-Kyung Hong

HARPSICHORD
Dan Saunders

* indicates debut in the role

Orfeo ed Euridice is performed without intermission.

Sunday, October 20, 2019, 3:00–4:30PM
Chorus Master  Donald Palumbo
Musical Preparation  John Keenan, Dan Saunders, and Howard Watkins*
Assistant Stage Directors  Gina Lapinski, Stephen Pickover, and Daniel Rigazzi
Stage Band Conductor  Gregory Buchalter
Assistant Choreographer  Sam Black
Associate Costume Designer  Courtney Logan
Italian Coach  Loretta Di Franco
Scenery, properties, and electrical props constructed and painted in Metropolitan Opera Shops
Costumes executed by Metropolitan Opera
Costume Department
Wigs and Makeup executed by Metropolitan Opera
Wig and Makeup Department

Orfeo ed Euridice is performed in the Vienna version, 1762, edited for the Gluck Complete Works (Gluck-Gesamtausgabe) by Anna Amalie Abert and Ludwig Finscher; used by arrangement with European American Music Distributors Company, U.S. and Canadian agent for Bärenreiter-Verlag, publisher and copyright owner.

This performance is made possible in part by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts.

Additional funding for this production was received from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Before the performance begins, please switch off cell phones and other electronic devices.

Met Titles
To activate, press the red button to the right of the screen in front of your seat and follow the instructions provided. To turn off the display, press the red button once again. If you have questions, please ask an usher at intermission.
Synopsis

Act I

Mythical times. At a lonely grave, nymphs and shepherds lament the death of Euridice, who was bitten by a snake. Left alone, Orfeo, Euridice’s husband, adds his voice to the rites. Only Echo replies. Orfeo vows to rescue Euridice from the underworld.

Amore, god of love, appears with word that Jove, pitying Orfeo, will allow him to descend into the land of the dead to retrieve Euridice. To make this trial more difficult, Orfeo must neither look at Euridice nor explain why looking is forbidden. Otherwise, he will lose her forever. Orfeo agrees and begins his voyage.

Act II

At the Gates of Hades, furies and ghosts try to deny Orfeo’s passage to the underworld. His lament softens and placates them. He is eventually allowed to pass through to the Elysian Fields.

In Elysium, Orfeo is moved by the beauty of the landscape. Heroes and heroines bring Euridice to him. Without looking at her, he takes her away.

Act III

Orfeo leads Euridice through a dark labyrinth toward the upper world, forbidden to look at her. Euridice panics at the thought of a life without the love of Orfeo, and in desperation, he turns to her. She dies, again. Grief-stricken, Orfeo wonders how he can live without her. He decides to kill himself.

Amore appears and stays Orfeo’s hand. In response to Orfeo’s deep love and devotion, Amore revives Euridice for the second time. The three return to Earth.

At the Temple of Love, Orfeo, Euridice, Amore, the nymphs, and the shepherds all celebrate the power of love.

Orfeo ed Euridice on Demand

Looking for more Orfeo ed Euridice? Check out Met Opera on Demand, our online streaming service, to enjoy other outstanding performances from past Met seasons—including a 2009 Live in HD transmission of Mark Morris’s enchanting production and a 1958 radio broadcast starring Risë Stevens and Lucine Amara as the title lovers. Start your seven-day free trial and explore the full catalog of more than 700 complete performances at metoperaondemand.org.
In Focus

