

THE COCKPIT

EO Ensemble
OrQuesta

20th February
2021 7.30pm

LIVE STREAM



XERSE

Cavalli

(Concert Version)

Marcio da Silva *Music Director*

Petra Hajduchova *Harpsichord*

Toby Carr *Theorbo*

Edmund Taylor, Eloise MacDonald *Violin*

Jacob Garside *Cello/Viola da gamba*

Nathan Mercieca *Xerse*

Sophie Levi-Roos *Romilda*

Alexander Pullinger *Arsamene*

Helen May *Amastre*

Celena Bridge *Adelanta*

Hugh Cutting *Elviro*

Thomas Kelly *Ariodate*

Sarah Parkin *Eumene*

John Holland-Avery *Periarco*

Katie Dobson *Clito*

Marcio da Silva *Aristone*

www.ensembleorquesta.com

2021 Opera Academies - United Kingdom

'This ensemble is certainly one to watch'

Tim Hochstrasser - Live Theatre UK Reviews

'tempestuous evening of operatic delight'

'an enchanting revival by the enterprising Ensemble OrQuesta and Brazilian director Marcio da Silva'

Peter Barker, Traffic Light Theatre Goer GREEN



29th April to 9th May, Hastings

Le Nozze di Figaro (Mozart)

(Tuition fee: £750)



2nd to 9th July, Hastings

Dido and Aeneas (Purcell)

(Tuition fee: £500)



27th July to 5th Aug, London

Céphale et Procris (de la Guerre)

(Tuition fee: £650)



5th to 13th August, London

Teseo (Handel)

(Tuition fee: £700)

- Performance of a role in a fully staged production in original language with professional orchestra accompaniment.
- Tuition on style, pronunciation, movement, acting and vocal technique.
- Professional pictures.
- Application requirements: cv and recording to auditions@ensembleorquesta.com
- Roles will be allocated upon receipt of suitable applications.
- Few roles remaining for 2021: please apply promptly.

Ensemble OrQuesta was created in 2013 by its artistic director Marcio da Silva. It brings together artists who are dedicated to performing Baroque music in all its richness and diversity to the highest of standards. In recent years Ensemble OrQuesta have taken their professional productions to the Grimeborn Festival at the Arcola Theatre and to other venues in the UK and abroad. These productions have secured considerable critical acclaim. Since 2014 Ensemble OrQuesta has organised a series of highly regarded opera academies each year. The purpose of these academies is to give singers from all over the world the opportunity to perform entire roles in a fully staged opera production, with orchestral accompaniment. Singers benefit from ten days of intensive tuition and training from the Ensemble OrQuesta team of specialists, being coached on style, acting, language, technique and movement. Marcio da Silva and Stephanie Gurga are at the heart of this team, but other contributors have included: stage director Jenny Miller, counter-tenor Victor Soares, lutenist Taro Tacheuchi, conductor Neylson Crepalde, Italian Coach Alessandra Fasolo, movement coach Patrick Dailey, and others. Marcio da Silva is both stage and musical director of the productions but is particularly grateful for Stephanie's musical expertise and support. The increasing success of these academies has lured singers from all over the world: Ireland, France, Canada, USA, Brazil, Romania, Hong Kong, Denmark, Spain, Portugal, Japan, Russia, Georgia, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Sweden, Israel, Greece, Austria, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Argentina and across the UK.

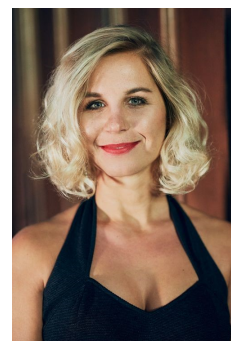
This production of *Xerse* grew out of the 13th Ensemble OrQuesta opera academy, which was held in London in July 2018, and it was then taken to the Arcola Theatre as part of the Grimeborn Festival in August of the same year. This year The Cockpit had invited Ensemble OrQuesta to stage a run of *Xerse* performances in the theatre, but unfortunately Covid-19 had other plans! However, they were delighted to take up the offer of using the services of The Cockpit's excellent team of technicians for this livestreamed concert version instead. The company very much hope that you enjoy this, and look forward to welcoming you to one of their live performances in the near future. They are particularly looking forward to their performances of Handel's *Alcina* at the Grimeborn Festival at the Arcola Theatre in August (dates to be announced in due course), a production which they hope to take on tour in September.



Music Director - born in Brazil, **Marcio da Silva** studied singing, and choral and orchestral conducting at the Conservatoire de Toulouse, France. He received his Bachelor of Music degree in orchestral conducting from the Hochschule für Musik, Freiburg, Germany, before moving to London to undertake a Masters in orchestral conducting at the Royal College of Music. During this time, he was one of three conductors to take part in the London Symphony Orchestra Conducting Master Class with Sir Colin Davis and was one of the three finalists at the Princess Astrid International Conducting Competition. As a guest conductor Marcio has conducted orchestras in Poland, Italy, Czech Republic, Germany, Turkey, Norway, Brazil and Kosovo. Marcio was Music Director of Woodhouse Opera from 2012 until its final season in 2018, and he is the founder of the Ensemble OrQuesta. In these roles he has conducted and directed over 20 fully staged productions of operas ranging from less regularly performed works such as Lully's *Armide*, to popular works such as *Carmen*, *The Magic Flute* and *La Boheme*. This year he will stage and music direct Cavalli's *L'Egisto* for Hampstead Garden Opera. He is also music director of the Hastings Philharmonic Choir and Grange Choral Society, and artistic director of the Hastings Philharmonic Orchestra. www.marciodasilva.com

Harpsichord - **Petra Hajduchova** completed her studies at Trinity College of Music, London and was awarded a TCM Scholarship, the Raymond Russel Prize and the June Emerson Wind Music Launchpad Prize. Petra is known for her radio and television work, including a live broadcast on BBC Radio 3, and has recently recorded with The Harmonious Society of Tickle-Fiddle Gentlemen. Petra is in high demand as a soloist (harpsichord, piano and organ), choir accompanist, orchestral and chamber musician and has performed in Austria, Czech Republic, France, Italy, Palma de Mallorca, Spain, Turkey and here in England for leading ensembles such as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, London Mozart Players, National Symphony Orchestra, European Union Chamber Orchestra, The Locrian Ensemble, Trafalgar Sinfonia, London Concertante, Belsize Baroque and others. In addition to performing, Petra enjoys teaching piano and harpsichord and has participated in several educational projects with the English Concert, the Amadè Players and London Piano Masters.

www.petraharpsichord.com





Theorbo: Toby Carr is a lutenist and guitarist from London. Known as an engaging and responsive artist, Toby performs with some of the finest musicians in the business. Having studied at Trinity Laban and the Guildhall School he is now active as a soloist, continuo player and chamber musician working in the field of historically informed performance, bringing old music to new audiences in exciting and innovative ways. This has included working with many of the foremost period instrument groups around, including Dunedin Consort, Academy of Ancient Music, The English Concert, La Nuova Musica, and Irish Baroque Orchestra. Toby has also worked for the Royal Ballet, London Philharmonic Orchestra, RTE Symphony Orchestra, Longborough Festival Opera and for English Touring Opera for four tours from 2016-2020. Toby is a founding member of Ceruleo and Lux Musicae London and appears on a recent recording of the works of Barbara Strozzi by Fieri Consort. In 2019 he made his Wigmore Hall debut with Dame Emma Kirkby and her group Dowland Works. www.tobycarr.co.uk

Violin I - Edmund Taylor is a violinist specialising in historical performance. After training at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Edmund founded the period instrument ensemble Bellot Ensemble, to give talented soloists the opportunity to perform early music concertos, as well as to perform a variety of repertoire from the renaissance to the classical period. Edmund has directed his group in such venues as St George's Hanover Square and the Chapel of St Peter and St Paul, alongside choral directors such as Ralph Allwood MBE, as well as working closely with singers such as the award-winning Julien Van Mellaerts. In 2019 the Bellot Ensemble gave the UK premiere of Telemann's reconstructed 'Erklingt Durch Gedoppelt Annehmliche Töne' Cantata. Edmund performs regularly across the UK and Europe as a violinist and leader for other period instrument ensembles and has a particular passion for operatic works from the Baroque period. He is also a music lecturer at CityLit in central London, and is co-founder of the charitable initiative healingnotesmusic, set up to provide virtual concerts for hardworking NHS staff during these difficult times.



