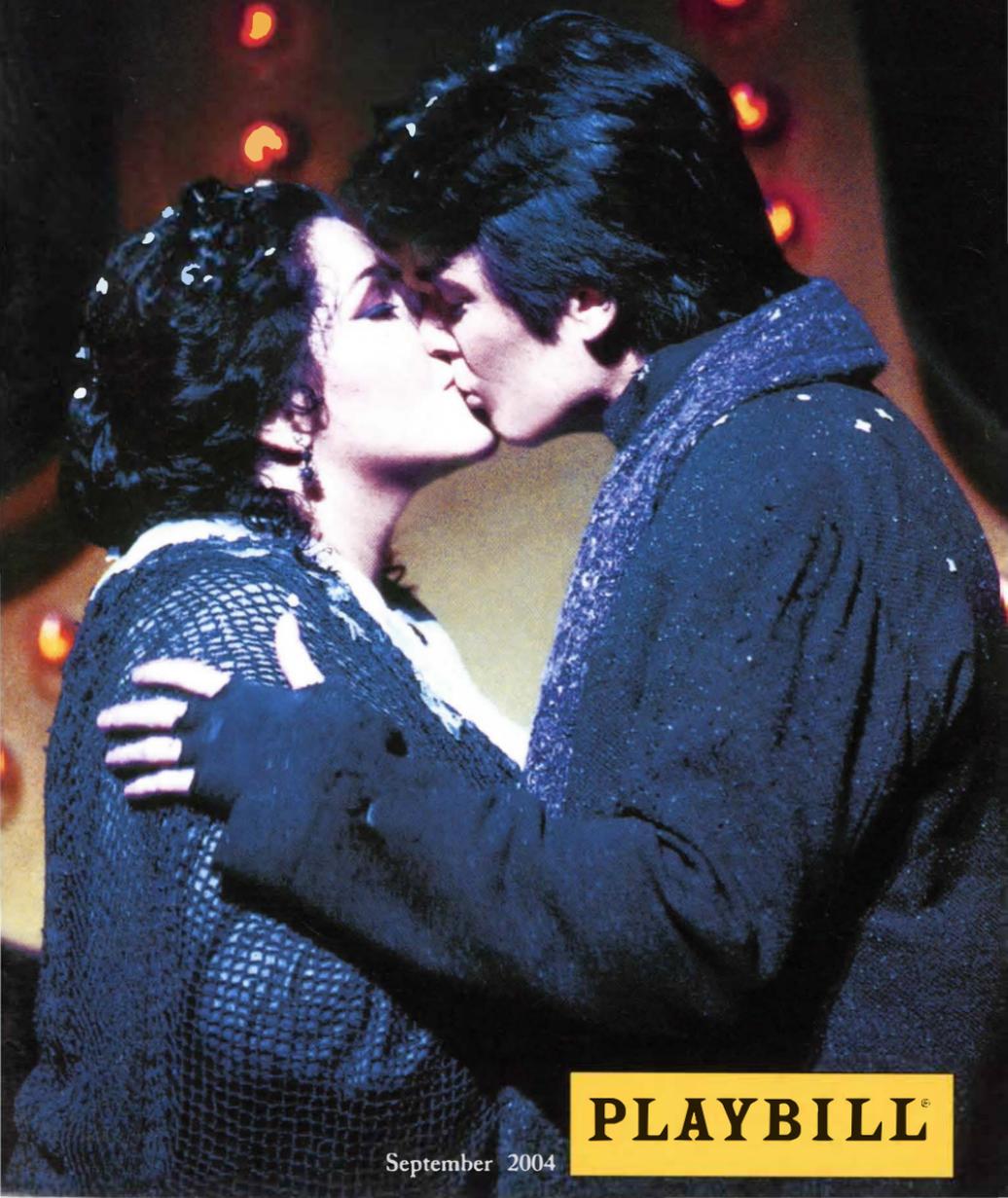


NEW YORK
CITY
OPERA



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September 2004

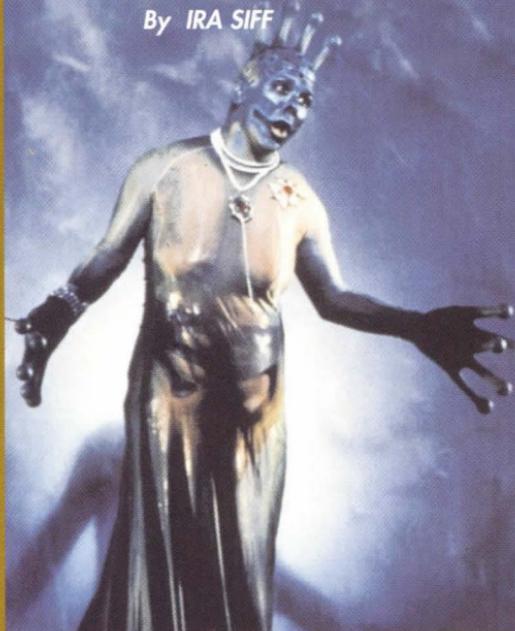
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Rameau's *Platée* returns to
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By **IRA SIFF**



18 METAMORPHOSES

For Richard Strauss and many other Germans between the world wars, classical Greece evoked a perennial nostalgia for a time of lost grace, and much more. Strauss' *Daphne* premieres on September 8.

By **NICHOLAS TILL**



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Cover: *Angela Marambio and Gerard Powers*
in *La Bohème*. Photo: Carol Rosegg

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ON STAGE AT CITY OPERA



CAROL ROSEGG

Daphne by Richard Strauss

Elizabeth Futral plays the mythic title character in the New York stage premiere of Strauss's intoxicating rarity. Seven performances through October 3.

La Bohème by Giacomo Puccini

Puccini's unforgettable bohemians return in City Opera's beloved production of the world's most popular opera. Seven performances through October 15.

La Traviata by Giuseppe Verdi

City Opera favorite Maria Kanyova returns as Violetta, the tragic heroine of Verdi's immortal tale of self-sacrifice. Ten performances through November 7.

La Rondine by Giacomo Puccini

Puccini's charming lyric comedy returns to City Opera with Pamela Armstrong as the courtesan Magda. Eight performances through October 9.

Platée by Jean-Philippe Rameau

Mark Morris's high-energy staging of Rameau's comic opera-ballet features the Mark Morris Dance Group and outlandish costumes by Isaac Mizrahi.

Seven performances through October 16.

For tickets, order online at www.nycopera.com, call Ticketmaster at (212) 307-4100, or visit the New York State Theater Box Office at Lincoln Center, Broadway & 63rd Street.

Fall Season 2004

Wed	September 8	Daphne 7:00
Thu	September 9	Bohème
Fri	September 10	Traviata
Sat (m)	September 11	Daphne
Sat	September 11	Bohème
Sun (m)	September 12	Traviata
Thu	September 16	Traviata
Fri	September 17	Daphne
Sat (m)	September 18	Traviata
Sat	September 18	Bohème
Sun (m)	September 19	Rondine
Tue	September 21	Daphne
Thu	September 23	Rondine
Fri	September 24	Traviata
Sat (m)	September 25	Rondine
Sat	September 25	Daphne
Sun (m)	September 26	Bohème
Tue	September 28	Platée
Wed	September 29	Rondine
Thu	September 30	Daphne
Fri	October 1	Rondine
Sat (m)	October 2	Platée
Sat	October 2	Bohème
Sun (m)	October 3	Daphne

