



Cavalli
IL XERSE

Carlo Vistoli • Ekaterina Protsenko
Gaia Petrone • Carolina Lippo • Dioklea Hoxha
Orchestra Barocca Modo Antiquo
Federico Maria Sardelli

Francesco
CAVALLI

(1602–1676)

Il Xerse

Dramma per musica in a prologue and three acts (1655)

Libretto by Nicolò Minato (c. 1627–1698)

Critical edition by Sara Elisa Stangalino and Hendrik Schulze (2019) – abridged version

(The artistic team at Festival della Valle d'Itria have made some cuts to this performance
which include removing the Prologue and several scenes)

First performance: Teatro Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice, 1655

Xerse	Carlo Vistoli, Countertenor
Amastre	Ekaterina Protsenko, Soprano
Arsamene	Gaia Petrone, Mezzo-soprano
Romilda	Carolina Lippo, Soprano
Adelanta	Dioklea Hoxha, Soprano
Ariodate	Carlo Allemano, Tenor
Aristone	Nicolò Donini, Bass
Periarco	Nicolò Balducci, Countertenor
Elviro	Aco Bišćević, Tenor

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The Italian libretto and an English translation can be accessed
at www.naxos.com/libretti/660536.htm

Act I

- 1 Sinfonia – 5:01
Scene 1 Aria: Ombra mai fu –
Scene 3 Recitative:
 Tutti dormiano ancor dell'alba i rai
(Xerse, Elviro)
- 2 Aria: Caro tetto felice – 2:03
 Recitative: Siam giunti, Elviro – Intendo
(Arsamene, Elviro)
- 3 Aria: O voi – Quest'è Romilda – 5:18
Scene 4 Qui si canta il mio nome?
(Romilda, Arsamene, Elviro, Xerse)
- 4 **Scene 5** Aria: Vibra pur, ignudo Arciero – 2:02
 Recitative: Speme m'avviva
(Romilda, Arsamene, Adelanta)
- 5 Aria: Coroniamo d'applausi 0:53
(Romilda, Arsamene, Adelanta)
- 6 Recitative: Speri ch'ei sia mio sposo? – 9:48
Scene 6 Come qui... –
Scene 7 Or che senza rival... –
Scene 8 Ho inabili –
Scene 9 Dove...
(Romilda, Adelanta, Arsamene, Elviro, Xerse)
- 7 **Scene 10** Aria: Fiamma ch'accesa fu – 3:48
 Recitative: Or ditemi, chi sete?
(Amastre, Aristone)
- 8 **Scene 11** Aria: Già la tromba – 4:34
Scene 12 Recitative: V'abbraccio, Ariodate
(Ariodate, Amastre, Xerse)
- 9 **Scene 13** Recitative: Queste vittorie – 5:10
Scene 14 Che fate, ahimè? –
Scene 15 Ah principessa
(Xerse, Amastre, Aristone)
- 10 **Scene 16** Aria: Regie stelle, che fatali – 2:53
Scene 17 Recitative: Ecco la lettera, Elviro
(Amastre, Arsamene, Alviro)
- 11 Aria: Innamorato cor – 5:50
Scene 18 Romilda vostra figlia –
Scene 19 Faccia che siate sposa al vostro Xerse
(Arsamene, Ariodate, Romilda, Adelanta)

Act II

- 12 **Scene 1** Aria: Speranze, fermate – 5:30
 Recitative: Argo, ch'avea cent'occhi
(Amastre, Elviro)
- 13 Aria: Speranze, fuggite – 10:01
Scene 2 Recitative and Aria: Pur alfin... –
Scene 3 Figlio del genio... –
Scene 4 Aprasi questo... –
Scene 5 Ecco Romilda
(Amastre, Elviro, Adelanta, Xerse)
- 14 Aria: L'amerò? Non fia vero – 4:23
Scene 6 Recitative: Lasciate questo ferro –
Scene 7 Chi tel disse?
(Romilda, Aristone, Amastre, Arsamene, Elviro)
- 15 Aria: Sciocco è ben chi crede a femina – 4:11
Scene 9 Recitative: Arsamene, ove andate? –
Scene 10 V'inchino
(Arsamene, Elviro, Xerse, Adelanta)
- 16 Aria: Voi mi dite che non l'ami 2:53
(Adelanta)
- 17 **Scene 12** Aria: O ben sparsi sudori! – 2:02
 Chi brama di gloria
(Ariodate)
- 18 **Scene 13** Aria: Morirò: volete più? 2:27
(Amastre)
- 19 Recitative: Gran pena è gelosia! –
Scene 14 Romilda, e sarà ver ch'al foco mio – 5:56
Scene 15 A dietro
(Xerse, Amastre, Romilda)
- 20 Aria: Amante non è 2:09
(Romilda)
- 21 **Scene 17** Aria: Beato chi può – 4:45
 Recitative: Lo sguardo lagrimoso –
Scene 18 Pur ti trovo, Ariston
(Periarco, Aristone, Amastre)
- 22 **Scene 19** Aria: Quante son d'amor le pene – 2:56
 Recitative: Ecco Xerse
(Xerse, Periarco)