Christoph Willibald Gluck

Orfeo ed Euridice

Premiere: Burgtheater, Vienna, 1762
The myth of the musician Orpheus—who travels to the underworld to retrieve his dead wife, Eurydice—probes the deepest questions of desire, grief, and the power (and limits) of art. The story is the subject of opera’s oldest surviving score (Jacopo Peri’s Euridice, 1600) and of the oldest opera still being performed (Monteverdi’s L’Orfeo, 1607). Gluck and his librettist turned to this legend as the basis for a work as they were developing their ideas for a new kind of opera. Disillusioned with the inflexible forms of the genre as they existed at the time, Gluck sought to reform the operatic stage with a visionary and seamless union of music, poetry, and dance. Specifically, he wanted the singers to serve the drama and not the reverse. The recent popularity of Handel’s operas has shown that many operas written prior to Gluck’s reforms have a power that still resonates, but there is no denying that Orfeo ed Euridice, with its score of transcendent and irresistible beauty, helped expand the public’s idea of opera’s theatrical potential. Mozart and Wagner were among the successors to Gluck who openly acknowledged their debt to his vision.

The Creators
Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–87) was born in Bavaria and studied music in Milan. He joined an orchestra and learned about the art of opera production in that city, where his first operas were produced. Gluck traveled extensively throughout Europe, attracting students and disciples to his philosophy of an all-encompassing operatic-theatrical experience. After notable successes in London, Prague, Dresden, and especially Paris, Gluck had his greatest achievements in Vienna, where he died in 1787. His librettist for Orfeo ed Euridice was the remarkable Italian poet Ranieri de’ Calzabigi (1714–95). Thanks to many years spent in Paris, he had been influenced by French drama and shared Gluck’s zeal for an ideal musical theater.

The Setting
The opera is set in an idealized Greek countryside and in the mythological underworld. These settings are more conceptual than geographic, and notions of how they should appear can (and rightly do) change in every era.
The Music
Gluck consciously avoided the sheer vocal fireworks that he felt had compromised the drama of opera during the era of the castrati—male singers who had been surgically altered before puberty to preserve their high voices. Castrati dominated opera to such an extent that composers, Gluck felt, were compelled to compromise their own talents in order to display these singers’ technical brilliance. He did not originally dispense with castrati, but the castrato role of Orfeo (nowadays sung by a mezzo-soprano or countertenor) impresses through musical and dramatic refinement (a “noble simplicity,” in Calzabigi’s words), rather than vocal pyrotechnics. This is immediately apparent in his two most notable solos, “Che puro ciel” and “Che farò senza Euridice?,” heartrending arias without a single over-the-top moment. Even the dance music manages to be thoroughly convincing and subversively disturbing while retaining this notable simplicity.

Met History
Orfeo ed Euridice was presented early in the Met’s history: on a single night on tour in Boston in 1885, sung in German, and for eight performances in the 1891–92 season. It appeared as the curtain-raiser for the Met premiere of Pagliacci on December 11, 1893. Arturo Toscanini was a great admirer of the opera and showcased it on its own, featuring the great American contralto Louise Homer as Orfeo, from 1909 to 1914. George Balanchine created a dance-intensive production in 1936 that was quickly replaced by another in 1938. Risë Stevens starred in a production in 1955 that also featured Hilde Güden and Roberta Peters, and Richard Bonynge conducted a notable production in 1970 with Grace Bumbry as Orfeo. When it was revived two seasons later, Marilyn Horne sang the role. In addition to Toscanini and Bonynge, Artur Bodanzky, Walter Damrosch, Eric Leinsdorf, Charles Mackerras, Pierre Monteux, and Bruno Walter have also led the opera with the company. The Met’s current production had its premiere on May 2, 2007, with James Levine conducting, Maija Kovalevska as Euridice, Heidi Grant Murphy as Amore, and David Daniels as Orfeo—the first (and only) man to sing the role at the Met. Subsequent revivals have featured Stephanie Blythe as Orfeo, Danielle de Niese and Kate Royal as Euridice, and Lisette Oropesa as Amore.
Program Note

“I agree with you that of all my compositions Orphée is the only acceptable one. I ask forgiveness of the god of taste for having deafened my audience with my other operas.”

—Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–87), writing to Jean François de la Harpe in 1777

History often disagrees with a composer’s assessment of his own output. And it’s quite possible that Gluck, who was writing to a public enemy of his work, was deliberately being at least a bit facetious in denigrating his other operas, such as Alceste and Iphigénie en Aulide. But what is interesting about his statement is the revelation that even someone who was firmly in an opposing artistic camp could not help but admire Gluck’s opera on the myth of Orpheus.

It’s probably not going too far to say that Orpheus (or Orfeo, or Orphée) was the godfather of opera itself. According to Greek and Roman writers, he was the son of one of the Muses and a Thracian prince, which makes him more than mortal but less than a god. From his Muse mother, he received the gift of music. When his bride, Eurydice, died of a snake bite immediately after their wedding, Orpheus dared something no man had ever done before. He descended into the underworld and played for the gods, asking for Eurydice’s return.

It was inevitable that a story combining the power of love with the power of music would appeal to composers. Though historians disagree about what, exactly, was the very first opera, Claudio Monteverdi’s L’Orfeo, first given in Mantua in February 1607, intertwined music and poetry in a way that brought the familiar Orpheus myth to life with a dramatic impact quite new to its audience.

But the most famous of all Orpheus operas is Gluck’s Orfeo ed Euridice. It was first given in the Burgtheater in Vienna on October 5, 1762. By then, Gluck, who was born in Germany and had studied and worked in Italy and then London, had lived in Vienna (his wife’s home) for about ten years. The director of the court theaters, Count Durazzo, admired Gluck’s work and introduced him to two men who were determined to reform their own art forms: the poet Ranieri de’ Calzabigi and the ballet master Gasparo Angiolini. The year before Orfeo, the three men had collaborated on a dance-drama entitled Don Juan ou Le Festin de Pierre that had surprised the Viennese public with its serious retelling of the Don Juan story. Their Orpheus opera was no less a surprise (though Gluck lamented the inevitable—at the time—happy ending by writing, “To adapt the fable to the usage of our theaters, I was forced to alter the climax”).

Italian opera of the day had certain conventions that seemed carved in stone. Most operas were set to libretti by Pietro Metastasio or at least rigidly followed his formula: no chorus, six characters (including a first and second pair of lovers), and often extremely elaborate arias.
GIACOMO PUCCINI

LA BOHÈME

Two of opera’s most compelling artists, Ailyn Pérez (pictured) and Matthew Polenzani, share the Met stage for the first time, as the bohemian lovers at the heart of Puccini’s classic tragedy. Marco Armiliato conducts Franco Zeffirelli’s romantic staging—a timeless audience favorite.

OCT 25, 30 NOV 2, 5, 9, 14, 17 mat, 21

Tickets from $25 | metopera.org
Gluck’s *Orfeo* broke all those rules. The chorus is an integral part of the opera, which has only named three characters: Orfeo, Euridice, and Amore. Orfeo does not first appear with a heavily embellished aria to show off his voice, but with three simple yet heartrending repetitions of “Euridice!” sung over a moving choral lament. The story of the opera is told with a directness that was revolutionary. Events unfold almost in real time, with a cumulative impact that even today can be overwhelming, which is why the Met’s production is performed without an intermission.

In addition to forsaking elaborately decorated da-capo arias in favor of simple, poignant vocal music that goes directly to the listener’s heart, Gluck did away with secco recitative accompanied by a harpsichord. Instead, the orchestra plays throughout, which also helps to unify the opera into a true musical drama.

*Orfeo* is often cited as an example of Gluck’s intention to reform opera. But his famous letter to Grand Duke Leopold, in which he declared, “I sought to restrict music to its true function, namely to serve the poetry by means of the expression without interrupting the action or diminishing its interest by useless and superfluous ornament,” was written in 1769, as the preface to his opera *Alceste*. That was seven years after *Orfeo*’s premiere. But there is no doubt that in *Orfeo*, Gluck the composer had truly anticipated Gluck the philosopher–reformer. At first, the Viennese public was cool to the new opera. But the work’s undeniable power won them over, and it was soon thrilling audiences throughout Germany and Scandinavia as well as in London.