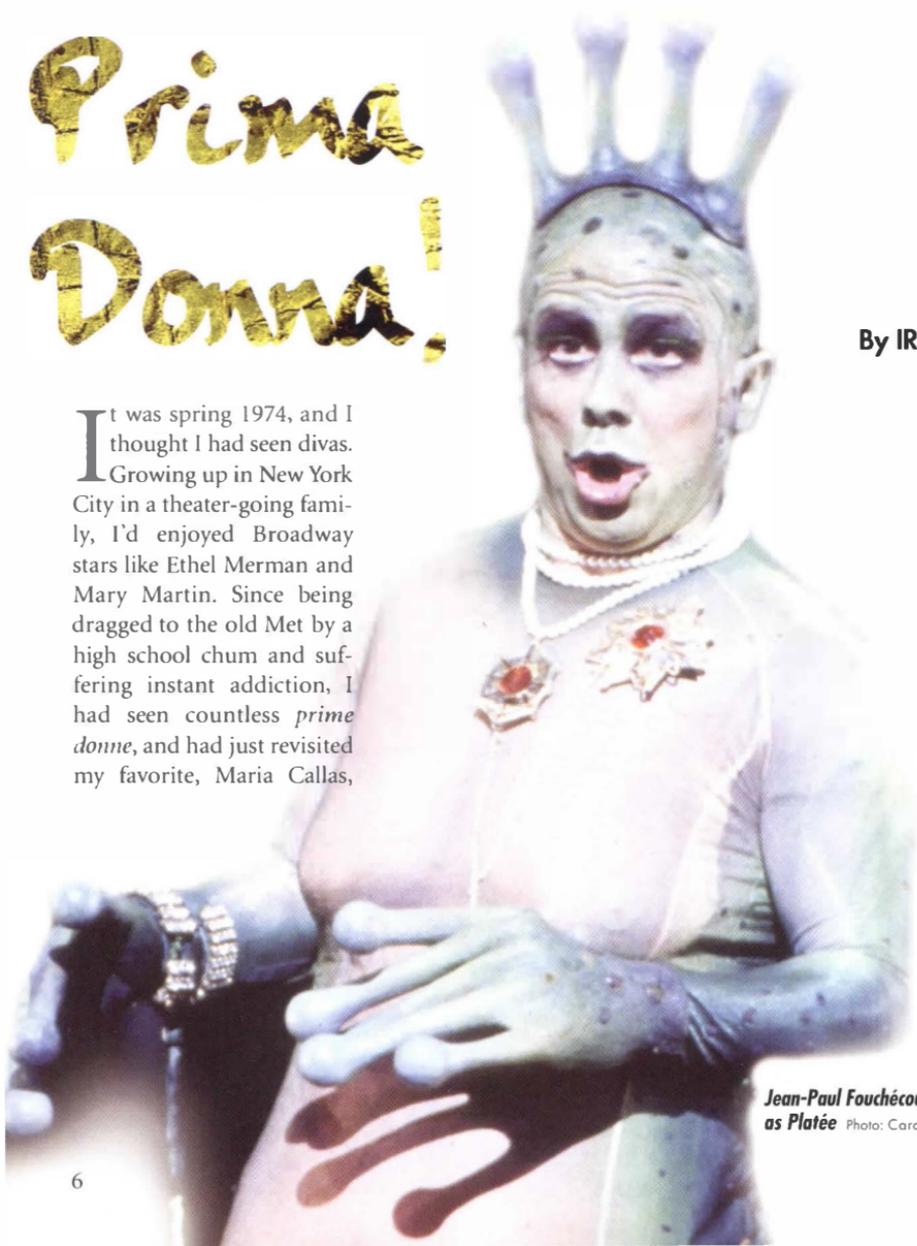
Tue, Wed, & Thu night performances begin at 7:30, Fri & Sat night performances at 8:00, weekend matinées at 1:30, except where noted.

City Opera performs these and four other works this fall through November 21. The spring season begins March 4, 2005.

She's No Lady —She's Our Prima Donna!

By IRA SIFF

It was spring 1974, and I thought I had seen divas. Growing up in New York City in a theater-going family, I'd enjoyed Broadway stars like Ethel Merman and Mary Martin. Since being dragged to the old Met by a high school chum and suffering instant addiction, I had seen countless *prima donna*, and had just revisited my favorite, Maria Callas,



Jean-Paul Fouchécourt
as *Platée* Photo: Carol Rosegg



John Rath as Cithéron, Mathew Chellis as Thespis and Jean-Paul Fouchécourt as Platée in the City Opera production

Photo: Carol Rosegg

who was then making her sad farewell recital tour. But until a friend took me to see a certain Charles Ludlam, with his Ridiculous Theatrical Company, in his own brilliant adaptation of Dumas' *Camille*, I had perhaps never seen the ultimate diva.

Yes, Ludlam played the title role. And as a man in a dress, a world of layers (and not only those of the tulle he wore so gracefully) opened to him, and therefore to us, his audience. As an opera nut, I had witnessed my share of *travestie*, or women playing men—known in Met broadcast patter as “trouser roles.” But the man-in-a-dress art form I had seen rarely, and mostly in the context of broad (pun intended) Milton Berle- or Benny Hill-like slapstick. And drag shows per se held no fascination for me.

Enter Mr. Ludlam. What he brought to *Camille* was a characterization of such variety and depth, such wit, passion, and humanity that one didn't know whether to laugh or cry, so one did both. A superb clown, he did not stint on the physical comedy at which he was a genius, nor did he deprive one of vocal thrills emanating from a speaking voice of infinite colors. One moment he was Bankhead, another Garbo, another simply Charles vocally commenting on what he'd just intoned in the manner of one of them. Each line was treated to the voice it required for its ultimate effect, whether that effect was intended to elicit screams of laughter, or hushed, surprised tears, as in the death scene. It was in seeing Ludlam (many, many times in many roles, until his death of AIDS in 1987) that perhaps I found the courage to invite my own “inner diva” out of the closet. Some seven years later I invented my own *travestie* company, La Gran Scena Opera, in which I ultimately donned the necessary frock and sang many soprano roles over the ensuing two decades. For my first *scena* in public, it seemed fitting to essay Act III of *Traviata*, the death scene. After all, Violetta was the operatic *Camille*. And, truth be told, when Ludlam came to see a Gran Scena performance that included that scene, I was more nervous than I have been when visited by Sutherland, Price, Scotto, Sills, or any of the other divas I've worshipped.

With New York City Opera reviving Mark Morris' acclaimed production of Rameau's *Platée*, in which the title role of a homely swamp nymph was written for a tenor *en travestie*, it seems a good time to examine what makes male-to-female operatic *travestie* perhaps riskier than the reverse, and---dare I say it?---richer in possibilities. This may seem an odd statement, when "drag" roles often seem designed simply to deliver laughs, whereas operatic trouser roles most often evoke a heroic young warrior or an ardent youth.

It is perhaps the automatic humor of male-to-female *travestie* that fills it with the possibility of surprise. For instance, a character like Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier* is, at first glance, not funny. Women as men are not funny. They are earnest, like Handel or Rossini warriors, or Richard Strauss' self-important Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Yet once we accept the conceit that the mezzo Octavian is male, when this same Octavian dresses up as a female to flirt with Baron Ochs, he is suddenly funny. So, even a woman *playing* a man playing a woman is funny!

But to see only the comic possibilities in drag slightes the art form, which, as demonstrated by Ludlam, can, both through the inherent humor and beyond it, have an infinite expressive vocabulary. If used wisely, *travestie* can exploit features of both genders separately and simultaneously, transcending what can be accomplished only by one.

Jean-Paul Fouchécourt, City Opera's *Platée*, points out, "All those *travesties* are written to be funny, but in the case of *Platée*, the drollness disappears behind the pathetic nature of the situation, because she is a human frog. After a while, you become ashamed of having laughed at her. I think it is very important for the audience to forget about the *travestie* after the first five minutes."

I experienced something like this many times with Gran Scena. Our most celebrated scene was the second act of Puccini's *Tosca*, in which I sang the title role. In the context of our spoof/tribute, I worked with director Peter Schlosser to devise ways to honor the tradition of the great Toscas who had come before my invented Gran Scena diva, Madame Vera Galupe-Borszhk. There was a lot of Callas, as well as some Zinka Milanov and Magda Olivero, in Vera's *Tosca*. But though the aim was mainly comic, when it came time for *Tosca*'s famous aria, "Vissi d'arte," I needed to deliver it with as much poignancy—and legato—as I could muster. There was a sudden turn in the atmosphere, and the public was silent, exploding all the more at the aria's conclusion because of the surprise they felt at being moved. I always insert one "straight" bit of singing in my shows, and it's invariably the part most commented upon. The drama becomes all the more potent because it is in surprising relief to the comedy one expects.

