

## Midcoast Senior College

### *Italian Opera: From Monteverdi to Puccini*

#### *Opera Synopses –*

Session I [3/12/20]

#### ***L'Orfeo by Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)***

The Spirit of Music vows to tell the story of Orpheus and commands silence even from nature.

Nymphs & shepherds celebrate the marriage of Orpheus but the scene is interrupted when Sylvia, Eurydice's friend, brings news of Eurydice's tragic death by the bite of a snake.

Overcome with grief, Orpheus vows to brave the underworld to recover his beloved bride. At the edge of the River Styx, Charon initially bars Orpheus but when the music of Orpheus' lyre lulls him to sleep, he succeeds. In Hades, Pluto, persuaded by his wife Persephone releases Eurydice on condition that Orpheus not look back at Eurydice on the journey out of Hades. Orpheus, fearful of the pursuing Furies, disobeys and Eurydice disappears. Later in the fields of Thrace, Orpheus is once more lamenting the loss of his beloved when Apollo, Orpheus' father descends in his golden chariot and transports his son to Mt. Olympus to dwell there in immortality.

#### ***Possible DVD Highlights:***

Production-

La Capella Reial de Catalunya

Le Concert des Nations

Musical Director- Jordi Savall / Stage Director- Gilbert Defeo

Performance-

Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu (2002)

#### ***La Calisto by Francesco Cavalli (1602-1676)***

ACT I

Jupiter descends to earth (Arcadia) with his son Mercury to assess the damage caused by the fall of Phaethon (son of Helios, the sun god). He discovers Calisto, the beautiful, young devotee of the goddess Diana, and immediately falls for her. Mercury advises Jupiter to try his luck by resorting to a ruse; disguising himself as Diana. Calisto is tricked into following him (her) into a shady retreat. Later, still giddy from her recent tryst, she encounters the real Diana who immediately dismisses her for her outrageous insinuations. Endymion, a young mortal admirer of Diana, is infatuated with her personification as the moon and Diana confesses the same feelings for him to the old nymph, Lympha. A third love appears; it is Pan, the god of the shepherds.

ACT II

Endymion has trekked to the summit of Mt. Lycaeus. Diana appears as he is sleeping but when he awakes they sing of their mutual love. Later, Jupiter's wife Juno appears and suspects that her husband is up to his usual amorous antics after Calisto confides in her. She vows to take revenge.

ACT III

Calisto awaits the arrival of her divine Diana but instead Juno appears accompanied by Furies and plans to transform her into a she-bear for her transgressions with Jupiter. Later, Jupiter appears in all his splendor and confesses the love he has for her. He then explains that she must continue her earthly life as a bear for a time but as the opera ends she is transformed and ascends as one of the constellations.

#### ***Possible DVD Highlights:***

***Giulio Cesare in Egitto* by George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)**

The scene is Egypt just after Caesar has conquered Pompey, who had fled Rome after starting civil war. Caesar promises Pompey's wife, Cornelia, pardon for her husband and family as Achilles, an Egyptian lord, arrives. Achilles brings Pompey's head, which Ptolemy has had cut off. Pompey's son, Sextus, vows revenge. Cleopatra prepares to meet Caesar, whom she hopes to persuade to debar her brother Ptolemy from Egypt's throne. Caesar agrees. Cleopatra offers to help Sextus in his revenge. Ptolemy entertains Caesar in his palace. Sextus enters and challenges Ptolemy to a duel, but is taken prisoner with his mother. The second and third acts deal with a maze of plots to assassinate Caesar and Ptolemy and then a battle between Ptolemy and Cleopatra in which Cleopatra is taken prisoner. After the eventual death of Ptolemy by Sextus's hand, the opera concludes with the general rejoicing of peace under the unity of Caesar & Cleopatra.

***Possible DVD Highlights:***

Production/Performance-

The Glyndebourne Festival, Glyndebourne, England (2005)

Orchestra of the Enlightenment

Music Director-William Christie / Stage Director- Timothy McVicar

***Terminology:***

**Opera Antecedents-**

Liturgical Dramas

Mystery Plays (Sacre Rappresentazioni)

Madrigal Comedies

Interdedii

Monody

Florentine Camerata

***L'Orfeo Favola in Musica***

Maestro di Cappella

Libretto

Toccata

Cornetto

Sackbut

Theorbo

Strophic Aria

Ritornello

***La Calisto***

Arioso

Carnevale

***Giulio Cesare in Egitto***

Falsettist/Countertenor

Castrato

Da Capo Aria

Pietro Metastasio

