Scene III: Christoph Willibald Gluck

Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714-1787)

It will not be often that I will devote an entire chapter to one composer, but since Gluck and Wagner had the most profound effect on opera as drama in their respective times I am making an exception for them. The principal reason for this is that each of them in their very different ways had the most profound effect on opera that succeeded them for close to half a century.

Indeed, Christoph Gluck was undoubtedly one of the most important and influential opera composers of all time, a towering genius as brilliant and influential as Monteverdi, but as in the case of the master of Mantua, only a few of his works are part of the standard repertoire, and those only intermittently. In his case, however, it's not a case of lost operas—most of them exist in score form, particularly all of those from his "reform" period—so much as the fact that many audiences squirm when they are performed because they don't have a lot of pretty, melodic arias with high notes. The top three are, of course, *Orfeo ed Eurydice, Alceste* (the French version) and *Iphigénie en Tauride,* although the long sung dialogues in the last-named makes it one of those "squirmers" for many audiences.

Originally working in Italy, as had his older predecessor Handel, he wrote an astonishing number of now-forgotten works in the Italian style, thirty in fact, between 1741 and 1762. Like Handel, he wrote some of these for London audiences , including a few based on the texts of Metastasio, who many composers (including Hasse) also used. As we have seen, the Metastasio model produced long, convoluted plots with too many characters and, in the end, a contrived happy ending to soften the blow of the tragedy. Then, in the latter year, Gluck produced the first opera of which he was really proud, *Orfeo ed Euridice,* also in Italian. By this time, during his travels abroad, he had met people who agreed with him that opera has strayed too far from its original freshness as living theater; the jokes of comedies had become stale, and the serious works were too full of over-ornate coloratura arias. He wanted to make operatic music more straightforward and, in the process, more dramatic.

Ironically, since the first version of *Orfeo* was written in Italian—though premiered in Vienna—the first Orfeo was the alto castrato Gaetano Guadagni, which to modern-day historically-informed performers (heretofore abbreviated in this study as HIP) automatically means a countertenor. In 1769, he transposed the music upward to suit the castrato *soprano* Giuseppe Millico and rewrote some of the orchestration for a performance at the Feast of Apollo in Parma. This is the least-performed edition of the opera; it was given its first modern revival in November 2014 at the Tage Alter Musik festival in Herne, Germany…again with a countertenor in the title role. In 1774 he revised it once again, this time in France, and since the French almost never used castrati, he rewrote the part for a *haute-contre.* In the 20th century, this has been transposed down a bit and sung by "normal" tenors such as Nicolai Gedda, but by and large it's not very popular.

The final revision came 72 years after Gluck's death, when Hector Berlioz prepared a new performing edition for the great mezzo-soprano Pauline Viardot-Garcia, and this is the most complex of all. For this version, Berlioz combined the best elements of the original Italian and later French versions. He kept the key scheme of the 1762 original but added some of the more subtle orchestration of the 1769 revision, and for the end of the first act Gluck's original scene, "Che disse? Che ascolta?," which is performed in most versions, was replaced with a coloratura aria, "Amour, viens rendre à mon âme" that Gluck had written for Joseph Legros, the first *haute-contre* Orfeo because he wanted to show off his coloratura technique. But Berlioz, convinced that it was not an authentic Gluck aria but written by Italian composer Ferdinando Bertoni—something believed for nearly two centuries until its authenticity was verified—didn't even want

to use it, but Viardot-Garcia was his star and she insisted on it. In fact, she and a young Camille Saint-Saëns rewrote the cadenza for it.

Actually, it's a wonderful aria to use in alternate performances, but Gluck was right in trying to bury it after Legros performed it because the musical *style* is all wrong. When conductor Arturo Toscanini staged *Orfeo* (in Italian) at the Metropolitan Opera in 1909, he fretted over whether to use the "corrupted" but exciting "Bertoni" aria or Gluck's original ending which he felt was too tame to describe Orfeo's emotions, for the end of the first act. Eventually, he rejected both, instead transferring Alceste's great aria, "Divinites du Styx," into the opera with slightly rewritten lyrics. In a highly unusual gesture from him, he wrote part of the program notes explaining this and defending his position.