Violin II - Eloise MacDonald enjoys an active freelance career as a chamber musician and orchestral player (modern and historical violin). In 2019 she graduated with a Master's (Distinction) from the Royal College of Music. She also completed an Erasmus at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris. Eloise has performed at festivals such as the Gstaad Menuhin Festival, Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme, WYE Valley Winter Festival and Roman River Festival, and her performances have been broadcast on BBC Radio 4, ARTE TV, NTS Radio and Resonance FM. Her awards include the International Music Competition London Grand Prize Virtuoso, Jonathan Willcocks Prize and Edward Alleyn String Prize. A keen chamber musician, Eloise has performed in venues such as Buckingham Palace, Southbank Centre and King's Place with the Maconchy Quartet, and she has enjoyed curating the concert series RETAKE which launched on International Women's Day with support from Arts Council England. Eloise is a current a member of Southbank Sinfonia and is looking forward to performances with the London Sinfonietta Academy and Sinfonia Cymru.



Cello and viola da gamba - Jacob Garside took up the cello at the age of 12. In the sixth form he attended the Centre for Advanced Training at Sage Gateshead, prior to reading Music at the University of Bristol. There he took cello lessons with Ioan Davies (Fitzwilliam Quartet), conducted the University Baroque Ensemble and String Orchestra and was principal cellist for the Opera and Musical Theatre societies' productions. As a soloist, Jacob has premiered Change Sung-a's Concerto for Cello and String Orchestra. Jacob was very involved in the University's New Music Ensemble and led projects with the Contemporary Music Venture, focusing on new music written for period instruments. He went on to study cello and viola da gamba in the Historical Performance Department of the Royal Academy of Music, assisted by a scholarship from the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. He is co-principal cellist of the Zeitgeist Chamber Orchestra and the Bellot Ensemble. During lockdown Jacob has recorded CDs with La Nuova Musica and Fretwork.





Xerse: Nathan Mercieca, countertenor, studied at Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, where he was Senior Choral Exhibitioner, and subsequently completed postgraduate studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Operatic roles include Peisander (cover) in Monteverdi *The Return of Ulysses* (Royal Opera House), “JL” in John Ramster’s staging of Handel’s *Messiah* (Merry Opera), Arsamene in Cavalli’s *Xerse* at the Grimeborn Festival (Ensemble OrQuesta), and Sorceress/Spirit in Purcell *Dido and Aeneas* (Armonico). A keen exponent of contemporary opera, he originated all the male roles in Clare Elton & Lila Palmer *These Wondering Stones* (Barbican Centre/Museum of London), Daryl/the Devil in Muelas & Ward *A&E* (Tête-à-Tête Festival) and workshopped the role of Yoël in Na’ama Zisser’s *Mamzer/Bastard* (Royal Opera House). During lockdowns he has undertaken online recordings, including Mark Bowler and Gareth Matthey’s new opera *Little England*. Future work includes: chorus Le Concert d’Astrée, Purcell, *Dido and Aeneas*, and concert tour and recording with Solomon’s Knot. Nathan also holds a PhD in musicology from Royal Holloway, University of London, and teaches a variety of historical and analytical topics at Cambridge University. www.nathanmercieca.com

Romilda: Sophie Levi-Roos is a British/French, secular Jewish soprano from Leeds. She studied and trained at The University of Birmingham, RWCMD and Drama, and the National Opera Studio. Roles have included Ottavia with *Ensemble OrQuesta*, Donna Anna, Countess Almaviva and Susanna, Vixen Sharp-Ears, and Adina. Sophie has been working with Marcio and Ensemble OrQuesta for several years in different capacities, including assistant directing, lighting and makeup design, as well as performing a variety of roles. She is incredibly appreciative of all the opportunities that Ensemble OrQuesta has offered her. Future engagements include scenes as Juliette and Lady Macbeth in ‘The Darker side of Shakespeare’ as part of *Wexford Festival Opera’s* Pocket Opera series, and the title role in Handel’s *Alcina* for the 2021 *Grimeborn Festival* at the Arcola Theatre. She will act as Assistant Director alongside Marcio for *Ensemble OrQuesta’s* Academy production of Handel’s *Teseo*, and for Hampstead Garden Opera’s production of Cavalli’s *L’Egisto* at The Cockpit. www.sophielevisoprano.com

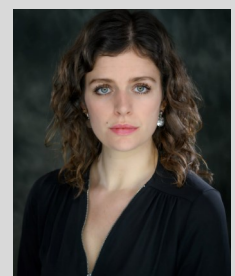


Ariodate: Alexander Pullinger is a countertenor, teacher and LGBTQ+ advocate. Roles include: Armindo (Handel, *Partenope*, Hampstead Garden Opera); the Sorceress (Purcell, *Dido and Aeneas*); Ruggiero (Handel, *Alcina*); Cesare (Handel, *Giulio Cesare*, Kent Opera); Annio (Mozart, *La clemenza di Tito*, Kent Opera); Selene, sister of Dido (Jommelli, *La Didone*, London Handel Festival); Ottone (Monteverdi *L’incoronazione di Poppea*). Ensemble work includes projects with Binchois Consort and Chamber Choir Ireland, and choral outreach with Armonico Consort and L’Offerta Musicale di Venezia. As a teacher, Alex joined the team at the National Children’s Choir of Great Britain Easter Course (2019), and in 2020 he was invited to facilitate a workshop at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama on designing set and costume with opera singers in mind. With generous support from Sound Connections, Alexander recently spent time researching how to make singing more trans-inclusive. His work was featured on *Classical Music UK* and *Pink News* and has been platformed on the websites of the National Association of Teachers of Singing and LGBTQ+ History Month. Future roles include: Lidio (Cavalli, *L’Egisto*, Hampstead Garden Opera). www.alexanderpullinger.co.uk



Amastre – Soprano Helen May graduated from the Royal Academy of Music with a Master’s in Vocal Performance (Distinction) and a DipRAM for outstanding final recital performance. In 2020 she was nominated for an OFFIE Award for her performance as Calisto in Cavalli’s *La Calisto* at The Cockpit. Helen has undertaken roles for Woodhouse Opera, Hampstead Garden Opera, Royal Academy Opera, Ensemble OrQuesta, Barefoot Opera, Opera Anywhere, Bury Court Opera, and Oxfordshire Contemporary Opera, among others. Roles have included: Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*, Mozart); Despina (*Così fan tutte*, Mozart); First Lady (*The Magic Flute*, Mozart); Barbarina (*Le Nozze di Figaro*, Mozart); Galatea (*Acis and Galatea*, Handel); Morgana (*Alcina*, Handel); Nerone and Valletto (*L’Incoronazione di Poppea*, Monteverdi); Diane (*Hippolyte et Aricie*, Rameau); Giannetta (*L’elisir d’amore*, Donizetti); Woodpecker (*The Cunning Little Vixen*, Janáček); Nimue (*Merlin*, premiere, Keith Beal) and cover Aurora (*Aurora*, premiere, Noah Moseley). Forthcoming roles include: Countess Almaviva, (*Le Nozze di Figaro*, Mozart); Medea (*Teseo*, Handel); Climene (*L’Egisto*, Cavalli); Alcina (*Alcina*, Handel); and cover Jenůfa (*Jenůfa*, Janáček).