Another of the small handful of intentional man-in-a-frock opera roles, Arnalta, Poppea's worldly-wise nurse in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, can offer similar surprise. Written for an *haute contre*, a rare, very high tenor, it has also been played by tenors transposing it down, female altos, and countertenors. Tenor Barry Banks, remembered for his sensational Oreste in last season's *Ermione*, insisted, "Arnalta has to be totally heartfelt and beautifully sung. The first-act lullaby she sings is such a beautifully haunting piece of music, it deserves to be treated with total respect." Still, Banks didn't stint on Arnalta's comedic aspects: "I do admit to being a trifle outrageous," he said. "What was the best part of doing Arnalta? Wearing DKNY tights! I think there is a little



**Jean-Paul Fouchécourt as Platée,
Bernard Deletré as Momus**

Photo: Carol Rosegg

drag in every straight guy. That, and having a real ‘Shirley Bassey Entrance’ for my last scene, when I am finally the queen’s handmaiden and elevated to glam status.”

Another sometime *travestie* role is the Witch in Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel*, which countertenor Ralph Daniel Rawe has sung in several productions. He feels “there is a great temptation to cast a man without looking further than the comic aspect. The comedy should be explored fully, but I always simply played the character; the fact that I’m a man adds layers. I have never played her with a wink to the audience.”

Sometimes a man is cast in a role meant for a female singer, like the Witch, in order to “heighten” the effect. Countertenor David Walker, veteran of many NYCO Handel productions, once performed Madame de la Haltière, the wicked stepmother in Massenet’s *Cendrillon*. “Instead of playing a nasty, manipulative woman,” he said, “I just played a nasty manipulative character. The idea was completed visually by my female body suit, costume, makeup, and wig. Once I put all these elements together, my body naturally started to move the way she might.”

Simply playing the character was something I always stressed with the male “divas” of La Gran Scena. Any mincing about or resorting to caricatured “female behavior” was immediately edited out. I wanted the guys to sing beautifully, and to accent the strength beneath the dress, something that “anatomically correct” divas often have in abundance. When I played L’Opinion Publique, a “diva ex machina” character usually sung by a mezzo, in Offenbach’s *Orphée aux enfers* with L’Opéra Français de New York, it was the first time my alter ego Madame Vera appeared in a conventional opera performance. Without the protective context of a performance played to an audience who had come to see a spoof *en travestie*, I found myself moderately terrified.

**Jean-Paul Fouchécourt as *Platée*,
Bernard Deletré as *Momus***

Photo: Carol Rosegg



And my character had to begin the show! Before singing, *L'Opinion* gives an opening speech, and I never altered my voice by speaking in falsetto, but rather used the normal “chest voice” any middle-aged woman would to deliver her lines in a big theater. A surprising number of audience members not acquainted with me from *La Gran Scena* told me later that they sensed something heightened in the character’s presence, without suspecting that somewhere beneath that body padding there was a man lurking. I also found it amusing, as well as reassuring, that Yves Abel, who conducted the performance, was very accommodating to me as Madame Vera, making small adjustments in the score to suit Madame’s unique vocal gifts. We actually had to raise entire passages an octave; Madame Vera is, after all, a soprano, and the Offenbach mezzo role lay a bit low. This accommodation to a “fictitious real person” is an interesting aspect of the male-to-female *travestie* character. For some reason, people of all sorts believe in and are comfortable with it. Think of all the conservative men (Charlton Heston, Mel Gibson) seen on television cavorting, or even sharing a peck on the cheek, with Dame Edna without blinking an eye.

When I founded *La Gran Scena*, an opera career was virtually impossible for a countertenor, particularly one with a full tone and vibrato; the Handel revival was a thing of the future. Therefore, I was able to employ some remarkable vocalists who have gone on to countertenor careers. One of them, Johnny Maldonado, was recently asked to take a break from his Baroque opera duties to sing Marcellina in an otherwise conventional *Le nozze di Figaro* in

New York City Opera

2004-2005 SEASON

September 8-November 22, 2004
March 4-April 24, 2005

Sopranos

Hanan Alattar* Pamela Armstrong Jennifer Aylmer Julianne Borg Christine Brandes Orla Boylan
Heather Buck Amy Burton Anna Christy Sarah Coburn Mary Dunleavy Cheryl Evans
Angela Fout Karen Frankenstein* Stephanie Friede Elizabeth Futral Gwynne Geyer Holly Hall
Carla Thelen Hanson* Georgia Jarman Maria Kanyova Jee Hyun Lim* Kathleen Magee*
Angela Marambio Tonna Miller Joanna Mongiardo* Lori Phillips Sharon Rostorf-Zamir*
Lisa Saffer Alison Trainer Melanie Vaccari Angela Turner Wilson Kristine Winkler* Caroline Worra

Mezzo-sopranos

Audrey Babcock* Mary Bowen Joyce Castle Edith Dowd Ursula Ferri Kathryn Friest
Misoon Ghim* Katharine Goeldner Eugenie Grunewald Jennifer Dawn Hines Heather Johnson*
Gwendolyn Jones Gloria Parker* Jennifer Rivera Jennifer Roderer Rinat Shaham Jennifer Tiller*
Alison Tunney*

Countertenors

John Gaston* Bejun Mehta Matthew White*

Tenors

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Andrew Drost William Ferguson Eric Fennell Jean-Paul Fouchécourt Marc Heller*
Roger Honeywell* Christopher Jackson* Keith Jameson Matthew Kirchner* Jonathan Kline*
Robert Mack Gregory Mercer Ryan MacPherson Yeghishe Manucharyan* Matt Morgan*
Scott Murphree* Daniel Paget* Jorge Antonio Pita Gerard Powers Anthony Pulgram*
Philip Salmon James Schaffner Yoonsoo Shin* Joel Sorensen Tracey Welborn* Brandon Wood*
Renzo Zulian*

Baritones and Baseses

John Avey Wojciech Bukalski* Matthew Burns Richard Byrne Michael Corvino Marcus DeLoach
Jake Gardner Ethan Herschenfeld* Scott Hogsed Bert K. Johnson Eric Jordan* Stephen Kechulius
Ryan Kinsella* Andrew Krikawa* William Ledbetter Lawrence Long* Malcolm MacKenzie*
Seth Malkin* Brian McIntosh Brian Mulligan* Rod Nelman Marco Nistico* Timothy Nolen
Jan Opalach John Packard Derrick Parker* Wilbur Pauley Kyle Pfortmiller Craig Phillips
David Pittsinger Stephen Powell Peter Strummer Paulo Szot Daniel Teadt* Todd Thomas*
Erik Nelson Werner* Grant Youngblood Don Yule Kyungmook Yum* Michael Zegarski

Solo Dancers

Jean Barber Gregorio de Silva Elizabeth Ferrell Tracy Fiore Esperanza Galan Tabb Nance
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Daniel Beckwith George Garrett Keast* Timothy Long* Stephen Lord* George Manahan
Steven Mosteller Ari Pelto* Emmanuel Plasson* Zachary Schwartzman* Gerald Steichen
Braden Toan Antony Walker* Gary Thor Wedow Steven White David Wroe* Atsushi Yamada

* Debut with New York City Opera

New York State Theater reconstruction funded by The Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, Inc.

The theater is owned by the City of New York, which has given funds for its refurbishment
and which provides an operating subsidy through the Department of Cultural Affairs.

