

PROGRAM

*Jonathan Woody: **By much love betray'd***

World-Premiere

*Jean-Philippe Rameau: **Orphée***

featuring [Hannah De Priest](#)

*Jean-François Dandrieu : **La lyre d'Orphée***

featuring Mark Edwards

*Philippe Courbois: **Orphée***

featuring Jonathan Woody

PERFORMERS

Hannah De Priest, soprano
Jonathan Woody, baritone & composer
Debra Nagy, baroque oboe
Shelby Yamin, violin
Rebecca Reed, viola da gamba
Mark Edwards, harpsichord

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Notes on the Program:

No myth is more foundational to musicians than that of Orpheus. He is the archetype of the inspired singer whose song can at once elicit feelings of love or to move us to tears. The power of his music was said to be so great that trees and mountains bowed in his presence, and he could charm the birds, the fish, and wild beasts. Perhaps most famously, Orpheus's song had the power to convince

the ruler of the underworld to let him bring his wife Eurydice back from the dead - on one condition - that Orpheus should not set eyes on her until they can see the sky above. In a moment of weakness, all is lost.

We're proud to open our program with the world premiere of **Jonathan Woody's *By much love betray'd***, a trio sonata that traces the full arc of Orpheus' life - from receiving his lyre and the gift of music from Apollo, to his fateful turn in the underworld, to his brutal demise at the hands of the Maenads.

While Orpheus' story is a grand tragedy for the ages, our program's small-scale cantatas by French Baroque masters Jean-Philippe Rameau and Philippe Courbois privilege intimacy. It's almost as though the drama has been distilled and intensified as a single soloist takes on multiple roles while the instrumentalists enhance the psychological portrayal. Taking advantage of the video format, we'll be able to witness both characters at pivotal moments in the story.

Primarily remembered today as a titan of French opera, Rameau's first contact with dramatic music was through the small-scale cantata. His *Orphée*, published in 1721, is a compact telling of Orpheus' fatal error. The action begins with a prematurely jubilant Orpheus leading his beloved out of the Underworld. Suddenly, victory gives way to disaster as Orpheus' eyes find his Eurydice. Unable to admit responsibility for the fatal error, Orpheus pleads with Cupid to make amends in a stunning lament, "Amour, c'est toi qui fais mon crime!" But his pleading is in vain; Eurydice returns to the Underworld and we are left with the inevitable moral tagline: in love, there is a perfect moment and you must wait for it. In other words? Timing is everything.

Following Jean-François Dandrieu's introspective **La Lyre d'Orphée**, which imagines the melancholy strains of Orpheus's lyre as a harpsichord solo, we'll swiftly be transported to the dramatic heart of Orpheus' tale.

Without any introduction, composer **Philippe Courbois** has Orpheus cry out to the heavens in the wake of Eurydice's death and he commits to following her to the underworld. The weeping and wailing double-stops in the violin become a sort-of leitmotif representing Orpheus' lyre while his passage down to the underworld is accompanied by "traveling" music in the viola da gamba. Upon his arrival in Hades, Orpheus pleads repeatedly with Pluto to put an end to his suffering in the air "Terminés mon funeste sort."

As we all know by now, Pluto grants Orpheus's request - on one crucial condition - and like in Rameau's **Orphée**, we anticipate Orpheus' triumph too soon: the martial air "Peut-on refuser la victoire" casts Love as a triumphant warrior and the Underworld as a soon-to-be distant memory.

All the while, faithful Eurydice follows in the footsteps of her beloved. As they near the uppermost reaches of the underworld, Eurydice herself speaks - pleading with Orpheus to adhere to Pluto's directive. But Orpheus' impatience gets the best of him...

The power of music - to heal, to convince, and to move - is at the heart of tonight's program. Along the way, we evoke the pain of loss, the thrill of victory, and dashed hopes as lessons about keeping faith, waiting for the right moment, and not succumbing to rash desire resonate with us all.

– *Debra Nagy*

About By Much Love Betray'd

By Much Love Betray'd takes its title from John Dryden's 1709 translation of Virgil's *Georgics*, and was inspired by several key events in the Orpheus myth. In movement one, the viola da gamba begins broad and expansive climb, soon joined by oboe and violin, conjuring Orpheus's journey to Mount Parnassus, where he is given the gift of music by the god Apollo. The deliberate scale-wise motion is meant to convey the awe and determination Orpheus must summon to reach the top and be granted his most significant ability: to charm the world with his magical lyre.

The next movement begins just after Orpheus has successfully used his charm to rescue Eurydice from the underworld. The oboe and violin now chase each other with a bounding melody, reminiscent of the youthful passion of a lover who has cheated death, only to reach the brink of safety before his fatal mistake. An abrupt diminished harmony snaps the heroes out of their anticipatory bliss, and the instant of horror is depicted with staccato, heartbeat-like pulses, interrupted with pitiable cries from each instrument. Upon realizing his fate, Orpheus's lamentation is conveyed by a chromatic descending passacaglia, beginning in the viola da gamba and then joined by the other instruments. Its unstable and ever-shifting harmonies generate images of the turmoil, confusion and loss that the impassioned Orpheus must now face.

The final movement once again skips forward to the end of Orpheus's life, described in some versions of the myth as coming to a violent end at the hands of the Maenads, the frenzied disciples of Dionysus. In the story, they rip him to pieces, weary of his incessant mourning of Eurydice, and in this depiction, flying and contrasting scales in the oboe and violin are meant to conjure the limbs of Orpheus being torn asunder here and there. The Maenads make efficient work of their prey, and the movement comes to a quick, cheeky end befitting the unceremonious demise of one of the great heroes of ancient Greek myth.

– *Jonathan Woody*