Act III			
23	Scene 1 Aria: Non mi dir – Scene 2 Recitative: Ahi, scoperto è l'inganno! (<i>Romilda, Elviro, Arsamene, Adelanta</i>)	6:42	
24	Duet and Trio: M'amerete? – Recitative: Ecco in segno... – Scene 3 Romilda... – Scene 4 Ubbidirò il mio re? (<i>Romilda, Arsamene, Adelanta, Elviro, Xerse</i>)	8:46	
25	Aria: Dammi, Amor, la libertà – Scene 5 Recitative: Pur conosco Ariston – Scene 6 Come già v'accennammo (<i>Adelanta, Periarco, Xerse, Ariodate</i>)	3:26	
26	Aria: O me lieto, o me beato! – Scene 8 Recitative: Mia regina! (<i>Ariodate, Xerse, Romilda</i>)	3:22	
27	Lament: Che barbara pietà! – Scene 9 Recitative: Questo foglio a l'iniquo invierò (<i>Romilda, Amastre</i>)	5:34	
	28 Scene 11 Aria: Va', speranza – Scene 12 Recitative: Romilda... – Scene 13 Recitative, Trio and Duet: Ecco lo sposo – Scene 14 Colà sul lito (<i>Amastre, Arsamene, Romilda, Ariodate</i>)		7:46
	29 Aria: La donna caduta – Scene 15 Recitative: Dunque fate rifiuto – Scene 16 Sen viene Ariodate – Scene 17 Ecco de l'empia il paggio (<i>Aristone, Periarco, Xerse, Ariodate</i>)		7:00
	30 Scene 18 Recitative: Arsamene è già sposo – Aria: Più rigido che scoglio asprissimo (<i>Adelanta</i>)		2:31
	31 Scene 19 Lament: Lasciatemi morir (<i>Xerse</i>)		4:52
	32 Recitative: Signor, grazie bastanti – Scene 20 Datelo a me, Signore (<i>Arsamene, Xerse, Amastre, Aristone, Periarco</i>)		6:39
	33 Umile il cor l'adora e 'l piè l'inchina – Quartet: Amante di me (<i>Arsamene, Romilda, Ariodate, Xerse, Adelanta, Amastre</i>)		1:40

Francesco Cavalli (1602–1676)

Il Xerse

Enamoured of a rough tree trunk

'Ombra mai fu di vegetabile chiara
ed amabile soave più.'

('Languidly, the lascivious oriental ruler celebrates his bizarre love for a luscious tree and the shade it provides.')

Set to Handel's music, also known as *Largo* and variously reworked with different words or instrumentation, this became one of the longest running themes of Baroque opera, enjoying virtually uninterrupted popularity.

Yet, when Handel's *Serse* debuted in London in 1738, it did not have great success – it was perceived as antiquated, unfashionable. Some Italian musicians had arrived in the English capital carrying with them the latest novelties from the continent, while Handel's experience in Italy dated from the first years of the century. Indeed, despite a few touch-ups, *Serse's* libretto, and therefore its dramaturgy, was quite old fashioned. It was a reworking of the Arcadian poet Silvio Stampiglia's libretto for Giovanni Bononcini's 1694 opera, taken in turn from Nicolò Minato's libretto for Francesco Cavalli's *Il Xerse*, premiered in Venice in 1655. In Cavalli's time, that was a relatively innovative subject, for instead of the mythological and magical phantasmagorias set to music, for example, in *Giasona*, it dealt with a historical, albeit romanticised, story, in which the supernatural is marginal, unimportant and accessory. There remains, yet, an allegorical prologue in which ancient gods appear and refer to contingent events such as the war between the Venetians and the Turks; the fantastic always comes useful in outlining Xerxes's bizarre and over the top character, be it for the spirits who must guard his beloved plane tree, or the project of the pontoon over the sea to make his infantry cross to and conquer Hellas, an element taken from ancient sources and the very emblem of the great Persian King's delirious hubris. The focus, however, is all on an extremely intricate human comedy of crossed loves, court intrigues, disguises, kings, princes, generals, ladies and servants. Two couples plus an inconvenient third, with the addition of the father of two princesses, a page, an ambassador, a eunuch, an old tutor, a servant and two magicians: this microcosm animates the narration's rhythm, now with important steps towards the success or failure of a plot, now with digressions of colour and costume. When it got to Handel, the characters were thinned out, but the story remained a love intrigue in which we find nobleness and heroism, drama, comedy and funny popular characters, as was customary in the mixture of genres typical of Venetian opera. It is entertainment, the librettist himself admits it ('Entertainment is sometimes necessary, indeed welcome by humanity; nor did I ever see a plant full of fruits that did not produce any flowers'), but not without the precise moral goal of condemning the excesses of Xerxes and Adelanta in exploring the dynamics of affections and relationships.