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Speranza Scappucci Gerald Steichen Susan Woodruff Versage

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Samantha Greene Peggy Imbrie Cindy Knight Lisa Jean Lewis Valerie Oliveira* Rachel Stern

* Debut with New York City Opera

** On leave of absence

Tuesday Evening, September 28, 2004, 7:30–10:10

Platée

Comédie lyrique in a prologue and three acts

Music by Jean-Philippe Rameau

Libretto by Adrien-Joseph Le Valois d'Orville

after Jacques Autreau's play Platée, ou Junon jalouse

Conductor Daniel Beckwith
Director and Choreographer Mark Morris
Set Conceived and Designed by Adrienne Lobel
Costume Designer Isaac Mizrahi
Lighting Designer James F. Ingalls
Supertitles Judy Mackerras

Cast

(in order of appearance)

<i>Bacchus—God of Wine</i>	Charlton Boyd
<i>Secretary</i>	Michelle Yard
<i>Thespis—Inventor of Comedy</i>	Philip Salmon
<i>Satyr—Goat-Man</i>	Marcus DeLoach
<i>Painter</i>	John Heginbotham
<i>Dyke</i>	Julie Worden
<i>Baroness</i>	Marjorie Folkman
<i>Sailor</i>	Bradon McDonald
<i>Showgirl</i>	Rita Donahue
<i>Policeman</i>	Craig Biesecker
<i>Thalie—Muse of Comedy</i>	Lisa Saffer
<i>Momus—Personification of Sarcasm</i>	Timothy Nolen
<i>L'Amour—God of Love</i>	Christine Brandes
<i>Snake</i>	Amber Darragh
<i>Cockatiel</i>	Charlton Boyd
<i>Alligator</i>	Marjorie Folkman
<i>Peacock</i>	Noah Vinson
<i>Toad</i>	Lauren Grant
<i>Blue Jay</i>	David Leventhal
<i>Firebird</i>	June Omura
<i>Cithéron—King</i>	Marcus DeLoach
<i>Mercure—Messenger to the Gods</i>	Philip Salmon
<i>Clarine—Lizard in Waiting</i>	Lisa Saffer
<i>Platée—Naiad, Water Nymph</i>	Jean-Paul Fouchécourt
<i>Lizard</i>	Rita Donahue
<i>Duck</i>	Maile Okamura
<i>Frog</i>	Aaron Walter
<i>Robin</i>	Julie Worden
<i>Iris—Rainbow Goddess</i>	Michelle Yard
<i>Aquilons—Personifications of the Wind</i>	Craig Biesecker, John Heginbotham, Bradon McDonald, Gregory Nuber
<i>Jupiter—God of Gods</i>	Timothy Nolen
<i>Momus—Personification of Sarcasm</i>	Andrew Drost

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

<i>Manifestations of Jupiter: Ass</i>	Charlton Boyd, Marjorie Folkman
<i>Owl</i>	June Omura
<i>Feathered Birds</i>	David Leventhal, Maile Okamura, Noah Vinson, Julie Worden
<i>La Folie—Personification of Folly</i>	Christine Brandes
<i>Babies</i>	Charlton Boyd, Marjorie Folkman
<i>Scholars</i>	Lauren Grant, Michelle Yard
<i>Tortoises</i>	David Leventhal, June Omura
<i>Snakes</i>	Amber Darragh, Rita Donahue
<i>Juno—Goddess of Gods</i>	Jennifer Roderer
<i>Frog Attendants</i>	Noah Vinson, Aaron Walter
<i>Graces</i>	Charlton Boyd, Lauren Grant, Marjorie Folkman
<i>Satyrs—Goat-Men</i>	Craig Biesecker, John Heginbotham, Bradon McDonald, Gregory Nuber
<i>Feathered Birds</i>	David Leventhal, Maile Okamura, June Omura, Julie Worden

Mark Morris Dance Group

Christina Amendolia*, Craig Biesecker, Joe Bowie, Charlton Boyd, Amber Darragh, Rita Donahue, Marjorie Folkman, Lauren Grant, John Heginbotham, David Leventhal, Vincent McCloskey*, Bradon McDonald, Gregory Nuber, Maile Okamura, June Omura, Noah Vinson, Aaron Walter, Julie Worden, Michelle Yard

* understudy

Continuo:

<i>Harpichord</i>	Daniel Beckwith, Gerald Steichen
<i>Viola da gamba</i>	Mary Springfels
<i>Lute, Archlute</i>	Lucy Cross
<i>Archlute, Theorbo, Baroque Guitar</i>	Richard Kolb
<i>Recorders</i>	Rachel Begley, Nina Stern
<i>Chorus Master</i>	Gary Thor Wedow
<i>Associate Conductor</i>	Gerald Steichen
<i>Musical Preparation</i>	Lynn Baker, Gerald Steichen
<i>Assistant Directors</i>	Mike Phillips, David Grabarkewitz
<i>Stage Managers</i>	Anne Dechène, Caroline Dufresne, Samantha Greene, Valerie Oliveiro
<i>French Language Coach</i>	Thomas Grubb
<i>Assistant to Mark Morris</i>	Joe Bowie

This production was originally presented by Royal Opera Covent Garden/Discalced, Inc.

This edition of Rameau's *Platée* was edited for the Mark Morris Dance Group by Nicholas McGegan and published by the Arcadian Company.

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Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, Inc.

Synopsis of *Platée (or Jealous Junon)*

PROLOGUE: Ideas

Thespis is sleeping it off. A Satyr sings of drinking.

Thespis wakes up and sings a love song to Bacchus. He then embarrasses everyone by exposing their infidelities.

Thalie and Momus arrive and remind Thespis that the gods behave in the same way.

Momus begins a story about Junon's jealousy of Jupiter.

L'Amour interrupts and insists on being included.

They sing of putting on a new kind of show.

ACT I: Plans

Cithéron appeals to the gods to end the terrible weather.

Mercure appears and tells him that the storms are caused by Jupiter and Junon's jealous quarrels.

Sent by Jupiter, Mercure is looking for a way to teach Junon a lesson.

Cithéron suggests a prank: let Jupiter pretend to propose to Platée, just to make Junon really jealous.

Mercure goes to tell Jupiter the clever plan.

Enter Platée, who sings of the swamp. What a place to fall in love! and she's long loved Cithéron.

Clarine is unimpressed.

The swamp creatures dance.

Mercure announces to Platée that Jupiter will be down soon to woo her. She can't wait.

Clarine sings the sun away.

Rain dances.

Mercure spots Iris leading the Aquilons, who come to clear the area for Jupiter's landing.

Intermission

ACT II: Metamorphoses

Mercure has misdirected Junon to delay her arrival.

Jupiter and Momus come down in a cloud. Cithéron and Mercure hide and watch.

Platée is attracted to the cloud.

Jupiter appears to her as an ass, an owl, and a man. He says he wants her.

She is overwhelmed. Everyone laughs at her.

Enter La Folie, who sings of...folly. She has stolen Apollon's lyre and is feeling musical.

Diverse dances.

A hymn to Marriage and to the coronation of Platée.

ACT III: Return

Junon can't find the cheating Jupiter and she's furious at Mercure. But he convinces her to hide in order to observe the wedding.

A procession. Another procession.

Everyone's invited, but Platée doesn't see L'Amour.

Mercure and Jupiter make a long dance longer.

Platée has anxiety.

Momus, disguised as L'Amour, shows up to officiate. He tells Platée how sad marriage can be.

La Folie makes fun of him.

Dances in honor of Platée.

Just as Jupiter is swearing his vow, Junon bursts in. She's shocked by Platée's looks.

The joke is over.

Jupiter and Junon make up.

Platée is very angry and blames it all on Cithéron.

The gods return to Olympus.

Platée goes back home.

Note on *Platée*

In 1745 Jean-Philippe Rameau was asked to produce one of the seven musical spectacles to be performed in celebration of the marriage of King Louis XV's son, crown prince Louis, to Princess Maria Teresa of Spain at Versailles. To fill the last-minute gap left by Royer's failure to complete his commissioned *Pandore*, Rameau offered *Platée*, a work he had already nearly finished. Apparently, the Duc de Richelieu, the King's right-hand man, didn't read the libretto too closely before approving it: the plot revolves around a homely but vain petty potentate, who, arrogant enough to set her romantic sights on Jupiter, ends up becoming the butt of a most uncharitable joke. Not the most tasteful entertainment for a royal wedding—particularly one in which the bride was “not physically well served by nature,” according to Malherbe.

The madcap scene for *Platée* is set in its Prologue, in which some drunken cronies of Bacchus—Thespis and the muses Thalie and Momus—give birth to comedy, vowing to “wage a never-ending battle against absurdity! We'll spare neither mortals nor gods!”

And they're as good as their word. Gods and mortals, royalty and commoners, French ballet and Italian opera—nothing escapes the rapier of Rameau's *ballet bouffon* (farcical ballet). *Platée*, the “heroine,” is a cave-dwelling, web-footed Swamp Thing who rules over a marsh full of croaking, buzzing amphibians and insects. To underline her absurdity, Rameau made *Platée* a “drag” role for a high tenor—an anomaly in French opera. And she's ridiculous less for her unfortunate looks than for foolishly aspiring to join the inane Olympians—shallow, bored, and obsessed with appearance, status, and sex (not unlike the denizens of Versailles, *peut-être?*).