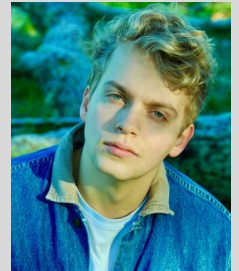
www.helenmaysoprano.com





Adelanta: Soprano **Celena Bridge** graduated with honours from the Royal Academy of Music and was the recipient of the prestigious Rutson Memorial Prize. In 2017, she completed her training with English National Opera on their celebrated Young Artist Opera Works programme. Professionally Celena has worked for a number of leading UK opera companies, including English National Opera, West Green House Opera, Opera Della Luna and Iford Arts. Since 2018 Celena has also toured Europe with her two solo shows 'La Scala to the Savoy' and 'From Stage and Screen'. Celena has a busy concert schedule, performing in some of the UK's top classical music concert venues, highlights including The Royal Albert Hall, St Georges, Hannover Square, and St Paul's Cathedral. In film, Celena played the role of an opera singer in Stephen Poliakoff's film 'Capturing Mary', starring Dame Maggie Smith, Ruth Wilson and David Walliams, recording the soundtrack at Abbey Road Studios, London.
www.celenabridge.com

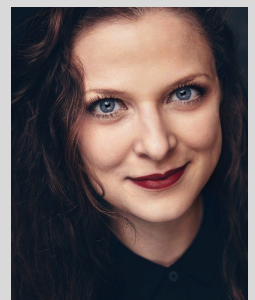
Elviro - Hugh Cutting is a British countertenor based in London where he is currently completing a Master's in Vocal Performance at the Royal College of Music. In September he will be joining the RCM International Opera Studio. Previously he studied music at St John's College, Oxford, where he held a Choral Scholarship. Recent performances have included those with The English Concert, Solomon's Knot, and The King's Consort. Upcoming roles include Arsace in Handel's *Partenope* conducted by William Christie and Paul Agnew, a role he undertakes as one of the six laureates of the 10th edition of Le Jardin des Voix, the academy for young baroque soloists run by Les Arts Florissants. This summer he will also perform the role of Bertarido in Handel's *Rodelinda* with the RCM International Opera Studio. Other engagements include *Messiah* with Britten Sinfonia at the Barbican (December 2021), and appearances on an upcoming CD release of German Baroque arias with Iestyn Davies and Fretwork.



Ariodate: The English lyric tenor **Thomas Kelly** recently graduated from the Royal Academy of Music with a Master's in Vocal Performance. He has performed a range of opera roles with ensembles such as The English Concert and The Early Opera Company, from Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and Charpentier's *Actéon* to ground-breaking staged performances of Handel's *Messiah* at the Bristol Old Vic. Tom has extensive choral experience having begun life as a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral, and having served as a lay clerk in the choirs of Manchester Cathedral and New College, Oxford. He has pursued a varied ensemble career singing as a full-time member of Stile Antico and the Fieri Consort, and regularly for groups such as the Gabrieli Consort, The Monteverdi Choir, The Sixteen, Tenebrae, The Tallis Scholars, Polyphony, Collegium Vocale Gent, the Marian Consort and Dunedin Consort. Tom is looking forward to upcoming projects that include making the role of Emile L'Angelier for Surrey Opera's world premiere production of David Hackbridge Johnson and Jonathan Butcher's *Madeleine*, and Hipparco (*L'Egisto*) for Hampstead Garden Opera.



Eumene: Soprano **Sarah Parkin** appears frequently on the opera and concert platform in contemporary music, notably in *A Certain Sense of Order* (tick tock opera) and originating roles with UU Productions (for *Tête-à-Tête*). She is a regular deviser of new works for scratch performances. Sarah has collaborated with new music company Hanbury & Groves, developing electronic and contemporary opera (*Rough for Opera*, *Helios Collective*); and has appeared with the 10/10 Ensemble (Royal Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool), as well as in the Left Bank Opera Festival (Leeds), the Polyphonic Poetry Festival (Cambridge) and a moving sound installation at London Cavalcade. Sarah collaborates with composers internationally, including Martyna Kosecka (Spectro Centre of New Music, Poland/Iran), Alastair White (London), Jack Sheen (Manchester), and Robert Godman (Cambridge). In 2021, Sarah will create the soprano role in 'A Kinder Society' - an immersive chamber opera by Amy Bryce (supported by an International Music Grant from the Stiftung Kunst und Musik für Dresden), and will reprise her original roles (Beira/Edinburgh) in Alastair White's 'Robe' for CD release (Metier label). www.sarahparkin.com



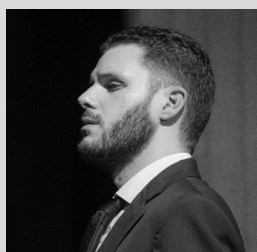


Periarco: British-Iranian baritone, **John Hormoz Holland-Avery**, is a prize-winning postgraduate from the Royal Northern College of Music. Operatic credits include: Chorus in Bart's *Oliver!* and Verdi's *Don Carlo* (Grange Park Opera); title role, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*; Hidraot/Ubalde, Lully's *Armide*; Bellone/Ali, Rameau's *Les Indes Galantes*; Guglielmo, Mozart's *Così fan Tutte* (Ensemble OrQuesta); Don Alfonso, Mozart's *Così fan Tutte* (Devon Opera); Traveller, Britten's *Curlew River* (Opera Xylem), Step-Out Baritone (cover), Noah Mosley's *Aurora* (Bury Court Opera); Pluton, Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie* (Ensemble OrQuesta); Alidoro (cover), Rossini's *La Cenerentola* (British Youth Opera); Dr Falke, J. Strauss II's *Die Fledermaus* (Windsor and Eton Opera); Dottore, Verdi's *La Traviata* (Teddington); Giove, Cavalli's *La Calisto* (Ensemble OrQuesta), and Harasta, Janacek's *Cunning Little Vixen* (Riverside Opera). He is a founding member of Eboracum Baroque and recently recorded Handel's *Messiah* for release later in 2021. Future plans include Hipparco, Cavalli's *L'Egisto* (Hampstead Garden Opera), and Melisso, Handel's *Alcina* (Ensemble OrQuesta). www.john.hollandavery.com

Clito: British soprano, **Katie Dobson** holds a BMus from Royal Holloway, University of London, and a Master's in Vocal Performance from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Operatic roles include: Belinda (*Dido and Aeneas*, Purcell, Edinburgh Studio Opera); Nella (*Gianni Schicchi*, Puccini, Edinburgh Studio Opera); La Novizia (Puccini, *Suor Angelica*); Second Lady (Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*) and covers of Susanna (Mozart, *Nozze di Figaro*) and Adele (Johann Strauss II, *Die Fledermaus*). As a soloist and recitalist, she is forging a career as a Baroque and Contemporary soprano, performing across Scotland and the UK, including performing in the Edinburgh Festival, collaborating with the Kellie Consort, and recording a new opera with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. Katie also assists in a pedagogical role at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, introducing children aged 1-4 to music and linguistics through play. Katie also works with Enable Scotland. During lockdown she qualified as an English teacher and learned to play the ukelele.