In the city of Abydos, Xerxes, the great Persian King, while divided between his love for a shady plane tree and his project to invade Greece through the Hellespont, becomes enraptured with Romilda, daughter of the local prince Ariodate, without knowing that the girl is already in love with his brother Arsamene. Nor does Xerxes care about his previous flame and betrothed Amastre, daughter of the King of Susia. Amastre, however, is a resourceful girl: she dons a soldier's clothes and goes to Abydos to find her beloved Xerxes. As if the situation were not complicated enough, Romilda's sister, Adelanta, has also fallen in love with Arsamene, and in self-interest she tries to favour the King's latest infatuation. The intrigues that follow are all based on misunderstandings or mistaken identities: with some false letters, Adelanta convinces Romilda and Xerxes that she is the one loved by Arsamene, and that the latter only pretends to love Romilda; at the same time she also deceives Arsamene, making him believe that Romilda is interested in the King. In the end, Romilda and Arsamene find out the truth and reconcile, and Adelanta can only give up on love and its sufferings. Xerxes, however, has no intention of giving up; he uses ambiguous words to try and obtain

from Romilda's father the consent to marry her; unfortunately, he gets caught in his own net, and Ariodate happily celebrates the union between the two true lovers. As a last revenge, Xerxes orders his brother to kill the woman who has caused him such suffering, but Amastre, still in disguise, hurls the same accusation to her faithless fiancé, who finally repents. The two couples, reunited, celebrate their newly found happiness.

The few hours I have left I give them to Apollo

'Know that I am no poet. My work is in the Forum. To serve one who can command me, I stole some hours from sleep to give them to this drama.'

Thus, in the '*captatio benevolentiae*' then used to address the reader, Nicolò Minato introduces himself for the first time as an operatic librettist for Cavalli's *L'Orimonte* (1650). Even though that first attempt was no real triumph, the lawyer assiduously continued his professional and artistic collaboration with the composer. A serious commitment, the one he had taken with Apollo, given what transpires from the stylistic declaration that precedes *Il Xerse*: 'I could have used loftier phrases, longer sentences, figures, metaphors and other ornaments which I know are considered essential in other genres of compositions, but while there I deem them sometimes harmful, here I abandoned them on purpose: for I have sometimes seen that using them weakens the power of affections and the naturalness of the performance, which requires a more familiar language, for in opera we do not write for the mind but for the ears.' Born, it seems, in Bergamo in the 1620s, Minato was a citizen of the Serenissima, studied law, became an orator and a lawyer, was an active member of literary academies, and long worked with Cavalli, bringing about remarkable dramaturgical development in the young 'melodrama' genre, with a gradually more personal style, autonomous from the preceding models. Of the eight libretti written for Cavalli, *L'Orimonte* is based on an original subject, *Elena* (1659) refers to the myth, *Il Xerse*, *Artemisia* (1657) and *Antioco* (1659) deal with the history of Persia, and the last three titles (*Scipione Africano*, 1664; *Muzio Scevola*, 1665; *Pompeo Magno*, 1666) to that of Rome. After the 'Roman trilogy', Cavalli would only compose two more operas with different librettists, while in 1669 Minato would suddenly move to Vienna, to work as a poet at the court of Leopold I. There, against the ten titles of Venice, he would produce over 220 texts of different genres, but mostly operas and oratorios. Among the many Viennese libretti there is a curious cycle of philosophical inspiration on music by Antonio Draghi (17 January 1634, Rimini – 16 January 1700, Vienna): *Le risa di Democrito* (1670), *L'avidità di Mida* (1671), *Gl'atomi d'Epicuro* (1672), *La lanterna di Diogene* (1674), *I pazzi abderiti* (1675), *Il silenzio di Arpocrate* (1677), *La pazienza di Socrate con due mogli* (1680) and *La Chimera* (1682).