—Cori Ellison, *New York City Opera Dramaturg*

Meet the Artists

Lisa Saffer, soprano. Birthplace: Madison, Wisconsin. This season at City Opera: Thalie and Clarine in *Platée*. City Opera debut: Cunegonde in *Candide*, 1989. Career highlights: title role in *Lulu* at English National Opera (Olivier nomination, Philharmonic Society Award for Best Vocal Performance in London in 2002); title role in *Partenope* at City Opera and Glimmerglass; Almirena in *Rinaldo*, Dalinda in *Ariodante*, Sandrina in *La finta giardiniera*, Atalanta in *Xerxes*, and more at City Opera; Marie in *Die Soldaten* at City Opera, English National Opera, and Opéra Bastille; Sandrina at UK's Garsington Festival; Adina in *L'elisir d'amore* at Boston Lyric Opera; Zerbinetta in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at Scottish Opera, Edinburgh Festival, and Opéra de Lausanne; Hilda in Henze's *Elegy for Young Lovers* at Tanglewood and with Schönberg Ensemble in Amsterdam; recordings of *Ariodante*, *Ottone*, *Agrippina* and solo album, *Arias for Cuzzoni* on Harmonia Mundi.

Christine Brandes, soprano. Birthplace: Canton, Ohio. This season at City Opera: L'Amour and La Folie in *Platée*. City Opera debut: Thalie and Clarine in *Platée*, 2000. Career highlights: *Ariodante* at Houston Grand Opera and San Diego Opera; *Acis and Galatea* at City Opera and Glimmerglass;

Orlando at Glimmerglass; *Secret Marriage* at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis; *Semele* at San Francisco Opera; *Alcina* with Opéra de Nancy; *Don Giovanni* at Opera Company of Philadelphia; *Le nozze di Figaro* at Opera Pacific and Opera Company of Philadelphia, Montreal, and Québec; *El Niño* with Tokyo Symphony; *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* with Los Angeles Philharmonic; concerts with Mostly Mozart, National Symphony Orchestra, Ensemble Orchestral de Paris, and orchestras of Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Saint Louis, Saint Paul, and Seattle; recordings for EMI, BMG, Harmonia Mundi, Virgin Classics, and Koch International. Upcoming: *Falstaff* at Houston Grand Opera; *View from the Bridge* at Washington Opera; and *Giulio Cesare* at Seattle Opera.

Jennifer Roderer, mezzo-soprano. Birthplace: Wheaton, Illinois. This season at City Opera: Junon in *Platée*. City Opera debut: Third Lady in *The Magic Flute*, 1999. Career highlights: Jade Boucher in *Dead Man Walking* and Giovanna in *Rigoletto* at City Opera; *Liebeslieder Waltzes* with New York City Ballet (including nationally televised Balanchine Gala); Amneris in *Aida* at Austria's Opern Air Gars and Opera Illinois; Waltraute in *Die Walküre* at Chicago and Seattle operas; Gertrude in *Hänsel und Gretel* with

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Sarasota Opera and New Jersey Symphony; Act II of *Parsifal* with Pierre Boulez and Los Angeles Philharmonic; Emilia in *Otello* at Opera Pacific; Hindemith's *Sancta Susanna* with American Symphony Orchestra; Mrs. Grose in *The Turn of the Screw* at Toledo Opera; *Intermezzo* at Santa Fe Opera; *Elektra* at Los Angeles, Washington, and Virginia operas; Verdi's Requiem with Hudson Valley Philharmonic and Peoria Symphony; *Messiah* with Jacksonville Symphony; *Les noces* with Los Angeles Master Chorale; grant from the Sullivan Foundation; Walters Memorial Award from Opera Index. Upcoming engagements: Santuzza in *Cavalleria rusticana* at Sarasota Opera.

Jean-Paul Fouchécourt, tenor. Birthplace: Blanz, France. This season at City Opera: returns to the title role in *Platée*. City Opera debut: *Platée*, 2000. Career highlights: toured internationally with Les Arts Florissants; Monteverdi's *Orfeo* in Salzburg; *L'incoronazione di Poppea* at Netherlands Opera and Aix-en-Provence; *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* at Geneva Opera; Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* and *Le nozze di Figaro* at Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and Aix-en-Provence; Poulenc's *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* with Saito Kinen Orchestra and Seiji Ozawa; *Platée* and Astrologer in *The Golden Cockerel* at Royal Opera House—Covent Garden; *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* with the Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Simon Rattle; Metropolitan Opera debut as Four Servants in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*; *Platée* at Opéra Bastille; over seventy recordings of works by Rameau, Lully, Campra, Satie, Poulenc, and others; Upcoming engagements: *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* at Théâtre des Champs-Élysées; *L'incoronazione di Poppea* at Vienna Festwochen and Aix-en-Provence Festival; Four Servants at Chorégies d'Orange and Covent Garden; *Orphée aux enfers* for Opéra de Lyon; *Platée* on tour in Geneva, Bordeaux, and Montpellier. Upcoming engagements: *The Tales of Hoffman* at the Metropolitan Opera; *L'incoronazione di Poppea* in Zürich (conducted by N. Harnoncourt) and in Salzburg; Manon and Falstaff at the Metropolitan Opera next season; and the one man show *The Fiancé de la Tour Eiffel* in 2006 with The Opéra Français de New York.

Philip Salmon, tenor. Birthplace: London, England. This season at City Opera: Thespis and Mercure in *Platée*. City Opera debut: Momus in *Platée*. Career highlights: Pelléas in

Pelléas et Mélisande for Opéra Marseilles, Opéra du Rhin Strasbourg, and Welsh National Opera; Prologue and Quint in *The Turn of the Screw* for Scottish Opera and Teatro Regio, Turin; Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville* for New Zealand's Wellington Opera; Frère Massée in *St. François d'Assise* for Der Oper Leipzig; Agenore in *Il re pastore* for Opera North; Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte* with Dublin Grand Opera; Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* for London's Chelsea Opera; Monostatos in *The Magic Flute* for Scottish Opera; Momus and St. Brioche in *The Merry Widow* for Royal Opera—Covent Garden; concerts with many of the leading orchestras of Britain and Europe; recordings for Deutsche Grammophon, Philips, Erato, and more. Upcoming engagements: Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus* for Lyric Opera, Dublin; concerts in Europe.

Andrew Drost, tenor. Birthplace: Detroit, Michigan. This season at City Opera: Gaston de Letoriers in *La traviata*, Momus II in *Platée* and Bagha in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. City Opera debut: Pirelli in last season's *Sweeney Todd*. Career highlights: Macduff in *Macbeth* and Flaminio in *L'amore del tre re* with Sarasota Opera; covered Belfiore in *La finta giardiniera* and Oreste in *Ermione* at City Opera; winner of the Liederkrantz Foundation Opera Competition.

Marcus DeLoach, baritone. Birthplace: Newburyport, Massachusetts. This season at City Opera: Satyr and Citheron in *Platée*. City Opera debut: Herman Atlan in *The Mother of Us All*, 2000. Career highlights: Slim in *Of Mice and Men*, Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Schaunard in *La bohème*, and Son in *Lilith* at City Opera; five seasons at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, including Son in *The Merchant and the Pauper* (world premiere); Almaviva with Opera Santa Barbara; Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* at Nashville Opera; Falke in *Die Fledermaus* with San Francisco Opera Center; first place winner in London's inaugural Wigmore Hall International Song Competition, followed by recital debut; performances with Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Borromeo String Quartet, Martin Katz, and Warren Jones; numerous appearances on Marilyn Horne's *On Wings of Song* radio recital series. Upcoming engagements: Narrator in *Paul Bunyan* with Central City Opera.

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Timothy Nolen, bass-baritone. Birthplace: Rotan, Texas. This season at City Opera: Momus I and Jupiter in *Platée*. City Opera debut: title role in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, 1984. Career highlights: title role in last season's *Sweeney Todd*, Horace Tabor in *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, Count and Figaro in *Le nozze di Figaro*, title role in *Casanova*, and Hajj in *Kismet* at City Opera; *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *The Bartered Bride*, and *The Merry Widow* with Metropolitan Opera; many productions with Lyric Opera of Chicago including *La cenerentola*, *Così fan tutte*, and Bolcom's *McTeague* (world premiere); *Béatrice and Bénédict* and *Così fan tutte* at Santa Fe Opera; *La cenerentola* and *The Daughter of the Regiment* at Cincinnati Opera. Broadway: title roles in *Cyrano* and *The Phantom of the Opera*; Hal Prince's *Grind* (original cast recording). Television: "The Sopranos," "Guiding Light," *Willie Stark* (*Great Performances*), and *Sweeney Todd in Concert*. Recent directing credits: Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* for ABC/Disney Radio.