Aristone - Marcio da Silva (baritone): As a boy soprano Marcio performed as a soloist in Germany, Italy and Brazil for audiences of over 32,000 people. In 1998 he studied in Arizona, graduating from the renowned Phoenix Boys Choir. Marcio gained extensive experience in opera, first as a child soloist at Palacio das Artes in Belo Horizonte, and subsequently at the Théâtre du Capitole de Toulouse, Théâtre des Champs Elysees and Théâtre du Chatelet in France. Marcio received his Diplôme d'Études Musicales (Voice) from the Conservatoire de Toulouse, his BMus from Hochschule für Musik, Freiburg and his MA from the Royal College of Music. Marcio has performed the roles of Arnalta (*L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, Monteverdi); Mercurio (*La Callisto*, Cavalli); Colas (*Bastien et Bastienne*, Mozart); La Haine (*Armide*, Lully); Aeneas (*Dido & Aeneas*, Purcell); and Thésée (*Hippolyte et Aricie*, Rameau). Although focusing on conducting and on stage/music directing, Marcio also works as a vocal coach. He specialises in baroque repertoire and, due to his fluency in 7 languages and broad musical experience, he is able to offer guidance on vocal technique, style, language, and stage craft.



EO Ensemble
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The challenges of producing *Xerse*

There are a range of challenges involved in preparing a work such as *Xerse* for performance. The first lies in the nature of the score itself. For this concert version the Paris score, a copy commemorating the 1660 production, has been used. The Parisian version of *Xerse* has two main sources: a manuscript score (currently held in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*), which was copied in 1695 by Louis XIV's librarian, François Fossard, and a printed script, published in 1660 by Robert Ballard.

This **Parisian score** contains many mistakes and inconsistencies. The Ensemble OrQuesta team - Marcio da Silva, Stephanie Gurga, and Cédric Meyer - devoted many hours to transcribing and correcting inaccuracies, inconsistencies and contradictions in order to arrive at a first version which has then been thoroughly revised by Marcio for this concert. This process also involved ensuring that the proportions of the opera were both musically and dramatically appropriate - the story needed to be told in a fluid and convincing way.

An additional hurdle was the need to make sense of the ancient Italian text. The translation used here was made by Marcio da Silva and once again this has been specially revised for tonight's concert. In itself the translation process necessitated an element of interpretation and what one might term intelligent guesswork, informed by knowledge of the historical context and contemporary performance practice.



In determining the final shape of the performance, the modern audience was also taken into account. It must be remembered that most operas of that time, and indeed even later, were performed in a completely different setting than the formal setting opted for in current times. In the 17th century audiences would not have expected to sit and watch an opera in silence from beginning to end - for example, *Xerse* in its Paris form included an additional one and a half hours of ballet suites, as well as hours of musical numbers. That said, surviving manuscripts that include Cavalli's own working annotations from performances of *Xerse* in Venice, Genoa, Naples and Bologna clearly demonstrate that he often amended, cut, and moved material as each production was being prepared. Every performance was in many ways organic - Cavalli himself understood the importance of pleasing his audience. In light of these considerations, whilst endeavouring to remain faithful to Cavalli's original intentions, what is presented here is a version of the original piece which can be followed and enjoyed by a modern audience.

Symbolism in *Xerse*

Some words of explanation about **symbolism** in the piece may be useful to you, to help enhance your understanding of the storyline; even if you peruse the programme notes assiduously and follow the sub-titles with a keen eye these early operas can be slightly mystifying. The tree in this performance represents **Xerse** and his power. For me this story seems to centre as much on power as it does on love, despite the apparent focus on love in the narrative. In fact, **Arсамene** is perhaps the only character who acts out of pure love; every other character is inclined to put power and status before anything else. **Xerse**, **Romilda**, **Adelanta**, and even **Amastre**, seem to be acting more than anything in 'survival mode', trying to get whatever they believe will ensure their power or superiority over others, whether it be a sibling or the world in general. However, in order to enrich the dramatic action, I have added a degree of sincere love from **Aristone** towards **Amastre**, and an element of love from **Elviro** towards **Arсамene**, and some light reciprocal love interest between **Clito** and **Elviro**, as the musical interactions between the characters seemed to indicate these possibilities.

Marcio da Silva

The plot of *Xerse*

The plot of *Xerse* involves a complex web of characters, and the usual interplay of misadventure and misunderstanding that one expects of a 17th century opera story: women disguised as men, sexual scheming, political manoeuvring, jealousy, jilted and unrequited lovers, and hapless emotional misjudgements, alongside some (slightly random) pseudo-social commentary masquerading as mildly 'comic relief'.

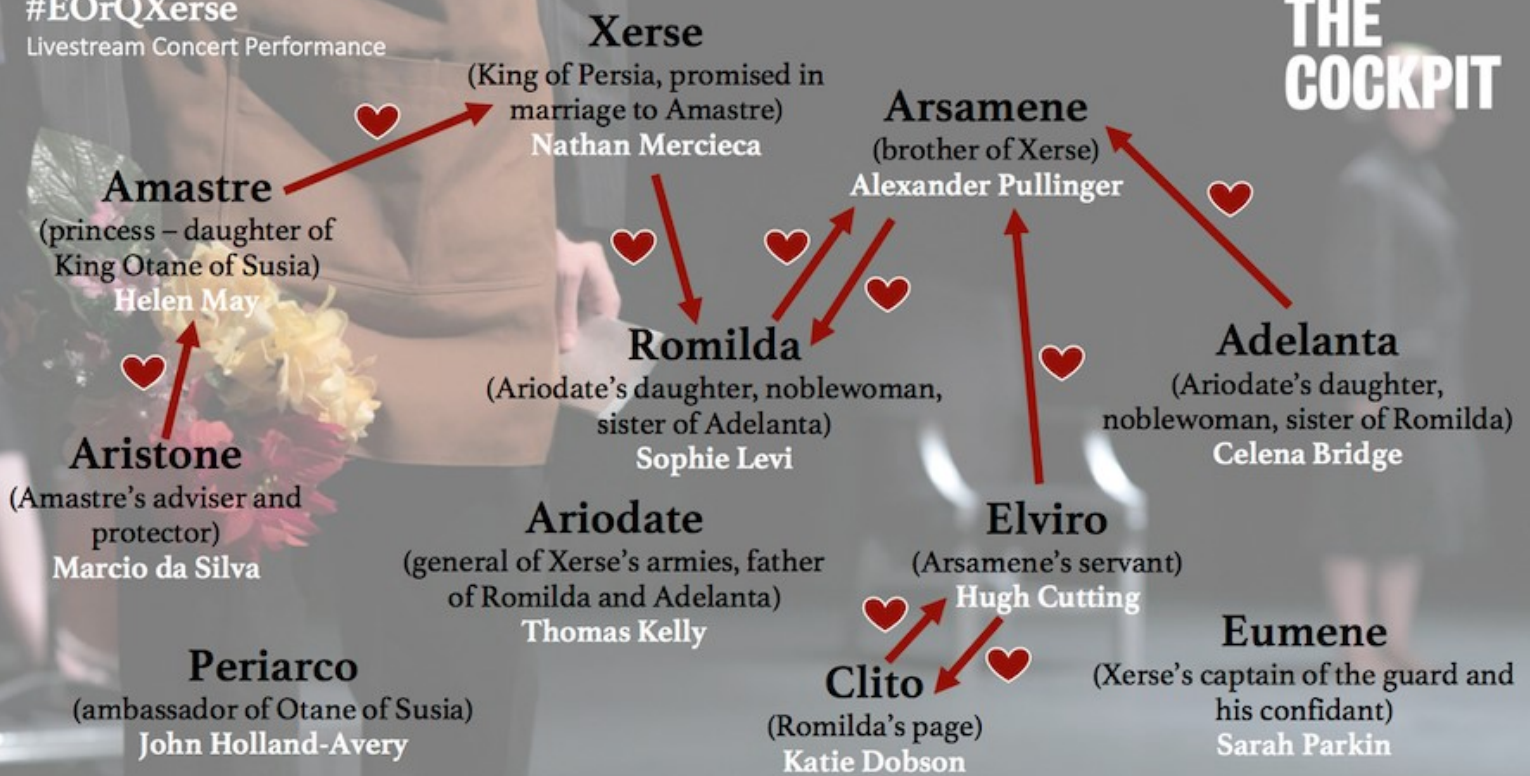
It concerns the distinctly un-regal behaviour of **Xerse**, King of Persia, who forsakes his betrothed (**Amastre**, daughter of King Otane of Susia), and becomes enamoured with the noblewoman, **Romilda**. However, Romilda loves, and is loved by, his brother **Arсамene**, who in turn is loved by Romilda's sister **Adelanta**. A complicated mix-up ensues, when a servant lets a love-letter fall into the wrong hands, and misunderstandings arise on all sides.