Twelve years later, Gluck composed a new French version of *Orfeo* for the Paris Opéra, *Orphée et Eurydice*, which was a huge success. Among other changes, the title role was rewritten for a high tenor (in Vienna it was sung by the alto castrato Guadagni). The composer Hector Berlioz used this 1774 version as the basis for his own 1859 reworking of the opera for the great mezzo-soprano Pauline Viardot-Garcia, who wanted to sing the title role.

Many performances of *Orfeo* (or *Orphée*) are a combination of Gluck’s two versions—depending on what the conductor and/or the singer portraying Orfeo feel is appropriate. The premiere of the current production in 2007 was the first time that the Met had given Gluck’s original 1762 *Orfeo*.

The Met first did the opera in Boston, in 1885, in German. The first time it was done at the Metropolitan Opera House was in 1891, when it ended after Orfeo’s famous Act III aria, “Che farò.” The opening of a new production on December 23, 1909, with Toscanini conducting Louise Homer in the title role, Johanna Gadski as Euridice, and Alma Gluck as the Happy Shade, was one of the great evenings in Met history. Toscanini omitted the overture, and Homer added “Divinitiés du Styx” from Gluck’s *Alceste* at the end of Act I. But even so, writing over half a century later, Francis Robinson, an assistant manager of the Met, said, “It must have been as perfect a production as exists in the annals of opera.”
GIACOMO PUCCINI

MADAMA BUTTERFLY

One of opera’s most devastating tragedies returns in Anthony Minghella’s classic production. Soprano Hui He reprises her celebrated portrayal of the title geisha, opposite tenor Andrea Carè in his Met debut as Pinkerton. Pier Giorgio Morandi conducts.

**NOV** 2 mat, 6, 9 mat, 13, 16, 22, 25

Tickets from $25 | metopera.org
Toscanini went on to conduct *Orfeo* 24 times at the Met; Homer sang the title role 21 times. Both remain a company record. In Anne Homer’s biography of her mother, *Louise Homer and the Golden Age of Opera*, she sums up the reason *Orfeo* has remained such a powerful work for almost 250 years:

One of the miracles of this opera lay in the stark range of emotions. Gluck had found a way of encompassing the heights and depths of human experience. Side by side he had arrayed the ugly and the sublime—the terrors of the underworld, the ‘pure light’ of ineffable bliss. With the genius of poetry and economy, he had pitted the most deadly and fearsome horrors against the radiant power of love, and then transfixed his listeners with music so inspired that they were caught up irresistibly in the eternal conflict.

—Paul Thomason

Paul Thomason, who writes for numerous opera companies and symphony orchestras in the U.S. and abroad, has contributed to the Met’s program books since 1999.
In adapting the classic Orpheus myth for the operatic stage, Gluck focused on only three solo characters, but he also created a large role for the chorus, who serve as both Orfeo’s earthly companions and the denizens of the underworld. When conceiving his vibrant staging, director and choreographer Mark Morris envisioned the nearly 100-member chorus as witnesses from history. “They’re involved personally in Orfeo’s quest,” he says. Fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi created unique costumes for the choristers, transforming each of them into a
recognizable historic figure—from Cleopatra to George Washington to Maria Callas. Even Gluck himself is represented. Standing on three balconies facing the audience, they serve as a mirror to Orfeo’s story. “Surrounded both visually and musically by the chorus,” Met Chorus Master Donald Palumbo explains, “Orfeo’s struggle becomes more clearly focused. And with the individual costumes, representing figures from all centuries and professions, the chorus illustrates the universality and timeless allure of the Orpheus myth.” Rather than have this chorus of spirits interact physically with the principal characters, “a lot of the action of the chorus is done by dancers,” Morris says. “I wanted it to be a little ambiguous, a little bit confusing who’s doing what, so that the union of chorus and dancers feels inevitable and inseparable.” In the end, the juxtaposition of evocative contemporary choreography and familiar faces from the past lends a timeless quality to Gluck’s enduring tale of love and redemption.
All season long, the Met hosts a special exhibition that pays tribute to the extraordinary contributions of black artists on the company’s historic stage. Featuring nearly 170 archival photographs, newspaper clippings, costume designs, and more, Black Voices at the Met recounts a fascinating 120-year story showcasing the groundbreaking careers of such prominent singers as Marian Anderson, Robert McFerrin, Mattiwilda Dobbs, and Leontyne Price.