Minato died in the Hapsburg capital in 1698, 22 years after Francesco Cavalli.

Cavalli was born in Crema in 1602 and his real surname was Caletti, but he had adopted the family name of the Venetian aristocrat who had taken him under his wing and to Venice, where at the early age of 15 he was already known as a singer (first as a soprano, then as a tenor) and an organist, and where he

developed his skills in the shadow of Claudio Monteverdi. Active as an operatic composer from 1639, in 1643 he probably took part in the writing of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, going on to compose, among his major titles, *Il Giasone* (1649), *La Calisto* (1651) and *Il Xerse* (1655). From 1669, the same year of Minato's departure, Cavalli retired from the theatre to dedicate himself mainly to sacred music. He died in Venice on 14 January 1676. At the time of his death, some of his works had already been revived and staged in Naples and Rome, and in other European cities. In Paris, the very powerful chief minister Cardinal Mazarin did his personal best to import operas from his native country, starting in 1645 with Saccati's *La finta pazza*. His goal was double: to consolidate the taste for Italian opera in France, and engage the castrato Atto Melani, a talented singer but also a secret agent in his service. The difficulties in understanding the language and the plot, and the peculiarity of the castrato voice, prevented the proposed operas from having the hoped-for success, but the Cardinal did not give up and invited Cavalli in person to compose a new title for the marriage of the new king Louis XIV to Maria Theresa Hapsburg in June 1660. That ought to have been *L'Ercole amante*, but due to a series of drawbacks that opera was only premiered in 1662. It too did not have much success because, the cumbersome Cardinal having in the meantime passed away, Italians, left without his protection, had been set aside by the French aristocracy in favour of the new national musical theatre represented by Jean-Baptiste Lully, a Tuscan ballet dancer and composer who took French nationality at the end of 1661. For the Sun King's wedding, *Il Xerse* was performed instead, in a revision meant to meet the Parisians' taste, which included some danced intermezzos composed by Lully. The operation did not work very well, confirming the court's dislike of the new foreign genre; in Italy, on the other hand, Cavalli's operas – and *Il Xerse* in particular – not only were becoming increasingly performed and successful, but represented, also, the *recitar cantando*'s evolution towards the forms that would be codified near the beginning of the new century. Recitatives got drier, progressively approaching the spoken word, while arias were circumscribed and gave full expression to melody, justified not only by contingent situations but also by the outpouring of a sentiment, an affection. In this *Il Xerse* is emblematic, because what, to all intents and purposes, can now be considered arias are inserted in the plot both as 'songs' (Romilda's *O voi che penate* [Act I, Scene 3]) and as monologues and soliloquies where vocal expression in music reaches its highest apex. And that is how, for the first time, the text that on different notes would remain among the most famous in history, was sung. It is the love song for a tree and its shade: nothing more ephemeral and absurd, therefore nothing more operatic.

Roberta Pedrotti

Courtesy of the Festival della Valle d'Itria

Synopsis

Act I

Stationed with his troops near the city of Abydos, from where he plans war on the Athenians, Xerxes, King of Persia, finds the shade of a plane tree so refreshing that he has platonically fallen in love with it. His brother Arsamene, on the other hand, has fallen in reciprocal love with Romilda, one of the daughters of Ariodate, Prince of Abydos. What Arsamene and Romilda ignore is that Adelanta, Romilda's sister, is also in love with Arsamene.

It is dawn. Arsamene is with his faithful servant outside the house of his beloved. As they approach, they hear Romilda sing a song that mocks Xerxes' bizarre love for a tree. Xerxes, however, is also nearby, and hearing the voice of the girl, he remains enchanted. He asks Arsamene about her, and his brother is forced to reveal that he knows her. Xerxes would have him tell Romilda that the King loves her, but Arsamene jealously refuses. Xerxes then decides that he will speak to the girl personally.

While the King goes to speak to Romilda, Arsamene hides. Xerxes is about to declare his love when a snake suddenly appears. Arsamene promptly jumps out in order to save his beloved, thus revealing not only his presence but also his feelings for the girl. To eliminate his rival, Xerxes bans both Arsamene and his servant, but this does nothing towards winning the affections of Romilda, who insists on remaining silent and insensitive to his advances. Once the King has left, Adelanta, who wants to be free to court Arsamene, tries her best to convince her sister to accept Xerxes' love. She plants in Romilda's mind the suspicion that the young man may be unfaithful to her. Arsamene, on his part, suspects that Romilda, in order to be queen, might be ready to betray him.