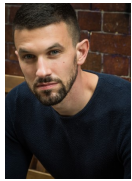
#EOrQXerse

Livestream Concert Performance

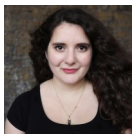
THE COCKPIT



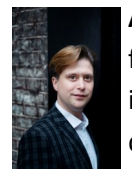
Some character notes, to help you to follow the narrative



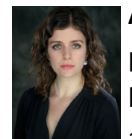
Xerse: Although the Parisian audience may have been presented with a benign and courtly king, this performance returns Xerse to his exotic Eastern roots. His behaviour is despotic and excessive, slightly crazy at times. He clearly enjoys seeing Arsamene and everyone else bow to his power. It is evident that part of the reason that he first desires Romilda is because he knows that his brother Arsamene is in love with her. He considers himself irresistible due to his position and his status; his pride is wounded, and he is driven to desperation by Romilda's rejection, and her refusal to submit to his wishes in spite of everything he is offering her. When he finally changes his mind about Amastre, he seems to do so in order to take personal control of the situation by 'choosing' Amastre, and to reassert his dominance by punishing Romilda and Arsamene with death.



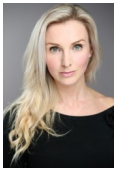
Romilda: Romilda, a noblewoman who is betrothed to Arsamene at the start of the opera, is conflicted by her situation. She undoubtedly feels flattered by Xerse's attentions, although she is also frightened at the prospect of union with him and torn by her feelings for Arsamene. She understands why her father would want her to be Queen, and indeed she feels tempted by the idea herself. She is in a quandary – she fears delaying acceptance of Xerse, for fear of missing the opportunity that is offered, but also fears what the prospect might actually involve. Ultimately her decisions are based on self-interest and, one might almost say, spite. The point at which she finally decides to reject Xerse is when she realizes that her sister, Adelanta, desires Arsamene for herself. From then onwards she is determined to show that *she* is the one who has the power over Arsamene, and therefore, by extension, power over Adelanta.



Arsamene: Arsamene, royal brother of Xerse, is the only character who seems to be driven by pure love. His feelings for Romilda are strong and true; he reiterates these with passion, even when he is wounded by Romilda's apparent infidelity, threatened by Adelanta's scheming, and challenged by Xerse's deception. In his actions and words are displayed deep feelings of rejection, anger, injustice, and hopelessness, as well as steadfast love.



Amastre: Can we be forgiven for seeing something of the feminist in Amastre? Even though she is a princess, her position does not bring any power with it. The fact that she set out from Arraca instead of remaining there at the behest of her father, tells us a great deal about her strength of character and determination. In disguising herself as a man perhaps she is seeking greater power and recognition: the ability to actually influence people, events and situations rather than being content to remain passive. She stands out amongst the sober Persians because she blazes with anger. When she is driven to such a point of despair that she considers killing herself, she is not doing so out of love; this is just a desperate bid to influence her destiny. It seems surprising that she is prepared to bond with Xerse in the end unless you view this as Amastre recognising that union with Xerse will at last bring her a new dimension of royal power.



Adelanta: Adelanta (Romilda's sister) is manipulative and highly competitive – willing to do whatever it takes to get what she wants. As the opportunities arise, she develops a plan which she hopes will enable her to snatch Arsamene away from Romilda. It is interesting that it is Arsamene that she desires, rather than Xerse. Clearly it is not pure power per se that she craves; rather perhaps it is sibling rivalry or jealousy that directs her machinations towards her sister's lover. It is doubtful whether love drives her actions at any point: instead, her emotions include anger, hopelessness, a craving for power (the ability to manipulate others) and desire for vengeance.



Elviro: Elviro is the servant of Arsamene (the brother of Xerse). As is often the case in opera, Elviro plays a pivotal role in the plot as a messenger, primarily because he allows a love-letter to fall into the wrong hands. The resultant misunderstandings not only lead to heartbreak but also threaten unfortunate political ramifications. But Elviro is not only used for convenient narrative purposes. Cavalli was one of the leading opera composers of his time, and he recognised that a winning formula should include vitality as well as dramatic atmosphere if it was to be accessible to his audience. Enter Elviro, part of whose role was to provide some light-hearted relief and some slightly tongue-in-cheek social commentary. Of course, this element was played down somewhat for the Parisian audience who rather preferred their tragedy to be comedy free, but the interactions between Elviro and Clito still raise a smile.



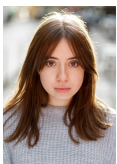
Ariodate: Ariodate is the general who commands Xerse's forces, and he is father to Romilda and Adelanta. He is highly excited when he believes that he has worked out from the hints given by Xerse that his daughter Romilda might be destined to marry Xerse himself, so much so that Romilda finds his enthusiasm rather annoying. Perhaps understandably he is devastated and full of shame and fear when he discovers that Xerse did not intend Romilda to be his bride. He is filled with joy when he learns that his daughter actually seems destined to marry Arsamene, since securing a marriage into the royal family ensures great status and power. In the 17th century context, it was concern for family position and influence which determined his reactions, and Xerse's fickle behaviour and the unfortunate political repercussions at the close of events indicate that he was wise in that regard.



Eumene: Eumene is a ruthless servant who believes that everything is justifiable in order to secure order and Xerse's kingdom. At the outset Eumene seems to be keen to find a sensible solution to the problem of Arsamene and Romilda, but when Arsamene does not step aside and allow Xerse to have his will - choosing instead to challenge Xerse's power - it is Eumene who emphasises that killing Arsamene and Romilda is a necessity. We gain insight into the full extent of Eumene's ruthlessness in the singing of the 'needle aria', as the 'death hoods' for Arsamene and Romilda are sewn.