As you can see, then, *Orphée/Orfeo* has had a more convoluted history than any other opera that is (pretty much) part of the standard repertoire. Yet in listening to any of the four extant versions, one can hear what Gluck was aiming at. The music, even when the performer singing the title role tosses in a few trills for decoration, is far more straightforward music than any of his or others' previous operas since the days of Lully. As in the case of Handel's *Rodelinda,* the opera is carried by a continuous succession of choruses, ariettas, sung recitative to orchestral accompaniment, and a few arias. One wonders if he had studied Handel's score; it certainly sounds like it. In any case, drama is brought forcefully to the fore, and although some modern performers tend to overdo the passion, it is clearly welcome in this work. In the first act, the chorus opens with a dirge-like piece that is reminiscent of the "chorus" in Greek drama; in the second, the chorus represents the Furies in the underworld. Here Gluck wrote his most imaginative music in the entire opera; even in a modern performance, the chorus of the Furies can create a spine-chilling effect if sung with an "edge." The third act is, of course, most famous for Orfeo's aria of lament, "Che faro senza Euridice," but the excellent and quite dramatic Orfeo-Euridice duet, with its clipped rhythms and "stop-time" accents from the orchestra, is too often overlooked. From this point forward, to Gluck, the presentation of drama was everything. Only the form and shape of the music changed. In his later "reform" operas, the music became gradually *less* melodic than in *Orphée,* sometimes with multiple tempo changes within a single aria—"Divinites du Styx" is a good example—and a focus on projecting the meaning of words in a very specific manner rather than leaning on "pretty" music to please the masses.

Of the various editions of *Orfeo,* there are three outstanding performances. The original 1762 version in Italian is best represented by the recording featuring Bernarda Fink in the title role, Veronica Cangemi as Euridice, and Maria Cristina Kiehr as Amore, conducted by René Jacobs. The best performance of the Italian revision for castrato soprano I've ever heard is the one featuring the great Brazilian countertenor Bruno de Sá, who sounds so much like a natural soprano that it will astound you. This was a live performance from 2021 that was streamed online and was, at the time of writing, available for free viewing online on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g67_LSuV8m4. Georgina Melville was the superb and highly dramatic Euridice, and Michael Hofstetter conducted in a brilliant fashion; the only negative feature of this performance is the absolutely abysmal singing of the soprano (at least, I think she's a soprano and not a bad nightclub singer) in the role of Amore.

As for the Berlioz revision, this is best represented in a DVD performance by the great Russian mezzo-soprano Vesselina Kasarova, who had a brief but brilliant career in the 1990s. The downside is that the visual production is nonsensical and confusing, but if you just listen to it and cut off the video, you'll be astounded by how good it is. Rosemary Joshua is the excellent Eurydice and Ivor Bolton the conductor.

Alceste I (Italian version, 1767) ***& II*** (French version,

Two years before he wrote the first revised version of *Orfeo,* Gluck turned out a work which has since become a neglected masterpiece—neglected not because the music was not brilliant or innovative, but because it was dramatic on an intimate scale whereas its successor, an entirely different work, presents the drama on a grander and more epic level, and for the most part opera lovers have little patience with subtlety. Unfortunately for Gluck and this opera, he was really too far ahead of his time. The way the drama is presented musically, the original *Alceste* has more in common with *Parsifal, Louise* and the operas influenced by them than with *Die Walküre, Elektra* or the operas that *they* influenced.

According to the account on Wikipedia, "When Gluck published the score of *Alceste* in Vienna in 1769, he added a famous preface in Italian almost certainly written by Calzabigi, which set out their ideals for operatic reform, whose programmatic points follow those exposed by Francesco Algarotti in his *Saggio sopra l'opera in musica* (*Essay on opera in music*, 1755), namely:

- no da capo arias,
- no opportunity for vocal improvisation or virtuosic displays of vocal agility or power,
- no long melismas,
- a more predominantly syllabic setting of the text to make the words more intelligible,
- far less repetition of text within an aria,
- a blurring of the distinction between recitative and aria, declamatory and lyrical passages, with altogether less recitative,
- accompanied rather than secco recitative [this, as we have seen, had actually been going on for some time],
- simpler, more flowing melodic lines, and
- an overture that is linked by theme or mood to the ensuing action."