Black Voices at the Met is open now through the end of the 2019–20 season in Founders Hall, located on the Concourse level.
The Cast

Mark Wigglesworth
CONDUCTOR (FRISTON, ENGLAND)

This Season  Orfeo ed Euridice at the Met and concerts with the Juilliard Orchestra, Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo Symphony Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, and Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

Met Appearances  Le Nozze di Figaro (debut, 2005).

Career Highlights  He conducts regularly at English National Opera, including productions of Lulu, Don Giovanni, Jenůfa, Die Zauberflöte, La Forza del Destino, Parsifal, Kát’a Kabanová, Falstaff, Così fan tutte, and Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk. He has also appeared at Covent Garden, the Bavarian State Opera, the Glyndebourne Festival, Dutch National Opera, Welsh National Opera, and Opera Australia; in Dresden, Brussels, and Madrid; and with the Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, and Sydney Symphony Orchestra; among others. His book, The Silent Musician: Why Conducting Matters, was published in 2018.

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Jamie Barton
MEZZO-SOPRANO (ROME, GEORGIA)

This Season  Orfeo in Orfeo ed Euridice and Elizabeth I in Maria Stuarda at the Met, Léonor de Guzman in Donizetti's La Favorite at Houston Grand Opera, Princess Eboli in Don Carlo at the Dallas Opera, Fricka in Die Walküre at the Reykjavik Arts Festival, Brangäne in Tristan und Isolde at the Santa Fe Opera, and concerts in London, Atlanta, and San Francisco.


Career Highlights  Recent performances include Brangäne in concert at Lucerne Festival and in Amsterdam; Ježibaba, Sara in Roberto Devereux, Fricka in Das Rheingold and Die Walküre, and Waltraute and the Second Norn in Götterdämmerung at San Francisco Opera; Sister Helen Prejean in Jake Heggie's Dead Man Walking at Atlanta Opera; Azucena in Il Trovatore at Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Bavarian State Opera; Adalgisa at Houston Grand Opera; and Princess Eboli at Washington National Opera. She was the 2017 recipient of the Met’s Beverly Sills Award, established by Agnes Varis and Karl Leichtman.
THIS SEASON  Euridice in Orfeo ed Euridice and Mimì in La Bohème at the Met.

MET APPEARANCES  Since her 1984 debut as Servilia in La Clemenza di Tito, she has sung nearly 400 performances of 24 roles, including Liù in Turandot, Mimi, Micaëla in Carmen, Violetta in La Traviata, Juliette in Roméo et Juliette, the Countess and Susanna in Le Nozze di Figaro, Eva in Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, Antonia in Les Contes d’Hoffmann, Zerlina in Don Giovanni, Marzelline in Fidelio, Ilia in Idomeneo, Pamina in Die Zauberflöte, Frei in Das Rheingold, Rosina in John Corigliano’s The Ghosts of Versailles, Despina in Così fan tutte, and Gilda in Rigoletto.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS  She has performed at many of the world’s leading opera houses, including the Vienna State Opera, Covent Garden, La Scala, Bavarian State Opera, Paris Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera, Washington National Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Dallas Opera, LA Opera, and in Rome, Amsterdam, and Verona. She has also appeared with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, and Chicago Symphony Orchestra, among others. She was a winner of the Met’s 1982 National Council Auditions.