Periarco: trusted ambassador of King Otane of Susia, father of Amastre, Periarco is the man responsible for ensuring that the complex political negotiations that led to the much-desired arrangement for Xerse to marry Amastre come to fruition. His task seems to be far from easy, since the princess is no shrinking violet. Feisty and strong-minded, Amastre has refused to remain in Arraca, where she had been sent by her father. Instead, she has set off with determination to shape her own destiny. Periarco, blundering in pursuit, tries to intervene somewhat ineffectually to prevent too many unfortunate political repercussions, but he discovers that both Amastre and Xerse have rather different ideas



Clito: As the plot unfolds, Romilda's page, Clito, gets sent on various errands which inevitably ensure that events become ever more complex. Although 17th century operas tended to be intense and dramatic in tone, space was always created for some light relief. Since Xerse is positively bristling with sexual scheming, political manoeuvring, jealousy, betrayal, and hapless emotional misjudgement, Cavalli left threads of a sub-plot in this Parisian version to create contrasting comedic moments and to provide the opportunity for some social commentary. Clito enjoys some delightfully flirtatious interactions with Elviro and shares in some slightly raunchy song choices.



Aristone: described as Amastre's adviser and protector, Aristone is perhaps best viewed as her long-standing and long-suffering tutor. The storyline tells us that Aristone had to hot-foot it from Arraca in pursuit of his rather headstrong charge. His role in the drama is clear; his companionship means that Amastre has a confidant – someone with whom she can share her anger about Xerse's betrayal, and her burgeoning feelings of extreme desperation. But close observers will also sense an additional dimension to his involvement. Aristone's concern for Amastre is tinged with self-interest because his actions are at least partly driven by his own love for the princess. He fears that Xerse is an unworthy match for his fiercely loyal and steadfast young charge, and he is full of anguish when Amastre looks set to forgive Xerse's negligent behaviour.

Historical context



Francesco Cavalli (1602-1676) was born in the city of Crema, in northern Italy, as Francesco Caletti-Bruni. Cavalli's first teacher was his father: the composer and organist, Giovanni Battista Caletti, who was the *maestro di capella* of Crema cathedral. From the mid 15th century, after periods under the sway of the Visconti and Guelph Benzoni family, the city of Crema passed under the rule of the Venetian Republic. When he was fourteen, Francesco's remarkable singing voice attracted the attention of Crema's Venetian Governor, Federico Cavalli, who took him to Venice and enrolled him as a boy soprano in the chapel choir at the basilica of San Marco. When Francesco became famous as a gifted singer, he changed his name from Caletti-Bruni, taking on his patron's surname, Cavalli.

The years that followed were formative ones for Cavalli. St Mark's was the 'state church' for the powerful Venetian Republic, and, since it served as the location for great public ceremonies such as the installation and burials of Doges, the basilica was a thriving musical centre. During his time there Cavalli had the opportunity to work under Claudio Monteverdi, who had taken over the role of *maestro di capella* at the basilica in 1613, having been dismissed from the court of the Duke of Mantua due to cost-cutting and court intrigue. Monteverdi was not only a gifted choirmaster and string player but was also a prolific composer of sacred and secular music, and a pioneer in the field of opera. It is not known whether Cavalli studied formally under Monteverdi, but it is known that Cavalli collaborated in the composition of Monteverdi's final opera *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (1642).

The young Cavalli made impressive musical progress. For a decade from 1620 he became organist at the church of San Giovanni e Paolo; in 1639 he was appointed second organist at St Mark's, he rose to the position of first organist in 1665, and ultimately, in 1668, to the position of *maestro di capella*. His first published work, the solo motet '*Cantate Domino*' (1625), marked the opening of a composing career that included wide-ranging compositions. However, he is primarily remembered for his operas, twenty-seven of which are still extant. A study of these operas provides a unique opportunity to trace Cavalli's evolving and influential role during a significant period of musical development - although opera was still quite a new medium when Cavalli began working, by the end of his career it had matured into a popular public spectacle.

Cavalli and opera

Cavalli began to write for the stage in 1639, with his first opera being *Le nozze di Teti e di Peleo*. This was written soon after the first public opera house - the *Teatro San Cassiano* - opened in Venice. Cavalli was more than just a composer for this production. Courtesy of the landholdings and dowry of his wealthy Venetian wife, he had been able to invest in the *San Cassiano*, and, since Cavalli ran the company as well as composing for it, he was acutely sensitive to the needs and expectations of his audience.

Public opera was a rising genre - there would soon be 16 opera houses in action to satisfy public demand - and Cavalli became one of the leading opera composers of his time. He set out to produce an accessible, repeatable formula which had the necessary vitality and dramatic atmosphere to be enjoyable for his audiences.

Prior to 1651 Cavalli's favoured librettist was Giovanni Faustini, younger brother of the lawyer Marco Faustini, one of Venice's foremost opera impresarios. Giovanni Faustini was himself an impresario of San Cassiano, and he and Cavalli produced 10

operas together. These operas had combined comic and tragic elements, and usually involved two pairs of noble lovers overcoming hardships and complex emotional entanglements before they could attain perfect happiness. However, during the 1650s, the aesthetic of Venetian opera changed. Firstly, poets gradually abandoned mythologically inspired subjects in favour of stories from Ancient history. This new trend gave heroes a human side, and therefore changing moods, which contrasted with the rigidly confident mythological figures, and, since the protagonists were warriors and soldiers, there were possible parallels to the contemporary political context. Secondly, they started to develop comic

scenes in parallel with the main plot, scenes that were performed by secondary characters like valets, servants, and nurses. When Faustini died in 1651 Cavalli followed the new trend and looked for semi- historical plots.



Xerse

Xerse, written in 1654, was Cavalli's twenty-first opera. It was composed for the public theatre in Venice and was first performed at the *Teatro SS. Giovanni e Paolo* on January 12, 1655. Subsequent productions took place at Genoa in 1656, at Bologna and Naples in 1657, and at Palermo in 1658. It was dedicated to Marchese Cornelio Bentivoglio, a nobleman from Ferrara. It was originally written in a prologue and three acts. Its originality came from the fact that it followed the new trend and brought historical characters from the exotic Middle East to the stage. Cavalli found his new kind of plot in the work of Nicolò Minato. Minato, a lawyer turned impresario who was a prominent figure in the running of the *Teatro San Salvador*, wrote over 200 librettos (three for Cavalli). His libretto for *Xerse* was essentially based on Herodotus (*Historiae*, Book VII), although in Minato's rendering, the story is enriched with new characters and plot twists. For these he was undoubtedly indebted to Raffaele Tauro, a translator of Spanish plays, who produced *L'ingelosite speranze* in 1651, a translation and free adaptation of *Lo cierto por lo dudoso* by Lope de Vega Carpio, who had previously adapted Herodotus.

Xerse contributed to Cavalli's growing fame as an opera composer, and his reputation was spread across Italy and into Europe by travelling opera companies touring his work. By the 1660s he had established such an impressive reputation that he was summoned to Paris by the Italian-born Cardinal Mazarin, France's Chief Minister. Here, at great expense, Mazarin commissioned him to write *L'Ercole amante* for the wedding of Louis XIV to the Spanish princess Maria-Theresa, and even commissioned the building of an elaborate new theatre for its performance. Whilst Cavalli was in Paris waiting for the delayed completion of this theatre, *Xerse* was performed four times as a stopgap. It played in a hurriedly constructed temporary theatre in one of the galleries in the Louvre, using tapestries rather than painted sets. It is likely that Cavalli was involved in the final adaptation of *Xerse* for Paris, and that he directed the performances from the harpsichord (as he was used to doing in Venice). This current production uses the Paris score as its base.



