



À la française, the Dutch do Offenbach's *Orphée aux enfers*

19/06/2023 by Laurence Vittes

 Netherlands **Offenbach, *Orphée aux enfers***: Soloists, Chorus of Opera Zuid, Philharmonie Zuidnederland / Enrico Delamboye (conductor). Flint Theatre, Amersfoort, 6.6.2023. (LV)

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Mathys Lagier (Orphée) and Amel Brahim-Djelloul (Eurydice) © Joost Milde

Production:

Director – Benjamin Prins

Design – Neil Marloes en Wikke and Marrit van der Burgt

Lighting – Julian Maiwald

Choreography – Willy Laury

Cast:

Eurydice – Amel Brahim-Djelloul

Pluton – Mark Omvle

Jupiter – Roger Smeets

Junon – Francis van Broekhuizen

Orphée – Mathys Lagier

Bacchus / Opinion Publique – Thomas Morris

Mercure – Jeroen de Vaal

Diane – Anna Emelianova

John Styx – Olivier Hernandez

Vénus – Marina Ruiz

Cupidon – Sophie Collin

Apollon – Tom Jansen

The word on the street in France is that authentic Offenbach – i.e. most deliriously nihilistic – is likely to be found in the south, in Marseille. What a happy surprise to find that a thousand kilometers north an opera company, based in Maastricht, the Netherland's south, has been touring a production of *Orphée aux enfers* that is as

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At the helm again after the company's success with *Fantasio* in 2019, director Benjamin Prins described the music 'as vulnerable as a bubble and extremely extravagant'. Using imaginative stagecraft, including floating chess pieces and other found objects, and putting the chorus in the balcony at one point, he kept the setting at the Athenian Acropolis but veered occasionally into future centuries including an appearance by Offenbach himself. The musical 'version mixte' that Prins and conductor Enrico Delamboye concocted was based on the 1858 and 1874 versions, and the production was assembled to fit into venues from the Parktheater in Eindhoven to the Opera op de Parade in 's-Hertogenbosch, where *Orphée* will end its run on 22 June.

It was the company's first appearance at the Flint in the beautiful city of Amersfoort, and the fun began after the Overture when Thomas Morris's pugnacious Public Opinion rose from the first row in the audience. Looking like Dustin Hoffman's Tootsie, Morris chatted to the conductor and friends – 'Martine, ça va?' – before reaching a stage populated by five extremely amorous sheep who later would go off in paroxysms of baas while Orphée was busy with his own dirty dancing.

The cast was wonderful from top to bottom, with flashes of unpredictable chemistry. Amel Brahim-Djelloul's Eurydice flirted deliciously with Mark Omvlee's commanding Pluton and Mathys Lagier's egotistical Orphée, and sailed brilliantly through her great arias, while Morris scored as Bacchus as much as with Public Opinion. Only Marina Ruiz's Vénus, acting exquisitely while carrying a mirror to check her beauty, and Jeroen de Vaal's otherwise engaging Mercure, struggled to be heard – and during his famous 'Eh hop! Eh hop!' the orchestra took such delight that no one could reasonably complain. Sophie Collin's Cupidon in diapers almost stole the show, and Roger Smeets's perplexed Jupiter with his stage prop of a lightning bolt was the night's final and best absurdity.

Energized by musical intrusions that included Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, *La Marseillaise* and *Love Me Tender* – all absurdly perfect considering Offenbach's own use of Gluck's 'Che farò senza Euridice' – the entire cast was dancing by the end with some glorious singing by Eurydice and Orphée. The finale came amidst explosions of golden confetti.

The five-person corps de ballet added a sexy French snap of its own throughout the night, whether it was their opening ballet parodying *Swan Lake* or their embracing Eurydice in the guise of Cerberus's three heads. Their chaotic take on the iconic *galop* was a welcome change from a clichéd can-can.

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expertly balanced with the singers and chorus so that not one delectable instrumental morsel was dropped off the table: an acoustic miracle.

Next season, Opera Zuid will take on Mozart's *Der Schauspieldirektor* and a Rossini double bill of *La Scala di Seta* and *Il Signor Bruschino*. It should be a riot.

Laurence Vittes

International Opera, Opera & Ballet

Amersfoort, Laurence Vittes

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