Meanwhile, dressed as a soldier, Amastre, Princess of Susia and Xerxes' betrothed, has arrived in Abydos. She is accompanied by her guardian Aristone. Amastre has come in secret to catch another glance of her beloved husband-to-be. Hearing people approach, the two hide. It is Ariodate, Romilda's and Adelanta's father, back from defeating the Moors. Xerxes welcomes him with open arms and as a reward ambiguously promises, meaning himself, a husband 'of royal blood, equal to Xerxes' for his daughter Romilda. Left alone, the King reflects on his love, and Amastre, overhearing him, thinks he is speaking of her. When, however, Xerxes says that the bride is below his status, she jumps out to contradict him. Aristone promptly intervenes to avoid Amastre from being recognised, and then drags the girl away, insisting that it is high time she returned to Susia. On the pretext of having him prepare for their departure, she sends him away and remains alone.

Arsamene gives his servant Elviro a letter to deliver to Romilda. Meanwhile, Ariodate is wondering who the promised husband 'of royal blood, equal to Xerxes' might be. Adelanta seems certain that it is the King himself, but Ariodate knows that Xerxes cannot marry below his status and believes the man might be Arsamene. Romilda, on her part, has finally tricked her sister into revealing her interest in Arsamene, and this has made her quite jealous.

Act II

To deliver Arsamene's letter to Romilda, Elviro has disguised himself as a flower vendor. Amastre bumps into him and learns that Xerxes wants to marry Romilda. Next, Elviro meets Adelanta, who recognises him and offers to deliver the letter to her sister herself. She maintains that Romilda has finally agreed to marry Xerxes and is writing to him, and Elviro believes her. Left alone, Adelanta opens the letter, hoping that it might prove useful for her goals, and throws the envelope away. At that moment, Xerxes arrives. Taking advantage of the King's curiosity, Adelanta pretends that Arsamene's letter was written to her and that the young man's love for Romilda is only a deception. Xerxes is overjoyed at the news: he grants Adelanta his brother's hand and thinks his love for Romilda now may have no more obstacles. Then, he has Adelanta hand him the letter and goes to show it to Romilda as proof that Arsamene is deceiving her, but the girl does not believe him, for the envelope with the name of the addressee is missing. Romilda reasserts her love for Arsamene; but once alone, she grieves over the young man's infidelity.

Meanwhile, Amastre is prey to despair and wants to take her own life; Aristone manages to convince her not to give credit to the words of a flower vendor and the young lady desists from her suicidal plans, but she decides instead to go and face Xerxes. Aristone worriedly follows her.

Elviro has relayed to Arsamene what Adelanta told him – that Romilda intends to marry Xerxes, provoking the young man's tirade about women's fickle nature. Unexpectedly, however, Xerxes informs him that he is pardoned and can have the woman he loves. The misunderstanding over who that woman actually is, however, is soon revealed. A furious Arsamene reasserts that he loves Romilda and will have her at any cost. Stunned, Xerxes tells Adelanta that she is the one deceived by Arsamene, not Romilda.

Xerxes is complaining about his unreciprocated love when he becomes aware of the presence of Amastre, who, still in men's clothes, passes herself off as a soldier who has fought for the King without receiving the due reward. Their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Romilda. Xerxes returns to court her, and the girl hesitates, unable to oppose a firm refusal. She is saved by Amastre, who steps in to warn her about the King's disloyal nature. Xerxes orders his guards to seize the importune soldier and Amastre is arrested, but a moment later a grateful Romilda manages to have her released.

In search of Amastre, Aristone chances upon Periarco, an ambassador from the King of Susia who has come to finalise the arranged union between Amastre and Xerxes. Aristone, and then also Amastre, pretends not to know him, and Periarco wonders what is going on. He goes to thank Xerxes, on behalf of Ottane, King of Susia, for the victory over the Moors, which was obtained with Xerxes' help. When the King, however, inquires after Amastre, Periarco, not knowing what to reply, feigns a fainting spell.

Act III

Arsamene reproaches Romilda for her alleged correspondence with Xerxes and accuses her of betraying him. Romilda, on the other hand, accuses Arsamene of writing a love letter to her sister Adelanta. The two quarrell, until Adelanta arrives and her intrigue is revealed. Arsamene and Romilda make peace. As Xerxes is arriving, Arsamene hides. Pressed by the King, to buy time Romilda insists that she cannot marry anyone without her father's consent. While Xerxes rushes to get it, Arsamene, once again jealous, storms off. To get Ariodate's consent, Xerxes repeats that he will give Romilda a husband of royal blood, once again omitting that he is speaking of himself. He asks Ariodate to give Romilda's hand in marriage to the man of noble origins who will come to his apartment.