***Xerse* in Paris, 1660**

Since the 1640s, Cardinal Mazarin had been heavily involved in efforts to establish Italian opera at the French court. Cavalli's high reputation made him an obvious choice to invite to Paris to help enhance the forthcoming marriage celebrations. Cavalli was tasked with writing the music for a new opera to a libretto by Francesco Buti - *L'Ercole amante* - to celebrate the wedding. Determined to produce an impressive and extravagant display, Mazarin commissioned the Italian theatre architects Gaspare Vigarani and his sons to build a theatre with elaborate stage machinery - the *Salle des Machines* - in the Tuileries palace. However, because the construction of this took much longer than expected (indeed, the opera was not premiered until 1662), it was decided that *Xerse*, which had been a big success in the major Italian cities, would be reprised instead. *Xerse* was performed on November 22, 1660 in the Louvre's *Petite Galerie*. Here a temporary theatre was constructed, using tapestries for the scenery. Although the performers wore costumes, it was not possible, for practical reasons, to use theatrical machinery.



The Parisian version of *Xerse* was adapted in a number of ways for the French audience, and some, but not all, of these adaptations are reflected in this concert version. These adaptations impacted on both the libretto and the music. The opera was reorganised into five acts (instead of the three acts of the Venetian version) like the five acts of a French classical play, and a new prologue was written to evoke the royal wedding. In order to acknowledge the love of dance at the French court, and most especially the King's love of dance, a Florentine musician - then still known as Giambattista Lulli - was charged with the composing of a *Ballet de Xerxès*, whose six entrées were to be performed during the opera. The ballets fitted conveniently between the acts and increased the length of the opera significantly - they are omitted from this concert version.

French classicizing poetics was also concerned with the rules of the unities of time, place, and action. In the case of *Xerse*, the unity of **time** had already been observed by Minato in his Venetian libretto (since the action takes place within just one day), and the unity of **place** was respected in the Paris version, in so far as there was only one setting (because of the unchangeability of the ephemeral stage). Unity of **action** was another matter, however. The Venetian *Xerse* contained a separate line of action in the servants' sphere of a comic nature, resulting in a mixture of tragic and comedic genres. In the eyes of the French, this was unacceptable. Therefore, in the Parisian *Xerse*, entire scenes were deleted, and the independent

action of the servants disappeared almost completely. Action from the servants remained only if it specifically related to the main characters, and, although some comic elements survived, these were downplayed.

Although the Venetian version of *Xerse* had been written for the public theatre in Italy it was not too difficult to mould it to fit a French courtly audience. The plot essentially portrays a triumphant king who accumulates military victories, and yet obstinately and inappropriately pursues the wrong woman (Romilda) instead of recognizing his legitimate fiancée, Amastre. However, at the end of the opera, *Xerse* recognises his mistake and marries Amastre.

The opera could easily be 'transformed' into a **political allegory**. It was well established that the royal wedding did not prevent the King from having love affairs and mistresses. Before marrying Maria-Theresa of Spain, the young Louis XIV had been in love with Maria Mancini, one of Mazarin's nieces. Despite the fact that Maria was a member of his family, Mazarin was shocked at the idea that Louis might choose a woman of lower rank who was incapable of offering further political strength to either him or the King, and she was encouraged to leave France to marry elsewhere. *Xerse's* libretto reminds us at several points that Romilda is not noble enough for a king. By contrast the royal origin of Amastre is constantly referred to. The political allegory was clear - Romilda and Amastre are seen to resemble Maria Mancini and Maria-Theresa of Spain.

However, *Xerse's* role did require some modification. The Parisian revival downplayed *Xerse's* extravagant behaviour, which Minato derived from Herodotus' account. According to the latter's report, the Persian king was impressed by the beauty of a tree. The first scene of Act I shows him talking to the tree and singing the well-known aria '*Ombra mai fu*'. But the second scene was cut out; in it, two sorcerers join him for a magic ceremony meant to protect the beloved tree while *Xerse* went away to fight. The scene might have been considered too esoteric or perhaps too excessive, but it is also possible that they wanted to avoid speaking about war at the French court after years of political instability and struggle

More broadly, all the references to **fights and battles** were omitted, including the training of *Xerse's* army (I, 14), the fight with the Ethiopians (I, 20), and the burning of the ships on the Hellespont (II, 8). The only exceptions to this rule are references to military victories, such as the return of Ariodate announcing the defeat of the Moors, which was retained. In the subsequent scene, *Xerse* expresses his gratitude to his faithful general. It is likely that Ariodate was probably considered as representing Mazarin. Deprived of concrete references to the historical context, the plot tends to focus on the obstinate love *Xerse* has for Romilda, until the final admission of *Xerse's* fault. The implication is clear: in order to rule the country and guarantee its welfare, the King had to overcome his personal inclinations and act like a responsible monarch. Symbolically, the extravagant though ultimately discerning *Xerse* projected the image of a politically strong king who was able to recognize his faults and was therefore wise and responsible.

Thus, the process of turning a Venetian opera into a **courtly one** changed the audience's perception of the character *Xerse*, transforming the exotic Persian ruler into a symbolic representation of the King of France. Further adaptations were made for the 1660 Parisian production. As *Xerse* now represented the King this necessitated a significant musical change in the vocal range of the title role, since this had been written for an alto castrato in Venice. Castrato singers were generally not held in high esteem in France during the Ancien Régime. To ensure that the king was represented to the courtly audience in a dignified way, and to enhance the comparison between the character and the King, *Xerse* became a baritone. This marked the first time in sung French theatre that a deep masculine voice was used to convey the gravity and strength of the sovereign's image. For this concert version, however, the role of *Xerse* is returned to the original countertenor register.

Other musical changes made by Cavalli for the Parisian performances included the rewriting of **recitative** sections. Whereas the melodic lines and harmonic flow of the recitatives was seldom altered, their rhythm was often changed. From around 1650 Venetian librettists, including *Xerse's* librettist (Minato), began to use a dialogical structure that favoured short statements that succeeded each other rapidly, and they broke down long verse lines into an explosion of alternating questions and responses. The new Venetian opera aesthetics in the 1650s relied partly on the wit and speed with which the action unfolded on stage. Cavalli often composed such passages so that they not only followed each other quickly, but also overlapped - as a result the characters interrupted each other. However, this overlapping of speech parts was removed from the Parisian score. In the Paris version long passages were speeded up by the shortening of note values but were also adapted rhythmically in order to avoid characters talking across each other. Perhaps this made it easier for a non-Italian audience to follow the operatic dialogue, or maybe it was simply regarded as impolite in a court society to interrupt another person's speech.

In summary, the Parisian *Xerse* upon which this concert version is based has specific traits – French ingredients added to an Italian opera core.

The significance of Cavalli's work

Cavalli commands attention on both historical and musical grounds. At the time of his death, in 1676, at the age of seventy-four, he had composed forty-one operas, and in the process he had more or less codified the form. He perfected the transition from domination by recitative to the blossoming of aria - the transformation from a preoccupation with libretto-driven musicalized speech to embracing the dramatic and emotional potential of song. He was astute in his response to literary texts, his writing always falling naturally on the voice. A canny businessman, he managed several theatres, assisted in the preparation of other composers' scores (including Monteverdi's), and arranged for a copyist to preserve his manuscripts for posterity. And he was a masterful composer.



Unlike Monteverdi's early operas, which were scored for the extravagant court orchestra of Mantua, Cavalli used instrumentation to suit the finances and dimensions of the theatres with which he was involved. His operas utilised a small orchestra of strings and basso continuo to fit the limitations of public opera houses. The reduction in the size of the orchestra was also matched by a reduction in the role of the chorus, thus placing ever increasing emphasis on the role of the solo singer.