Daniel Beckwith, conductor. Birthplace: Chicago, Illinois. This season at City Opera: *Platée*; City Opera debut *Platée*, 2000. Career highlights: *Don Giovanni* at Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera; *Così fan tutte* at Lyric Opera of Chicago; *Theodora* with Glyndebourne Festival; *Rinaldo* at Grand Théâtre de Genève; *La clemenza di Tito* at Opera Australia; *Alcina*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, and *The Return of Ulysses* at City Opera; *Die Zauberflöte* and *The Crucible* with Washington Opera; *Xerxes* and *Die Zauberflöte* at Seattle Opera; *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Roméo et Juliette* with Cincinnati Opera; *L'incoronazione di Poppea* and *Il re pastore* with Canadian Opera; *Turandot*, *Giulio Cesare*, and *Le nozze di Figaro* with Edmonton Opera; *Susannah* and *Don Pasquale* at Calgary Opera; *Falstaff* with Wolf Trap Opera; Handel's *Oreste* with Juilliard Opera Theatre and the Spoleto Festival, Italy.

Adrienne Lobel, set concept and design. Birthplace: Brooklyn, New York. This season at City Opera: *Platée*. City Opera debut: *Platée*, 2000. Set designs for Mark Morris include *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* and *The Hard Nut* at Brussels La Monnaie, New York State Theater, and Brooklyn Academy of Music; *Orfeo ed Euridice* at BAM, Edinburgh, and on U.S. tour; *Le nozze di Figaro* at La Monnaie; *Lady in the Dark* at London's National Theatre; *Street Scene* and

Nixon in China at Houston Grand Opera; Paris' Bobigny, English National Opera; *The Rake's Progress* at Théâtre du Chatelet; *The Magic Flute* for Glyndebourne; Peter Sellars' productions of *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Così fan tutte*, and *The Mikado*. Broadway: *Passion*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *On the Town*, and *A Year with Frog and Toad* (also developed and produced). Upcoming engagements: *An American Tragedy* at Metropolitan Opera and *Dr. Atomic* at San Francisco Opera.

Isaac Mizrahi, costume designer. Birthplace: Brooklyn, New York. This season at City Opera: *Platée*. City Opera debut: *Platée*, 2000. Fashion designer career highlights: opened his own business in 1987; subject of 1995 documentary *Unzipped*, for which Mr. Mizrahi and director Douglas Keeve received a special CFDA Award for bringing the fashion world to the cinema; designed costumes for movies, theatre, and dance in collaboration with such artists as Twyla Tharp, Bill T. Jones, and Mikhail Baryshnikov; designed costumes for Roundabout's *The Women* (Drama Desk Award, 2002). Other career highlights: appeared in his own off-Broadway one man show, *Les Mizrahi*; three-time CFDA Designer of the Year award winner; author of comic book series, *The Adventures of Sandee the Supermodel* (now in development as a major motion picture); attended High School of Performing Arts and Parsons School of Design. Currently: has a partnership with Target Stores and is the host of a talk show on the Oxygen Network.

James F. Ingalls, lighting designer. Birthplace: Hartford, Connecticut. This season at City Opera: *Platée*. City Opera debut: *Platée*, 2000. New York credits: *Wozzeck*, *Gambler*, *Benvenuto Cellini*, and *Les Troyens* at Metropolitan Opera; *The Hard Nut*, *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, and *Dido and Aeneas* for Mark Morris Dance Group; *El Niño*, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, and *Nixon in China*, all directed by Peter Sellars at Brooklyn Academy of Music. Recent projects: *L'amour de loin* by Kaija Saariaho (Finnish National Opera); *West Side Story* (Bregenz Festival), *The Cherry Orchard* (Williamstown Theatre Festival), *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* (Steppenwolf Theatre Company), and *Sylvia* choreographed by Mark Morris (San Francisco Ballet).



Mark Morris was born on August 29, 1956 in Seattle, Washington, where he studied as a young man with Verla Flowers and Perry Brunson. In the early years of his career he performed with Lar Lubovitch, Hannah Kahn, Laura Dean, Eliot Feld, and the Koleda Balkan Dance Ensemble. He formed the Mark Morris Dance Group in 1980 and has since created over 100 works for the company. From 1988–1991, he was Director of Dance at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, the national opera house of Belgium. Among the works created during his tenure there were three evening-length dances: *The Hard Nut*; *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*; and *Dido and Aeneas*. In 1990 he founded the White Oak Dance Project with Mikhail Baryshnikov. Mr.

Morris is also much in demand as a ballet choreographer. He has created four works for the San Francisco Ballet since 1994 and received commissions from such companies as American Ballet Theatre, Boston Ballet, and the Paris Opera Ballet. His work is in the repertory of the Geneva Ballet, New Zealand Ballet, English National Ballet, and the Royal Ballet, Covent Garden. He has worked extensively in opera, directing and choreographing productions for New York City Opera, English National Opera, and the Royal Opera, Covent Garden. Mr. Morris was named a Fellow of the MacArthur Foundation in 1991. He has received honorary doctorates from The Boston Conservatory of Music, The Juilliard School, Long Island University, Pratt Institute, and Bowdoin College. Mr. Morris is the subject of a biography by Joan Acocella (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). In 2001 Marlowe & Company published Mark Morris' *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato: A Celebration*, a volume of photographs and critical essays.

Mark Morris Dance Group was formed in 1980 and gave its first concert that year in New York City. The company's touring schedule steadily expanded to include cities both in the U.S. and in Europe, and in 1986 it made its first national television program for the PBS series *Dance in America*. In 1988 the MMDG was invited to become the national dance company of Belgium and spent three years in residence at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels. The company returned to the United States in 1991 as one of the world's leading dance companies, performing across the U.S. and at major international festivals. It has maintained and strengthened its ties to several cities around the world, most notably Berkeley, California, where Cal Performances presents the company in two annual seasons, including engagements of *The Hard Nut* each December. The Dance Group appears regularly in Boston, Massachusetts; Fairfax, Virginia; Seattle, Washington; Urbana-Champaign, Illinois; and at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in Becket, Massachusetts. MMDG made its debut at the Mostly Mozart Festival in 2002 and at the Tanglewood Music Festival in 2003 and has since returned to both festivals annually. The company's London seasons have garnered two Laurence Olivier Awards. MMDG is noted for its commitment to live music, a feature of every performance on its full international touring schedule since 1996. Cellist Yo-Yo Ma has frequently collaborated with the Dance Group; their projects include the 1997 Emmy Award-winning film *Falling Down Stairs* and the 2002 dance *Kolam*, created for The Silk Road Project in collaboration with tablaist/composer Zakir Hussain and jazz pianist Ethan Iverson of The Bad Plus. MMDG's film and television projects include *Dido and Aeneas*, *The Hard Nut*, and two documentaries for the U.K.'s *South Bank Show*. In 2001 the Mark Morris Dance Center opened in Brooklyn, New York. The 30,000-square foot facility features three studios and a school for dance students of all ages.



Christina Amendolia, a native New Yorker, earned her B.A. in French Language and Literature from the College of the Holy Cross and lived in France as a Fulbright Scholar prior to starting her professional dance career. Since then she has worked with numerous and varied companies and choreographers, including the Mark Morris Dance Group, with whom she has appeared since 2000, and as a founding member of Vencil Dance Trio, performing both locally and internationally.



Craig Biesecker, from Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, received a B.S. in Music Education from West Chester University of Pennsylvania. While teaching music in Philadelphia, he studied ballet with John White, Margarita de Saa, and Bryan Koulman and worked with choreographers Tim and Lina Early. In New York City he has worked with Pascal Rioult, Carolyn Dorfman, New York Theater Ballet, Mark Dendy, and Gerald Casel. Craig joined the Mark Morris Dance Group in 2003.



Joe Bowie, born in Lansing, Michigan, began dancing while attending Brown University. After graduating with honors in English and American Literature, he moved to New York and performed in the works of Robert Wilson and Ulysses Dove and danced with The Paul Taylor Dance Company for two years before going to Belgium to work with Mark Morris in 1989.



