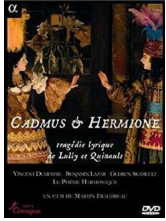


Lully - Cadmus & Hermione (2008)

Written by bluesever

Tuesday, 12 September 2017 14:45 -

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1. *Cadmus & Hermione* 2:00:51 CADMUS, son of Agenor, king of Tyre and brother of Europa : André Morsch HERMIONE, daughter of Mars and Venus : Claire Lefilliâtre THE GOD PAN / ARBAS, an African in Cadmus' following : Arnaud Marzorati ARCAS, companion of Pan / NURSE OF HERMIONE : Jean-François Lombard MELISSE, divinity of forests and mountains / CHARITE, companion of Hermione : Isabelle Druet PALES, goddess of shepherds / LOVE : Camille Poul AGLANTE, another companion of Hermione / JUNO : Luanda Siqueira DRACO, giant, king of Aonia / MARS : Arnaud Richard THE HIGH PRIEST OF MARS / JUPITER : Geoffroy Buffière THE SUN / first Tirian prince : David Ghilardi Second Tirian prince : Vincent Vantuyghem ENVY / First African : Romain Champion PALLAS : Eugénie Warnier Second African : Anthony Lo Papa ECHION, a soldier : Jeroen Bredelwold Ensemble (soloists, dancers, chorus and orchestra) : Le Poème Harmonique Musical direction : Vincent Dumestre

The event of the year! Three years after Le Poème Harmonique's European DVD release of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (which sold 25,000+ copies), the team led by Vincent Dumestre and Benjamin Lazar has produced *Cadmus & Hermione*, the very first French opera, composed in 1673 by Lully on a libretto by Quinault. With reconstructed sets and costumes, this entirely candle-lit production will become a landmark in the rediscovery of baroque opera, providing a unique opportunity to discover a musical masterpiece that has fallen into oblivion over the last three centuries. Playable in all regions. Approx run time 120 min. --- Editorial Reviews, amazon.com

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Most of the critics are saying the same thing: twenty years on (they're thinking of Atys), Lully is back with a bang. Atys is seen in France as Baroque opera's first "popular" smash hit. Villégier set it, not in period scenery and stage costumes, but in the marble halls, silver furnishings, black, grey and silver court mourning dress and white wigs of Versailles in the latter years of Louis XIV. This time, with Cadmus et Hermione (the work that won Lully his royal patronage) the production attempts to go HIP all the way.

Those who have seen Benjamin Lazar's production of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* on DVD will immediately get the idea: period sets and machinery, with billowing pasteboard clouds, serpents and dragons on wires, Apollo and Mars descending from the skies on thrones, Cupid flying through the air; lavish, colourful costumes using up acres of brocade, yards of gold fringe and an aviary of dyed feathers, and including some of those fantasy outfits you can still buy prints of at the Louvre: a pastry chef, a game of chequers and chess...; batteries of (real) candles for soft, warm lighting; period dancing, gestures and even pronunciation (for anyone interested, there's an essay on that in the *Pléiade* edition of Racine).

The result is a softly glowing, old-master-like display of "total art" 200 years before Wagner, and people love it: "Just like being at the court of Louis XIV," the ladies beside me gushed. The trouble, for me, is that the distancing effect of the whole enterprise, hieratic gestures and all, prevents any real emotion emerging, other than from the orchestra. Perhaps with a director and singers a notch more experienced? Under Villégier and Christie, Guillemette Laurens and Guy de Mey managed to project outbursts of anger or grief beyond the conventions. Here, the young singers (not one of whom I'm aware of having come across before. Where did they all come from, I wondered - the newspaper critic I asked at the interval had no idea either) remained imprisoned in their greasepaint.

They made nevertheless a strong team: plenty of sweet young voices with good tuning and diction and some excellent cameos: *L'Amour*, *La Nourrice* (an haute-contre in drag) and an excellent Arnaud Marzorati as the cowardly braggart Arbas. The weak point, unfortunately, was Hermione: Claire Lefilliâtre seemed to have Guillemette Laurens' faults (perilous tuning, shaky lines) but none of her dramatic strengths (Laurens was a powerful Cybèle, even on CD).

Vincent Dumestre took a more rustic than elegant approach to Lully, which suited me but not that critic I chatted with over the sandwiches.

Overall, a change - no doubt about that - from Eurotrash, but to be frank the exercise is to me

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more a splendid curiosity than a flesh-and-blood operatic experience and, by the end, verging on tedious. I wouldn't want more than one such production a year, if that - though of course I'd love lots, lots more Lully. --- npw-opera-concerts.blogspot.com

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