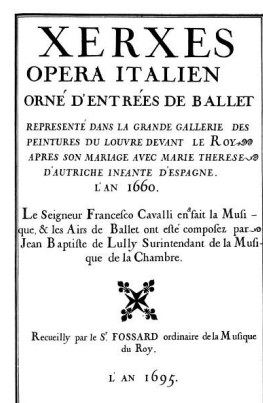
At the same time opera began to develop a new dramatic dimension, as it gradually ceased to be the servant of the libretto. The operas of Monteverdi, and Cavalli's early operas, were dominated by recitative and the desire to capture the inflections of speech in music. But in Cavalli's later operas recitative was supplanted by a more lyrical form known as *arioso*, which stood halfway between recitative and aria, and increasingly by arias themselves. Whereas arias had previously been used sparingly as episodes of contemplation or emotional outpourings which stood outside the dramatic narrative, later Cavalli operas explored the technical and expressive virtuosity of the aria form, and were full of melodious pieces, crafted to convey dramatic intent and marked by a lyrical tenderness that echoed Monteverdi.

Yet, whereas some later Venetian operas were aria-crammed at the expense of narrative integrity, Cavalli's operas developed into works that retained a strong sense of dramatic intent - the fluidity of the musical writing was forward-looking, giving primacy to the dramatic continuity of the story. In the hands of Venetians such as Cavalli, opera had undergone a profound transformation.

Thus, it has been argued (*Alex Ross, New Yorker, 2009*) that opera was, in effect, born twice. Its first coming was during the last decade of the 16th century, when humanist musicians and poets at the court of the Medici, in Florence, began to present a new kind of sung drama. The inaugural operas had impeccably high-minded subjects - Daphne changing into a laurel tree, Orpheus descending into Hades with his lyre - and were hyper-elegant in execution.

Then, when the first European public opera house opened in Venice, the art underwent a mutation. The first season took place during Carnival, the time of dissolution and self-reinvention. Melodrama, bawdy humour, and disorienting collisions of high and low permeated the form. Mythological subjects took on a modern edge; castrato singers flamboyantly re-imagined classical heroes; star divas enacted scenes of madness and lament. A paying public showed hearty approval. Arguably Cavalli was pivotal to this new awakening of opera, and therefore his music should be widely celebrated.

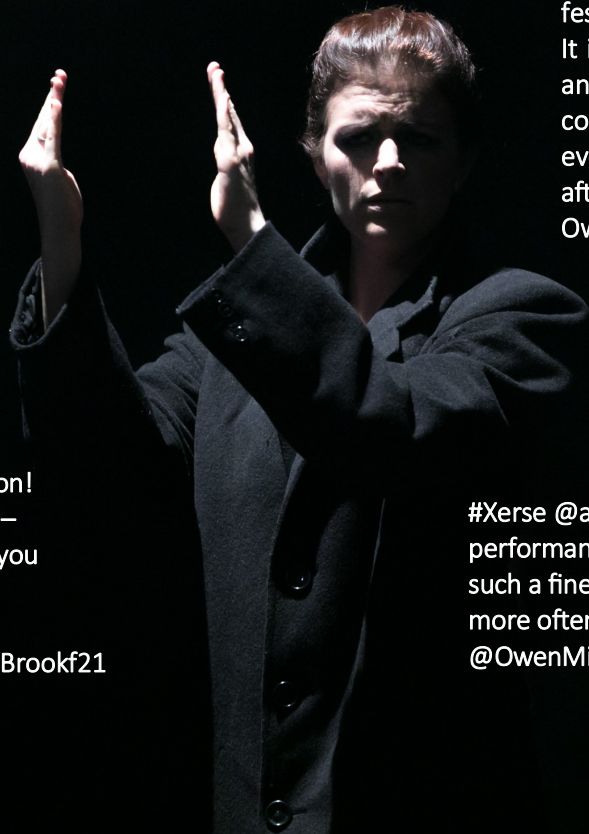
Yet for centuries these early Venetian operas were almost forgotten; the leading composers of the period remained lost in the fine print of long discarded histories and encyclopaedias. It was not really until the mid-20th century that a determined group of conductors and scholars made a concerted effort to restore Venetian opera to general circulation.



The Cavalli revival itself got under way in 1952, when Carlo Maria Giulini conducted *Didone* in Florence. In the sixties, the late great conductor Raymond Leppard (1927-2019) began mounting Cavalli operas at the Glyndebourne Festival; his colleagues Jane Glover and Alan Curtis also took a keen interest in Cavalli. But although *Xerse* itself was highly popular in Italy and indeed across Europe in the 17th-century, it has received very little exposure since, and Cavalli has hardly been a household name. That said, the keen amongst you might find a few high-class audio CDs and even the occasional DVD available through the ubiquitous Amazon [*Ercole Amante, La Calisto, L'Ipèrimesta, La Rosinda, Artemisia, Il Giasone*, and *L'Ormino* have all found their way into the light in recent decades.]

The current production in this concert version aims to contribute to the process of bringing Cavalli to a wider audience. And if you have enjoyed this, look out for *L'Egisto* here at The Cockpit in June, when

Marcio da Silva will take the helm of Hampstead Garden Opera as Stage and Music Director with an exciting cast of talented young singers who are keen to take to the stage for (hopefully) a 'proper' performance.



★★★★ Plays to See. August 2018

This production.. is a triumph – both for Marcio da Silva and his team and for the festival...

It is difficult to explain why such a foolish plot and such formal and ancient musical conventions can combine to provide an evening of operatic magic in Dalston 564 years after its premiere. But they absolutely do.. Owen Davies

Gorgeous Cavalli in Dalston!
First time at #Grimeborn –
fabulous evening. Thank you
@EnsemblOrQuesta and
@arcolatheatre.’
Karen Brookfield @KarenBrookf21

#Xerse @arcolatheatre @EnsemblOrQuesta superb
performance last night. Congrats to whole team for
such a fine production of an opera that should be seen
more often. Look out for review @PlaystoSee.’
@OwenMillsD

★★★★The Idle Woman Blog, September 2018

‘I leapt at the chance to see Cavalli’s version of this
fabulous story performed by Ensemble OrQuesta.. Unlike
most of the audience, I suspect, I’d actually seen Cavalli’s
rare opera before.. and so the bar was high. But it turned
out that the OrQuesta show was actually a fascinating
complement.. Very simply staged, with costumes in
sombre shades of black, and with a stunning silver-wire
tree as the only prop, it was a pared-down, effective
performance of a seldom-seen opera – and a welcome
introduction to some exciting young singers.’

If you haven’t booked a ticket for this
marvellous performance do so NOW’
Ruthw @Strewthieruthie

A treat all round – great band, singing, ensemble and
production. And rare to get Cavalli. Bravi
@EnsemblOrQuesta, #Grimeborn and
@arcolatheatre.’ Melissa Scot @Monteverdi1610

‘Cavalli’s Xerse, in an often mesmerising #Grimeborn production by
@EnsemblOrQuesta at @arcolatheatre, proves a much more rewarding
rediscovery than last year’s Hipermestra at Glyndebourne. I think
@Strewthieruthie felt the same.’ Yehuda Shapiro @YehudaShaprio

Opera Magazine, November 2018 Yehuda Shapiro

‘ a smartly-paced, absorbing evening that ending with da Silva’s own take on the
supposedly *lieto fine*, evoking shades of Poppea..’

‘The production, stylized but penetrating, lucidly traced the opera’s web of
relationships and manipulations’

‘In something of an operatic caucus race, each of the eleven soloists deserved a
prize... the smaller roles were just as strongly articulated and characterized..’



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