Charlton Boyd was born in New Jersey where he studied and performed with Inner City Ensemble Theater & Dance Company. He is a graduate of the Juilliard School and has danced with the Limón Dance Company. He appears in the *Jose Limón Technique Video, Volume 1* and other music videos. He first appeared with the Mark Morris Dance Group in 1989 and became a company member in 1994.



Amber Darragh began her dance training with Nancy Mittleman in Newport, Oregon. She received her B.F.A. from the Juilliard School in 1999 and went on to dance with the Limón Dance Company for two years. She is a recipient of the 2001 Princess Grace Award and has presented her own choreography in various venues, including Alice Tully Hall and the Joyce Soho. Amber joined the Mark Morris Dance Group in 2001.



Rita Donahue was born and raised in Fairfax, Virginia. She graduated with honors with a B.F.A. in dance and a B.A. in English from George Mason University in 2002 and joined bopi's black sheep, dances by Kraig Patterson. Rita began working with the Mark Morris Dance Group in 2003.



Marjorie Folkman began dancing for Mark Morris in 1996. She graduated summa cum laude from Barnard College and has attended Columbia University's Graduate Program in American Studies. She has also danced with Amy Spencer and Richard Colton, Kraig Patterson, Neta Pulvermacher, Sally Hess, Ellen Cornfield, the Repertory Understudy Group for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, and Sara Rudner.



Lauren Grant was born in Highland Park, Illinois, and began dancing at age three. She continued training, primarily in classical ballet, through high school. At New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, Lauren received her modern dance training and graduated with a B.F.A. Lauren joined the Mark Morris Dance Group in 1998.

John Heginbotham is from Anchorage, Alaska, and graduated from the Juilliard School in 1993. He has performed with artists such as Susan Marshall and Company, John Jasperse, and Ben Munisteri and as a guest artist with Pilobolus Dance Theater. John's choreography is featured in the performances and "Emerge" music video of recording artists Fischerspooner. He joined the Mark Morris Dance Group in 1998.



David Leventhal, raised in Newton, Massachusetts, has danced with the Mark Morris Dance Group since 1997. Previously, he worked with José Mateo's Ballet Theatre and the companies of Marcus Schulkind, Amy Spencer/Richard Colton, Ben Munisteri, and Zvi Gotheiner. He graduated from Brown University in 1995 with honors in English Literature.

Vincent McCloskey has trained at Chicago Academy for the Arts, Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, and Joffrey Ballet School. He has performed as a member of Festival Ballet of Rhode Island, Rennall Dance Company, and as a guest artist with several regional companies across the country. This is his first time working with Mark Morris Dance Group.



Bradon McDonald received his B.F.A. from the Juilliard School in 1997. He danced with the Limón Dance Company for three years and was the recipient of the 1998 Princess Grace Award. He has choreographed and presented his own works internationally, served as choreographer for seven Juilliard Opera Company productions under director Frank Corsaro, and was the choreographic assistant to Donald McKayle at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Bradon joined the Mark Morris Dance Group in 2000.

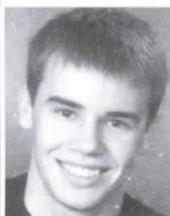
Gregory Nuber began working with the Mark Morris Dance Group in 1998 and became a company member in 2001. He was a member of Pascal Rioult Dance Theatre for three years; has appeared as a guest artist with New York City Opera, Cleveland Opera and Tennessee Repertory Theatre; and has worked with numerous New York-based choreographers. Gregory is a graduate of Arizona State University, where he studied acting and dance.





Maile Okamura was born and raised in San Diego, California. She was a member of Boston Ballet II and Ballet Arizona before moving to New York in 1996. Since then she has had the pleasure of dancing with Neta Pulvermacher, Zvi Gotheiner, Gerald Casel, and many others. Maile began working with the Mark Morris Dance Group in 1998 and became a company member in 2001.

June Omura spent her first six years in New York City and then grew up in Birmingham, Alabama. She returned to New York to attend Barnard College, graduating in 1986 with honors in dance and English, and has been dancing for Mark Morris since 1988. She is the proud mother of twin girls, born in July 2003, and is indebted to her husband, her family and the Mark Morris Dance Group for their love and support.



Noah Vinson received his B.A. in dance from Columbia College, Chicago, where he worked with Shirley Mordine, Jan Erkert, and Brian Jeffrey. In New York he has danced with Teri and Oliver Steele and the Kevin Wynn Collection. He became an apprentice with the Mark Morris Dance Group in 2003.

Aaron Walter graduated from Ohio State University with a B.F.A. in dance performance in June 2003. He started his training at the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Houston, Texas. While there, he was a Senior Company Member of the Texas Tap Ensemble. In New York he has performed with KickStand Dance and worked with Scott Cohen and Lisa Race in addition to his work with the Mark Morris Dance Group.



Julie Worden, from Naples, Florida, is a graduate of the North Carolina School of the Arts. She has worked with Chicago choreographers Bob Eisen, Jan Erkert, and Sheldon B. Smith. She has been dancing with the Mark Morris Dance Group since 1994.

Michelle Yard was born in Brooklyn, New York. She began her professional dance training at the New York City High School of the Performing Arts. Upon her graduation she received the Helen Tamiris and B'nai Brith awards. For three years she was also a scholarship student at The Alvin Ailey Dance Center. She attended New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts. Michelle began dancing with the Mark Morris Dance Group in 1997.



The Comic Genius of Rameau

A year before his sensational attack on French music, Jean-Jacques Rousseau—unpredictable and inconsistent as ever—gave a glowing assessment of *Platée*.

"Call it sublime!" he wrote in 1752. "Never repent of having considered it Rameau's masterpiece and the most excellent work that has ever as yet been heard in our opera house." It was a view shared by most critics by that date, including many of the other philosophers such as Grimm, d'Alembert, and d'Holbach. By the time of the composer's death in 1764, the work had generally come to be seen as one of his crowning glories, alongside *Castor et Pollux* and *Dardanus*.

Such would not have been the verdict when *Platée* first appeared. It was the last of several works staged at Versailles in 1735 during the festivities surrounding the marriage of the Dauphin with Maria Teresa of Spain. The opera was coolly received: Voltaire described it as "the most detestable show I have ever seen or heard." It was given only a single performance, and when the Duc de Richelieu, master of ceremonies, asked Louis XV repeatedly whether he would like to see the opera again, the king did not deign to reply.

The reason is not difficult to find. *Platée* was, as we shall see, wildly unsuited to the wedding festivities. There is indeed evidence that it had not been designed for this purpose but was already substantially complete. And when Rameau's contemporary, Royer, failed to produce a planned setting of Voltaire's powerful if controversial *Pandore* (a libretto which, to our eternal loss, Rameau had already refused), the organizers drafted *Platée* to fill the gap.

Richelieu may well not have read the libretto carefully. Had he done so, he must surely have realized that a plot which centered on the wooing by the god Jupiter of a grotesque marsh nymph was scarcely appropriate to the occasion, given that the new Dauphine was, in Malherbe's word, "not physically well served by nature." While few would have identified the nymph and her divine suitor with the newlyweds (anyone looking for allegory would equate Jupiter not with the Dauphin but with the King), much of the humor and especially the aborted mock-marriage at the work's climax must, in this context, have seemed in poor taste.

It was only in 1749, when *Platée* was presented at the Paris Opera, that its virtues became more obviously apparent, with "new beauties revealed at each hearing." (Rémond de Sainte-Albine). And at the 1754 revival, the work was ecstatically received. The triumphant reprises of this opera of *Castor* were seen as definitive ripostes to the Italian music of the Bouffons, whose appearance at the Opéra had for almost two years rocked that august institution to its foundations.

Comedy had traditionally played little part at the Paris Opera. The first "tragédies en musique" by Jean-Baptiste Lully, true founder of French opera, had followed Italian precedent in including comic episodes. But Lully soon realized that the French did not take to a mixture of the tragic and comic; this was one reason why they detested Shakespeare. After 1677, he eliminated such episodes from subsequent operas. From then until the appearance of *Platée* some 70 years later, only a handful of works presented at the Opéra had wholly comic themes. Of course, the most successful were Mouret's *Le mariage de Ragonde* and *Cariselli*, an entrée in Campra's *Les Fragments de Monsieur de Lully*.