Alceste also had no original role in it for the castrato voice, even though Gluck used a castrato in his next opera, *Paride ed Elena* and rewrote the tenor role of Admetus for soprano castrato Millico in the 1770 revival of this *Alceste* in Vienna. A really good, taut performance of either version is still a gripping experience. As good as Lully's *Alceste* was, Gluck's left it in the shade. Part of the "secret" to its success is the way Gluck wrote the orchestral music, in short, stabbing phrases that intrude their way into the sung solo and choral music, and here, even more so than in *Orfeo,* the chorus takes on the dimensions of a Greek chorus commenting on the proceedings. Without "Divinites du Styx," an invention for the French *Alceste,* there is no memorable aria in the entire opera although short arias, wedded to the ongoing musical structure, abound in it. It is as innovative and forward-looking an opera as C.P.E. Bach's Concerti and Symphonies were in the field of orchestral music, and neither composer had anyone in their time who could, or would, attempt to-follow in their footsteps.

Although much (but scarcely all) of the music in the first two acts of the Italian and French versions is the same, the libretti are entirely different. Not only do the characters sing in a different order, but much of the time they sing entirely different words. But it is the last act that was almost entirely rewritten for the French version. In addition, Gluck's use of the orchestra had clearly matured since *Orfeo;* he had learned how to use specific instruments for their astringent timbres in order to enhance the drama from the accompaniment standpoint. The flow of music incorporating sung recitative with arias had also matured, and his frequent use of minor keys, and occasional diminished chords, added to the overall effect. Admeto's aria in the last act of the Italian version, "Misero! É cho faro!" is an excellent case in point—an aria completely missing in the French version because in that one, Gluck and his librettist chose to bring Hercules into the

picture, with very different music. But perhaps most importantly, Alceste emerges in the Italian version as a very kind, loving, and sympathetic character, almost gentle in her concern for Admeto. This Alceste would never sound right singing an aria as powerful as "Divinites du Styx," although in the French version that aria, the climax of Act I, was clearly a brilliant stroke on Gluck's part since the character in this version has a bit less sympathy and a bit more spunk. More importantly, however, is that the Italian Act III is more believable as a dramatic entity *because* it doesn't rely on an extraneous character for its dramatic impetus. In place of the tender duet between Alceste and Admeto, "Cari figli," the French version substitutes another strong aria for her, "Grands Dieux, soutenez mon courage!" ("Great Gods, sustain my courage!"). Following the "Cari figli" duet, the music jumps, without warning or preparation, into a fiery explosion of sound, after which Admeto, Ismene and Evander, performing in full voice like a mini-chorus all by themselves, sing, "But what sound of terrible voices, what gloom and darkness, shocks and covers me with horror?" There is nothing similar to this in the French version, and I feel this was a rare lapse in judgment on Gluck's part. A bit later on, after a pause in the music, Gluck makes a terrific effect by contrasting low trombones with high clarinets and oboes in a slow, minor-key passage leading into the next duet. At nearly every turn, one is surprised by Gluck's musical choices. He did indeed make the music match the text, creating an act in which the musical and dramatic progression keep you on the edge of your seat. As the act eventually marches (literally) to its conclusion, you feel as if you had lived through something monumental. You have. It's called Gluck.

To be sure, the French version has its attractions as well. Act III in this version opens immediately with an aria by Evander, in which a soprano interjects a line or two, and the ensuing chorus, in C minor, is set to the words, "Weep, weep, O land of Thessaly! Admete is about to die!"Alceste, by this time in this version, has temporarily left the scene, giving way to the loud, bragging Hercules to make his points. The music of this rewritten act has its good moments, but it is clearly not as well-sustained a dramatic piece as the Italian Act III. Hercules' aria sounds oddly out of place, good though it is, and its inclusion interrupts the dramatic flow so well sustained in the Italian version. For all its good points, the French version is simply not as continuous or as consistent.

Yet we must understand that Gluck was under heavy pressure to make the French *Alceste* conform with the tastes of French audiences, and thanks to Lully and Rameau, they were used to gods interceding on behalf of mortals in their Greek operas. At least we can be thankful that Gluck stubbornly resisted their insistence that he end the opera with an extended ballet, although he did go so far as to acquiesce to their demands for extra, subsidiary characters to give the work "more variety." Although he did give in by including Hercules, he at least had precedent for that in Euripides' original play. Nowadays the opera is usually performed in the Paris edition, although the libretto is sometimes back-translated into Italian.