In a last effort to reject Xerxes's advances, Romilda tells the King that she and Arsamene have kissed. This only provokes the wrath of Xerxes, who orders that Arsamene be killed. In despair, Romilda turns for help to the 'soldier' she has saved, Amastre, who promises to warn Arsamene of danger. In return, Amastre asks Romilda to have a letter delivered to Xerxes, in which she accuses him of betraying their marriage arrangement. When Amastre finds Arsamene and tells him that the King has ordered his death, the young man replies that he does not fear it. He goes to Romilda to reproach her behaviour. Just then, Ariodate returns and, finding Arsamene in their apartment, convinces himself that he is the husband of royal blood sent by Xerxes. The two lovers, surprised but happy, are united in marriage.

When Periarco goes to Xerxes to officially offer him the hand of Amastre, the King, unexpectedly, refuses her. In comes Ariodate, who wishes to thank Xerxes for the honour granted to Romilda; the King, thus, learns that he has fallen into his own trap, and in a fit of anger condemns all to death. At that moment, Xerxes is handed Amastre's accusatory letter. He thinks it was written by Romilda, and when he sees Amastre's signature he rants against his adverse fate. Next it is Arsamene who comes to thank his brother for yielding Romilda to him. Xerxes now feels mocked, and in revenge he orders Arsamene to kill his wife with his own hands. Amastre, however, finally reveals herself and hurls the King's accusations of faithlessness back to him. Moved to pity, Xerxes acknowledges his error, pardons everyone, and takes Amastre as his wife and queen.

Daniela Pilarz

Photo: © Nicola Allegri



Carlo Vistoli

A guitarist and pianist by training, Carlo Vistoli began his studies as a countertenor in 2007. In 2015 his entry into Le Jardin des Voix of Les Arts Florissants led to an acceleration of his career, with performances all over the world. In 2017, he was selected by Sir John Eliot Gardiner to appear in *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* and as Ottone in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* for the Monteverdi 450 Project tour. Recent highlights include works by Cavaleri, Monteverdi and Vivaldi, and appearances at the Theater an der Wien and Staatsoper in Vienna, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and Philharmonie in Paris, the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, and the opera houses of Rome and San Francisco. www.carlovistoli.com

Photo: © Nelya Agdeeva



Ekaterina Protsenko

Russian-born soprano Ekaterina Protsenko has appeared in roles such as Oscar (*Un ballo in maschera*), Papagena (*Die Zauberflöte*), Gelinda (*Il colore fa la regina*) and Eurydice (*Orfeo ed Euridice*) at venues including Neue Oper Wien, Perm Opera, Theater an der Wien, Wiener Konzerthaus and at the International Vadstena Academy Summer Operatic Festival as well as on tour with Nederlandse Reisopera. A nominee in the best newcomer category of the Austrian Music Theatre Prize for her performance as Beppi in Gerd Kühr's opera *Stallerhof*, Protsenko is a laureate of the 2022 International Haydn Competition and the 2020 Kammeroper Schloss Rheinsberg.

Photo: © Maria Giovani Russo



Gaia Petrone

A graduate of the prestigious Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia in Rome and the Royal Conservatoire The Hague, Gaia Petrone was awarded First Prize at both the F. Provenzale International Competition and the Valerio Gentile Vocal Competition. In 2012, she joined the young singers' ensemble of the Theater an der Wien, and she made her UK debut in 2015 in Handel's *Messiah* with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Nathalie Stutzmann. Petrone has performed in prestigious venues and opera theatres worldwide, and has collaborated with conductors such as Ottavio Dantone, Christophe Rousset, Peter Neumann, James Conlon and Fabio Luisi.

www.gaiapetrone.it

Photo: © Mari Marshania



Carolina Lippo

Italian soprano Carolina Lippo studied at the Conservatorio Giovanni Battista Martini in Bologna and the Accademia del Belcanto 'Rodolfo Celletti' in Martina Franca. Known for her interpretations of works by the Neapolitan School of composers, including Cimarosa, Jommelli, Mercadante, Paisiello and Alessandro Scarlatti, Lippo has performed in venues such as the Theater an der Wien, Semperoper Dresden, Teatro Regio in Turin, Teatro La Fenice and the Handel Festival, Halle. Recent appearances include the role of Corilla in Donizetti's *Le convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali* in Novara and Savona. www.carolinalippo.eu