It was the success of this last that sparked the creation of the present work. In 1740, in response to the Académie's request for a new work modeled on *Cariselli* for performance during Carnival time or the summer doldrums, Jacques Autreau had written a libretto entitled "Platée ou Junon jalousie." Autreau borrowed the idea from the ancient Greek writer Pausanius—an episode in which Jupiter, to cure the tiresome jealousy of his wife Juno, pretends to court a wooden statue disguised as a woman. Juno, led to uncover the ruse, would be made to look foolish when the object of her husband's "affections" is exposed. In Autreau's version it is not a statue but the marsh nymph *Platée* who submits to Jupiter's courtship and who becomes the butt of most of the humor.

Autreau's text provided the outline and many details of the libretto that Rameau eventually set. (The Prologue, "La naissance de la comédie," is almost wholly Autreau's.) But the composer, though aware of the work's potential, realized that the libretto needed expanding. He thus bought the rights to the manuscript and hired another writer, Le Valois d'Orville, to adapt it to his requirements. Among the improvements that d'Orville introduced were the extravagant character of La Folie and many other comic elements.

From an outline of the plot alone we might conclude that the humor of *Platée*, as it was now known, is thoroughly sick. On the stage, however, that's not how it seems. While we may laugh at Platée's plight, our sympathies are with the nymph throughout. Moreover, the cruelty of laughing at an ugly but hopelessly vain female is kept at a distance by the fact that her part was sung by a man. (This *travesti* role, one of the few in French operas of the period, was created by the famous haute-contre, or high tenor, Pierre Jélyotte.)

Much of the humor of *Platée* comes from its wicked parodies of serious opera. Audiences would, for example, have expected miraculous stage effects and they certainly got them. But these transformations were hardly the kind normally seen at the Opéra, where representations of the supernatural were governed by elaborate conventions. The treatment of gods was a case in point. Such divinities were expected to act in a manner befitting their divine status. Yet when Platée first encounters Jupiter, he is crouching out of sight within the cloud that has brought him from Olympus. As Platée gingerly approaches, the god manifests himself first as a donkey (the nymph mistakes its braying for amorous sighs), then as an owl (this provokes from the other birds a cacophony far removed from the idealized bird-song that was part of the Opéra's stock-in-trade).

Audiences would likewise have expected elaborate scene changes, not only between acts but also within them. Yet *Platée*, after the Prologue, includes none. Instead the action takes place, not in an enchanted grove or a palace or any of the other standard settings, but entirely in Platée's soggy marsh. Moreover, the inhabitants are not the usual denizens of rural idyll but frogs and cuckoos. (The frogs are eventually used to pull Platée's chariot to the mock marriage.) The appearance of incongruous characters is, indeed, a recurrent theme. When La Folie first arrives, it is with a group of "fous gais" and "fous tristes"—these dressed respectively as babies (poupons) and Greek philosophers. Cupid, moreover, appears with a ludicrously large bow and arrow.

It is not only the gods' behavior that is parodied. Their conversation often takes on a colloquial or even irreverent tone far removed from that of the serious opera of the day. At the start of Act II, for instance, Mercury explains that he has hoodwinked Juno into going to Athens in the expectations of surprising Jupiter and his suspected new love. "Look, there she goes," he jokes, pointing to a passing cloud. And at the start of the mock-marriage, when Platée observes that Cupid and Hymen, the god of marriage, are not yet present, Mercury wryly observes that these two divinities rarely go together.

The libretto adopts a similarly irreverent approach to the normally elevated language of opera. Much is made of comic alliteration (Platée's "Mon Coeur, t'es tu bien consulte?/ Ah! T'a-t-il bien mérité?") and onomatopoeia (her indignant "Dis donc, pourquoi?", taken up by the frogs as "quoi? quoi? quoi?") This last is more frog-like than it may seem, since in Rameau's day the relevant words were pronounced "pourkwe" and "kwe." Later, when a furious Platée grasps Cithéron by the throat (not something you find in many a tragédie en musique), their duet includes the memorable exchange: "Qui, moi? Oui, toi! Moi? Toi!" And to cap Platée's demotic use of language, witness her decidedly un-operatic expletives: "Fi!" and "Ouff!"

How then did Rameau react to such a libretto? He has so often been portrayed as a withdrawn, desiccated, severe, avaricious cross-patch that he would hardly seem suited to such a mold-breaking comic text. Most assessments of the composer's personality, however, date from his final years: he died a few days short of his 81st birthday, disillusioned by changes of taste in the operatic world and by the problems he had experienced in the acceptance of his revolutionary work as a music theorist.

But there are glimpses in his biography of a more genial, *bon vivant* Rameau, whose first task when he moved to Paris in 1722 was to provide music for knock-about farces by his friend Piron. (The music, now lost, is known to have included operatic parodies.) Rameau's output also includes humorous drinking songs and canons. And we must remember, above all, that it was he who commissioned the revision of *Autreau's* text of *Platée* including, one assumes, the enhancement of its comic elements.

In the event, Rameau rose to the challenge superbly. There is, even by his standards, an extraordinary vitality about the music of this opera. From the start, the composer clearly has no intention of clinging to a style developed for quite different genres of opera. The tone is set by the opening of the "Overture," with its sharp fluctuations of tempo, capricious melodic dislocations, and gasping fragments: this is the music that will recur at the entrance of *La Folie* in Act II.

Thereafter, Rameau exploits every known trick of comic writing: glissandos—rarely used at this date—to characterize the gods' ludicrous wedding gifts to *Platée* (as Momus explains "Ce sont de pleurs,/Des tenders douleurs,/Des cris, des langueurs!"); extravagant pizzicatos for the lyre that *La Folie* has stolen from Apollo; exaggerated wide melodic skips; inanely chattering repeated notes. In the vocal music, musical parody takes many forms; inappropriate vocalises (as in the laughing chorus "Quelle es aima-a-a-able"), misaccentuations (in *Platée's* arietta badine), vocal acrobatics (in *La Folie's* delicious caricatures of Italian coloratura, especially). Sometimes the music can be mock-solemn, as in the two dances "dans le gout de vielle", where the vielle (hurdu-gurdy) is represented by sustained double stoppings. Sometimes the parody would have been more apparent to Rameau's audience than to us: the chaconne that precedes *Platée's* marriage is comic not just because of its absurd length or because it is danced in "le genre le plus noble," but because it is misplaced: chaconnes, everyone knew, belonged at the culminations of the final divertissement.

Throughout the score Rameau's flair for descriptive writing serves the comedy magnificently. The chorus of frogs and cuckoos, in which oboes repeat a croaking syncopated low C-sharp (a note not strictly available on the Baroque instrument), would hardly sound out of place in Ravel's *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, while the "charivari" of frightened birds has a Messiaen-like realism. And the braying of the donkey-Jupiter anticipates Mendelssohn's representation of Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

If *Platée* were merely a succession of comic effects, it would scarcely deserve its reputation as one of the most original and enduring works of 18th-century music theater. In pointing to individual moments of comedy, it is easy to forget that the work is constructed with rare skill and singleness of purpose. Even the Prologue, so often only tangentially related—if at all—to the main drama, introduces a pretext for the ensuing plot. And the quality of musical invention, even in the most outrageous passages, is astonishingly high. When Folly mockingly describes the wonderful chorus that summons the god Hymen as "a masterpiece of harmony," for once she is talking sense.

Above all, it is in the representation of *Platée* herself that Rameau has produced one of his most memorable creations. Her incurable vanity, her gullibility, petulance and vulnerability—all are sketched in the libretto but brought vividly and endearingly to life through the music itself. Here, as Rameau's biographer Girdlestone puts it, is "one of Rameau's few characters who is a personality and not just a succession of situation." It was for this reason, and for the work's naturalness, vivacity, and comic realism, that the philosophers hailed *Platée* as heralding a new era of French opera. That era never dawned in Rameau's lifetime, and he was unable to repeat his success in this genre. The work nevertheless remains, in the words of the composer's collaborator Cahusac, "of all his works the most original"—a testament to his comic genius.

—Program notes by Graham Sadler. Reprinted by permission, Royal Opera, Covent Garden.

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