The two best recordings I've run across of each version are, for the Italian, the often-underrated recording on Naxos with Teresa Ringholz as Alceste, Justin Lavender as Admeto, James Degerfeldt as Evandro and Miriam Treichl as Ismene, conducted by Arnold Östman. By far the best performance of the French version is the live performance with Janet Baker as a terrifically fiery Alceste, Robert Tear as Admete, Maldwyn Davies as Evandre and Jonathan Summers as Hercules, conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras.

Paride ed Elena (1770)

Having thrown his gauntlet down via his famous preface to the Italian version of *Alceste,* Gluck completely backtracked on nearly everything he put in it when he wrote *Paride ed Elena.* It's very pretty music, but almost entirely lacking in real drama. The music is clearly from his

"reform" period, but the entire score seems geared more towards pageantry and entertainment than drama. Pretty tunes abound, including the da capo arias that he abandoned in *Alceste,* and there is plenty of ballet music scattered throughout. Yet interestingly, although the work contains the character after whom the city of Paris was named, not to mention the ballets that the Parisians adored so much, it was never performed in France, but only in Vienna.

Aside from its almost complete lack of dramatic music, one reason for its being neglected is that there are no roles for a male voice in it. Paris was created by castrato Millico)Gluck's soprano Orfeo), and the other three roles in it, Helen, Amore (Cupid) and Pallas Athena, were sung by female sopranos.

Along with the Italian and (apparently) Austrian fetish for castrati, too many of the operas written from the time of late Monteverdi through the end of the 19th century for Paris suffered from the inclusion of all that extraneous ballet music. As I've said several times, the two don't really go together unless you find a way to make it part of the action as Verdi ingeniously did in *Aïda.* Otherwise, a ballet has about as much place in an opera as a baseball game. They are two entirely different things. If the French liked dancing so much, their stage directors should merely have found a way to have the chorus move on stage in synchronized, semi-dance-like movements while still performing in the style of a Greek chorus. That would, for me, have been not only sufficient but acceptable. But to stop the action for five to fifteen minutes while dancers cavort around the stage for no other reason than entertainment is clearly a drama-killer.

Iphigénie en Aulide (1774)

The next of Gluck's great operas, his first written for the French stage, was *Iphigénie en Aulide*. This was, to my knowledge, the first opera based on that wonderful House of Atrius and all its wacky denizens—Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Iphigenia and, sooner or later, that jolly old elf Elektra—except that, in this story, the first two are still sort of getting along and neither has the urge to bump off the other. This is the story in which Agamemnon is ordered by the Goddess Diana (Artemis in the original Greek) to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia in order for his ships to have good sailing winds for their naval jaunt to Troy, but he balks at sacrificing her. As part of the deal, she is to marry Achilles, but Agamemnon tries to throw a monkey wrench into this by telling her that Achilles has been wooing other women. She believes him at first, and becomes angry, but as soon as Achilles appears he confesses such passionate love for her that she gives in to him. After pre-nuptial festivities, Iphigenia is set to be married, but Arcas, the captain of the guard, warns her that her dad, who really knows how to give his daughter away, is waiting at the altar to kill her. Bad idea; Clytemnestra and Achilles rush in to save her. (Maybe this was what gave Clytemnestra the first idea to kill the old S.O.B.)

In the last act, we learn that Agamemnon has made up his mind to not sacrifice Iphigenia, which of course angers the gods, who make the sea winds stop so that none of his troops can sail to Troy. Iphigenia eventually decides to sacrifice herself for the good of her people, but here, surprisingly for Gluck, he introduces a *deux et machina* ending in order to resolve the problem. In the first version of the opera, it is the great seer Calchas who announces that Diana has changed her mind and that it's OK for Iphigenia to live, but in the revised version—the one more often performed—the goddess herself shows up to give the good news, and all celebrate.

The music of *Iphigenie en Aulide* is, truly, the first real flowering of Gluck's mature style. Combining the best elements of Scarlatti, Handel at his best, and Rameau, he sets the words to sung recitatives with orchestral accompaniment, occasionally going into real arias and duets, but the entire pacing of the opera—though highly unconventional in its day—sounds natural and flowing. With the arias and duets dovetailed into the overall fabric of the music, Gluck was able to create seamless lines of music, in fact, almost continuous musical *and* dramatic movement.