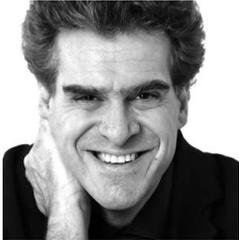
Photo: © Lorenzo Montanelli



Dioklea Hoxha

The Kosovar soprano Dioklea Hoxha has captivated audiences with her mesmerising performances. She has received critical acclaim as Pamina in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* at Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, and Giulietta in Verdi's *Un giorno di regno* at the Festival della Valle d'Itria. Further roles include Ipomene in Melani's *L'empio punito* at the Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik, and Musetta in Puccini's *La Bohème* at the Teatro Verdi in Pisa, showcasing her diverse range. Hoxha has collaborated with renowned orchestras such as the Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and the Auser Musici Orchestra in Pisa. She graduated *cum laude* from the Conservatorio Luigi Cherubini in Florence in 2021.

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Carlo Allemano

Carlo Allemano was born in Turin. He was the First Prize winner of both the Toti dal Monte Singing Competition in Treviso (1989) and the Mozart Competition at the Wiener Staatsoper (1990). He has established himself as a leading opera and concert singer and has appeared in many of the most important opera houses with conductors such as Christophe Rousset, Emmanuelle Haïm, René Jacobs, Riccardo Muti, Zubin Mehta, Marco Guidarini, Fabio Biondi, Alessandro De Marchi and Claudio Abbado. Baroque repertoire has always held an important place in Allemano's career, having performed the title role in Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* with René Jacobs.

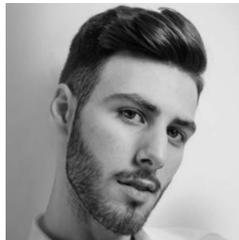
Photo: © Miguel Barreto



Nicolò Donini

Born in Bologna, bass Nicolò Donini studied piano before graduating in singing from the Conservatorio di Musica Giovan Battista Martini of his hometown. In 2018 he attended the Accademia Rossiniana in Pesaro, and made his debut at the Rossini Opera Festival as Lord Sidney/Don Prudenzio in *Il viaggio a Reims*. He has also been a member of the Accademia del Belcanto 'Rodolfo Celletti' of Martina Franca, and has appeared in several roles at the Festival della Valle d'Itria, including Seneca in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. Previous roles also include Don Basilio in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Mustafà in *L'Italiana in Algeri*.

Photo: © Paolo Donato



Nicolò Balducci

Multi-award-winning Italian countertenor Nicolò Balducci specialises in soprano and contraltist repertoire. He studied Baroque singing at the Conservatory of Vicenza and attended the Accademia Vivaldi (Giorgio Cini Foundation). In 2020–21 he appeared in *Alcina* at the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza under the baton of Andrea Marcon, and recorded an album of rare Neapolitan cantatas and Baroque operatic masterpieces with harpsichordist Anna Paradiso and the Baroque Academy Gothenburg Symphony. Recent highlights include Nerone in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* in Valencia, Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro* in Ferrara, a concert tour in Sweden, and Arvo Pärt's *Stabat Mater* in a dance production by Aterballetto.

www.nicolobalducci.com

Photo: © Jana Jocić



Aco Bišćević

After studying singing and the harpsichord at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Aco Bišćević made his debut at La Scala in Milan, where he performed under the direction of Ingo Metzmacher. Bišćević has appeared as a guest at the Komische Oper Berlin, the Regional Theatre in Innsbruck, the Styriarte Festival, the Valle d'Itria Martina Franca, the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and the Trame Sonore Mantua. He has worked with conductors such as Michael Hofstetter, Theodor Guschlbauer, Jordi Savall, Reinhard Goebel, Vittorio Ghielmi, Federico Maria Sardelli, Václav Luks and Michael Curney. With his haute-contre voice, Bišćević is a much sought-after concert singer.

Photo: © Clarissa Lapolla



Orchestra Barocca Modo Antiquo

Founded by Federico Maria Sardelli in 1987, the Baroque orchestra Modo Antiquo unites musicians endowed with virtuosity and a profound knowledge of the languages and practices of historical performance. The orchestra has appeared at many festivals and in theatres worldwide. It has recorded extensively for labels such as Naïve, Sony Classical, Glossa and Deutsche Grammophon, with an impressive discography of more than 40 albums including many world premiere recordings. The orchestra has received two GRAMMY Award nominations – in 1997 (Vivaldi's *Concerti con molti istromenti*) and 2000 (Corelli's *Concerti Grossi, Op. 6*). Federico Maria

Sardelli's research, revival and rediscovery of works by Vivaldi has made Modo Antiquo the pre-eminent orchestra in this field with premiere recordings and theatrical performances of *Arsilda*, *Tito Manlio*, *Orlando Furioso (RV 728 and RV 819)*, *Atenaide*, *Motezuma* and *Tigrane*, among others.