Once started, each act continues in a continuous arc until the finish. I'm assuming that at some point, Gluck must have looked over some of the scores of Rameau; although his own personal style of writing was different, the two composers shared the same idea, to keep the drama moving by keeping the music moving. The difference was that Gluck's music was even more advanced for its time than Rameau's, and that was going something.

The fly in the ointment here is that *Iphigénie en Aulide* was not very popular at first except for its overture; one critic even opined that it was not "really" an opera, but then quickly added that it was something better. Then the theater was closed down due to the death of King Louis XV, so that was the end of that opera season. Miraculously, it returned in 1775, and was then revived annually from 1776 to 1824, eventually becoming Gluck's most popular opera in Paris. But time shifted audiences' perspectives, and eventually the more dramatic but less conventionally melodic *Iphigénie en Tauride* and *Alceste* came to overshadow it.

Then in 1847 Richard Wagner, an admirer of Gluck, presented a revised version of the opera at the Dresden court. For this revival, he completely rescored the opera, not in his mature orchestral style used for his own music dramas but in the style of Beethoven. He also rewrote the libretto, particularly the ending, and added some music of his own…less than 10%, I am told, but still, not original Gluck. Ironically, it was this edition of the opera that took hold, at least in Germany (France had given up on it by then) and Austria. Gustav Mahler revived the Wagner edition in Vienna, where it was well received, and this edition continued to be performed well into the 20th century. This is yet another example of what I said earlier on in this treatise, that our concept of drama, and music as drama, changes over the years, yet both Mozart and E.T.A. Hoffmann were much taken by the original score and considered it one of Gluck's finest operas.

To date, there has been only one studio recording of the opera by Gluck in French, and that was the ill-fated John Eliot Gardiner version for Erato. Here, the normally-exciting Gardiner conducts a limp fish of a performance, and absolutely none of his singers are into their roles. Happily, there is a much better DVD performance on Opus Arte, conducted by Marc Minkowski, with Veronique Gens as Iphigénie, Nicolas Teste as Agamemnon, Anne Sofie von Otter as Clytemnestra (rather wobbly at times, but she has the sense of drama right) and Frédéric Antoun as Achilles. The problem is that the staging is awful, one of those "Mr. Machine" productions in which metallic plates, staircases and other steel ephemera are littered around the stage while Agamemnon, Calchas and Achille all romp around shirtless for no apparent reason, but you can always use DVD Audio Extractor to get the music and then burn it to CDs. You'll be glad you did. In this performance, despite von Otter's vocal flaws, the music comes to life as in few others.

Armide (1777)

Poor *Armide,* clearly a masterpiece, is practically an orphan begging at the door for food and lodging even compared with *Iphigénie en Aulis.* There have only been two commercial recordings and less than a handful of video broadcasts over the decades; Toscanini opened the 1910-11 Metropolitan Opera season with a production of it starring such luminous names as Olive Fremstad (Armide), Enrico Caruso (Renaud), Louise Homer (Hate), Pasquale Amato (Hidraot) and Alma Gluck (Lucinda), but was only able to give three more performances the following season. It hasn't been presented at the Met since, although two measly performances were given at the Juilliard School's Peter Jay Sharp Theater in 2012 under the "auspices" of the Met, since six of the singers, including Emalie Savoy in the title role, were from that company's Young Artists Program. So they didn't even bother to send their best and most seasoned artists over to sing it. Other opera houses have been just as stingy.

Yet this is clearly one of Gluck's most interesting works, not least for his masterful handling of the orchestra which had grown even further since *Iphigénie en Aulide*. Here, Gluck seems to have absorbed some of the *sturm und drang* style being presented at Mannheim during those years, and possibly even from the scores of C.P.E. Bach. Even in the overture, there are numerous quick chromatic key shifts that go by so quickly that one music pay attention to grasp them, yet even if one is inattentive they make a tremendous impression. He had also come, by this time, to creating what I would call, for lack of a better term, "swirling" string figures which, added to the basic rhythmic momentum, makes this one of his most fascinating overtures.

The plot is based on the same libretto that Lully used for his version of the opera. During the First Crusade, the sorceress Armide ensnares her enemy, the Christian knight Renaud, with her magic spells. At the moment she raises her dagger to kill him, she finds herself falling in love with him. She casts a spell to make him love her in return. Upon returning to her castle, she cannot bear that Renaud's love is only the work of enchantment. She calls on the Goddess of Hate to restore her hatred for Renaud, but fails to escape from her feelings of love for him. The Goddess condemns Armide to eternal love. Before Armide can return to Renaud, two of his fellow soldiers reach Renaud and break Armide's spell. Renaud manages to escape from Armide, who is left enraged, despairing, and hopeless.

Interestingly for Gluck, much of the music is surprisingly melodic, yet he still does not give in to long *da capo* arias. As had now become his style, he continually alternated short arias and duets with sung, orchestrally-accompanied recitative, but in *Armide* the sung recits are fairly short, sounding almost like "bridge" passages in the aria/duet format. Following the opening scene between Phénice and Sidonie, Armide's friends and confidantes, then the sorceress herself, there is a rattle of snare drums and trumpet blasts introducing a jaunty aria by Hidraot which blends seamlessly into a brief aria by Armide before going back to him. Wagner, who greatly admired Gluck, must surely have gotten ideas from him, but by comparison with the later composer there are no "long half-hours." The music, in fact, is almost continually rhythmic in addition to being original and well tied to the text, surely one of the features of the score that attracted Toscanini. And, to be honest, the almost continually lively rhythms give me pause to wonder why on earth this such a neglected opera; surely it is even more attractive on the surface than *Alceste* or either of the *Iphigénie* operas. Quite aside from the few ballet numbers that Gluck was (finally) forced to include in the last scene, so much of the sung music is set to rhythms that would surely appeal to the average listener while still managing to carry the drama. *Armide* seems to me to combine the best features of his previous "reform period" operas, including the somewhat weak *Paride ed Elena* which is also very melodic.

In Act III, however, Gluck pulls back on the rhythmic drive for a while to present Armide's reflections of how her love for Renaud has changed her and how he only loves her back because she has put a spell on him. The fast tempo, stabbing, downward arpeggios by the French horns and excitable chorus figures behind Hate in her scene were clearly inspired ideas, but Gluck saved his most astonishing bit of orchestral slight-of-hand for the fourth act. In the first scene, two noble soldiers who come to find Renaud bring with them a golden scepter which the sorcerer d'Ascalona gave them to undo any spells they might encounter on their journey. Armide has indeed used her witchcraft to throw up frightening visions of dreadful monsters to scare them away, but they use the scepter to turn the frightening scene into its reality, a pleasant countryside. For this scene, Gluck wrote a fantastic passage that even outdid Beethoven's turning the thunderstorm in his Sixth Symphony into a pleasant, post-storm idyll. In the blink of an eye (or ear), the violent sounds accompanying the monsters suddenly melt away into pastoral calm. Here is

how he did it:[1]

The transformation comes abruptly between the eleventh and thirteenth bars of the above score. Perhaps I should point out, since it seems not to be notated in the score, that there is also a sudden yet slightly graded *decelerando* at the point where the oboe enters. Nonetheless, it's a neat feat of orchestral legerdemain for the 1770s, don't you think?

The best of the two available recordings of this opera is unquestionably the one with Mirielle Delunsch as Armide, Charles Workman as Renaud, Laurent Naori as Hidraot and the phenomenal mezzo-soprano Ewa Podleś as Hate (clearly, just as imposing and dramatic voice as Louise Homer had). Neither the Richard Hickox recording nor the live performances I've found on YouTube come close.

Iphigénie en Tauride (1779)

The capstone of this very productive era was his second *Iphigénie* opera of 1779. Unlike its predecessor, which has struggled for good performances (and recordings), *Iphigénie en Tau-*

[1] Source: https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/9/92/IMSLP03074-Gluck-Armide1783.pdf

ride is one of his three (kind of) repertoire operas along with *Orfeo* and the French *Alceste,* and no wonder. It's a remarkable work that can still grip an audience today when sung well (which, unfortunately, is not always the case) and acted well.