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Daniele Rosi, Double bass • Simone Vallerotonda, Theorbo • Giulia Nuti, Nicola Lamon, Harpsichords

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Federico Maria Sardelli

Federico Maria Sardelli is a conductor, composer, flautist, musicologist, painter, engraver and essayist. He is the principal conductor of the Baroque Academy of St Cecilia, Rome, and a regular guest of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, Teatro La Fenice, Moscow State Chamber Orchestra and many other theatres. He founded Modo Antiquo in 1984. Sardelli has recorded more than 40 records for Naïve, Deutsche Grammophon, Sony Classical, Glossa, Dynamic and Brilliant, and was nominated for GRAMMY Awards in 1997 and 2000. He has recorded the world premieres of numerous unpublished Vivaldi works, is a member of the Vivaldi Institute of the Giorgio Cini Foundation in Venice and is responsible for the Vivaldi Catalogue (RV). Sardelli has authored numerous musical and musicological publications for Bärenreiter, Olschki, Ricordi, SPES and Sellerio. His historical novel *L'affare Vivaldi* (Sellerio, 2015) won the Comisso Prize for fiction, and has been translated into many languages.

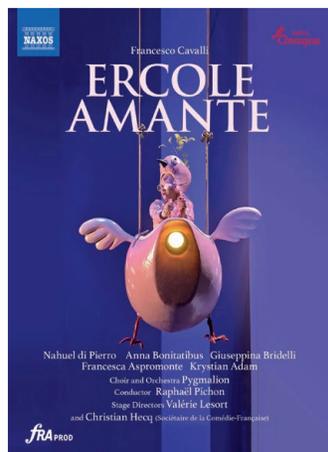
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Francesco Cavalli was successor to Monteverdi and the most influential opera composer in Venice during the mid-17th century. His *dramma per musica*, *Il Xerse*, was innovative for the period, with a tangled plot of affections and relationships based on history rather than mythology. Its enormous success was due in no small part to Xerse's bizarre and overblown character and his famous declaration of love for a tree, 'Ombra mai fu'. Cavalli's *Il Xerse* is *commedia dell'arte* theatre that creates an exotic world aimed at inspiring awe in its audiences, enhanced with music that conveys an avalanche of emotions.

Francesco
CAVALLI
(1602–1676)

Il Xerse

Dramma per musica in a prologue and three acts (1655)

Libretto by Nicolò Minato (c. 1627–1698)

Critical edition by Sara Elisa Stangalino and Hendrik Schulze (2019) – abridged version

(The artistic team at Festival della Valle d'Itria have made some cuts to this performance
which include removing the Prologue and several scenes)

Sung in Italian

Xerse Carlo Vistoli, Countertenor
Amastre Ekaterina Protsenko, Soprano
Arsamene Gaia Petrone, Mezzo-soprano
Romilda Carolina Lippo, Soprano
Adelanta Dioklea Hoxha, Soprano
Ariodate Carlo Allemano, Tenor
Aristone Nicolò Donini, Bass
Periarco Nicolò Balducci, Countertenor
Elviro..... Aco Bišćević, Tenor

Orchestra Barocca Modo Antiquo

on period instruments

Federico Maria Sardelli

1–11 Act I	47:20	23–33 Act III	58:18
12–22 Act II	47:18	Playing Time	2:32:56

The Italian libretto and an English translation can be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/660536.htm • An interview with Federico Maria Sardelli and the stage director Leo Muscato can also be accessed at www.naxos.com/notes/660536.htm
Recorded live: 25, 29 and 31 July 2022 at Teatro Verdi, Martina Franca, Italy (during the 48th Festival della Valle d'Itria)
Executive producer: Alberto Dellepiane • Producers and engineers: Rino Trasi, Vera Zanotti • Editor and mixing: Rino Trasi
Booklet notes: Roberta Pedrotti and Mattia L. Palma – courtesy of the Festival della Valle d'Itria; Daniela Pilarz
Publisher: Bärenreiter – critical edition by Sara Elisa Stangalino and Hendrik Schulze (2019) • Cover photo: © Clarissa Lapolla

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