As with several Gluck overtures, the opening music is soft and slow before it kicks into high gear, but this time Gluck had a surprise up his sleeve. When the faster music emerges, it is in aggressive waves of sound, urged forward by strong rhythms, and after a while it suddenly begins driving even harder as it moves up chromatically into neighboring keys. This gives the impression of an implacable drive of fate, and the next surprise is that Iphigénie enters on a high G while the orchestral music is still playing, thus it is not an overture but already the opening scene of the opera. Basically, it picks up where *Iphigénie en Aulide* left off; in order to protect her against being sacrificed by her father, the goddess Diana has transported her to Tauris.

After this thrilling, driving opening, however, the remainder of the opera is largely comprised of *parlando* sections or sung recitatives/dialogues with orchestral accompaniment, though he still finds space to insert such gorgeous little arias as Iphigénie's "Ah! Laissons-la ce souvenir funeste" in the last act—and somehow, the scarcity of arias makes them all the more effective when they *do* appear..To someone who is just listening to the opera, this pattern makes little sense, but if you watch a performance of it, it makes perfect sense, because this is where the drama lies. Orestes and Pylade, best friends, are imprisoned in chains and condemned to death. There are long sung dialogues between them in which the former offers to die in place of the latter. By this time, good Queen Clytemnestra has been knocked off by Orestes, thus Gluck missed the boat by not composing an *Elektra* opera to link these two.

Unlike other Gluck operas in which events are telescoped, the action in this one seems to almost be taking place in real time, and this was yet another dramatic innovation that drew audience members into the drama. Eventually, of course, Iphigénie and Orestes are reunited, the Greeks move in to rout the Scythians, but our old buddy Diana comes to the rescue once again.

There are only two recordings of this opera to consider. The more complete one is the performance on Sony Classical with Carol Vaness (Iphigénie), Giorgio Surian (Thoas), Thomas Allen (Oreste) and Gösta Winbergh (Pylade), conducted by Riccardo Muti. I'm sure that some readers are going to balk at the idea of larger, more conventional voices singing early Classical period opera, not to mention the larger orchestra that Muti uses, but as we shall see in the next chapter it is time to put some of these HIP prejudices aside. Characters who project big emotions cry out for big voices, and I'm sure that Gluck and his successors would have been thrilled by the Muti performance except for one thing: soprano Vaness cannot be clearly understood when she is singing in the high register at full volume.

For such folks, as well as those who just can't live without their HIP performances, there is another excellent recording with Mirielle Delunsch (Iphigénie), Simon Keenlyside (Oreste), Yann Beuron (Pylade) and Alexia Cousin (Diana), conducted by Marc Minkowski. Oddly, this is not as complete a performance as the Muti—Minkowski omits Scene 4 in Act I, Scene 3 in Act III. and Scenes 3 and 5 in Act IV—but it does move at a faster clip than the Muti recording. and you can actually understand Delunsch's diction in the first scene. As I say, however, we are reaching the point where our preference for the HIP version of operas to come, or at least *my* preference for them, is going to wane.

At this point, the astute reader will have noticed that I am occasionally recommending non-historically-informed performances of some operas, using larger operatic voices and somewhat expanded orchestras—not Wagner-sized, but about the size of the Berlioz or Verdi orchestra. This is because, as opera shifted towards big emotions and away from more delicate, intimate singing, such singers are often preferred in these roles, and with those larger voices you need a decent-sized orchestra to accompany them. This trend will continue into the next chapter as well.

I, for one, cannot believe that when these opera composers conceived these powerful roles that they *didn't* want singers with a bit more power to sing them.

And, thank goodness, we are almost, but not quite, at the end of operatic roles written for castrati. Even in their heyday, they were never considered to be great dramatic figures on stage; people just enjoyed hearing high, androgynous voices with more carrying power than their female contemporaries, but in the long run their participation sullied the concept of opera as real drama. No matter how great the castrato's voice was, you just couldn't really visualize him as a heroic, would-be world conqueror like Julius Caesar. With this role, not to mention Bertarido or Orfeo, it's hard for non-experts to watch and listen to a female singer in drag or a countertenor on stage and imagine them as strong *dramatic* figures. It goes against the mere concept of the storyline. Some castrati continued to hold the stage through the late 1820s, but even in Italy their use was much more limited in the coming era than it had been earlier.