



Femmes Fatales

Soprano Heroines from the Orient

Seljan Nasibli, Soprano
National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine
Yalchin Adigezalov



Femmes Fatales **Soprano Heroines from the Orient**

Maurice RAVEL (1875–1937) Shéhérazade (1903) (Text: Tristan Klingsor, 1874–1966)		17:57
1	Asie ('Asia')	10:31
2	La Flûte enchantée ('The Enchanted Flute')	3:14
3	L'Indifférent ('The Indifferent One')	4:10
 Samuel BARBER (1910–1981) Andromache's Farewell (1962) (Text: from <i>The Trojan Women</i> by Euripides, translated by J.P. Creagh, 1930–2012)		13:00
 Georges BIZET (1838–1875) Les Pêcheurs de perles ('The Pearl Fishers') (1863) (Text: Michel Carré, 1822–1872, Eugène Cormon, 1810–1903)		6:44
5	Comme autrefois dans la nuit sombre ('As once in the dark night') (<i>Léïla</i>)	
 Karol SZYMANOWSKI (1882–1937) Pieśni księżniczki z baśni ('Songs of a Fairy-Tale Princess') (1915/1933) (Text: Zofia Szymanowska, 1898–1946)		9:31
6	I. Samotny księżyc ('The Solitary Moon')	4:36
7	II. Słowik ('The Nightingale')	2:54
8	IV. Taniec ('Dance')	2:00

Nikolay Andreyevich RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844–1908)

Le Coq d'or ('The Golden Cockerel') (1909)

5:06

(Text: Vladimir Belsky, 1866–1946, derived from Alexander Pushkin's poem,
The Tale of the Golden Cockerel)

- 9 Ответь мне, зоркое светило ('Hymn to the Sun') (*Queen of Shemakha*)

Giacomo PUCCINI (1858–1924)

Turandot (1924)

6:10

(Text: Giuseppe Adami, 1878–1946, Renato Simoni, 1875–1952)

- 10 Tu che di gel sei cinta ('You who are bound in ice') (*Liù*)

3:19

- 11 Signore, ascolta! ('Listen, master!') (*Liù*)

2:50

Jules MASSENET (1842–1912)

Thaïs (1898)

6:47

(Text: Libretto by Louis Gallet, 1835–1898, based on the novel *Thaïs* by Anatole France)

- 12 Dis-moi que je suis belle ('Tell me that I am beautiful') (*Thaïs*)

Seljan Nasibli, Soprano

**National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine
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Artist's Foreword

In recent years, the role of women and their importance in our society has been put to the forefront. During my years studying, learning and practicing roles, I noticed that composers from all eras have accentuated women and their strength in their operas and vocal works. From Andromache's downfall in killing her own son, to Shéhérazade and the Fairy-Tale Princess's power of charming through storytelling, to Queen Shemakha using her charm and cunning to bring a man to his knees, Thaïs's fright of aging due to men, Leïla's bravery in bending the rules, and Liù's courage in saving a man by taking her own life, I saw the strength, hardships, miseries, sorrows and joys of all women of the past, present and future. Although all these heroines are from the Orient, the issues they face are the difficulties of every woman around the world today. I believe these composers have chosen Oriental women because of their exoticism and mysticism. Being originally from the junction of Europe and Asia, my heart is within this music and with these Eastern women. I identify with this music, and through it, to these heroines.

Femmes Fatales Soprano Heroines from the Orient

Maurice RAVEL (1875–1937) Shéhérazade

Born in 1875 in the small coastal village of Ciboure in the Basque region of France, Maurice Ravel spent his childhood and adolescence principally in Paris, starting piano lessons at the age of seven, and from the age of fourteen studying the piano in the preparatory piano class of the Conservatoire. In 1895 he left the Conservatoire, after failing to win the prizes necessary for promotion, but resumed studies there three years later under Gabriel Fauré. His repeated failure to win the important Prix de Rome, even when well enough established as a composer, disqualified at his fifth attempt in 1905, resulted in a scandal that led to

changes in the Conservatoire, of which Fauré became director.

Ravel's career continued successfully in the years before 1914 with a series of works of originality, including important additions to the piano repertoire, to the body of French song and, with commissions from Diaghilev, to ballet. He left some 39 songs, a dozen of which are arrangements of folk songs. The cycle with orchestra, *Shéhérazade*, was written in 1903, a setting of three poems by his fellow Apache Tristan Klingsor, reflecting the orientalist interests of the time, and a world of magic to which he would later return. The first song,

Asie ('Asia'), the longest of the group, conjures up a fairy-tale world, Persia, India, China, mandarins under their umbrellas, princesses, an imagined world, and then to return, raising, like Sindbad, his Arabian cup to his lips, interrupting the tale with art. The song was dedicated to the soprano Jeanne Hatto, who gave the first performance. The second song of the cycle, *La Flûte enchantée* ('The Enchanted Flute')

was dedicated to Marguerite Jourdain, wife of the sculptor René de Saint-Marceaux, an influential society hostess. The words suggest similar imagery, each note of the flute seeming to kiss the cheek. The third song, *L'Indifférent* ('The Indifferent One'), dedicated to Emma Bardac, a banker's wife, singer and mistress of Debussy, centres on an androgynous figure.

Samuel BARBER (1910–1981) **Andromache's Farewell**

A native of Pennsylvania, the American composer Samuel Barber was among the first students at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, where he studied piano, conducting, singing and composition. Awards allowed him further study in Rome. He taught briefly at the Curtis Institute, but soon withdrew, sharing a house with his former fellow student Gian Carlo Menotti. His music remained neo-Romantic in idiom, although not without contemporary influences. Barber wrote three operas, the first, *Vanessa*, with a libretto by Menotti, in 1957. It was followed two years later by *A Hand of Bridge* and finally, in 1966, by his Shakespearean *Antony and Cleopatra*, with a libretto devised by Franco Zeffirelli. He enjoyed very considerable popular success, initially as a singer and then as a composer.

Andromache's Farewell, a setting of an excerpt from *The Trojan Women* by Euripides,

has an English translation by John Creagh and was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic, which gave the first performance in 1963. In a note on the score Barber wrote: 'Scene: an open space before Troy, which has just been captured by the Greeks. All Trojan men had been killed or have fled and the women and children are held captives. Each Trojan woman has been allotted to a Greek warrior and the ships are now ready to take them into exile. Andromache, widow of Hector, Prince of Troy, has been given as a slave-wife to the son of Achilles. She has just been told that she cannot take her little son with her in the ship. For it has been decreed by the Greeks that a hero's son must not be allowed to live and that he is to be hurled over the battlement of Troy. She bids him farewell. In the background the city of slowly burning. It is just before dawn.'

Georges BIZET (1838–1875)

Comme autrefois dans la nuit sombre, from *Les Pêcheurs de perles* ('The Pearl Fishers')

Georges Bizet was born in Paris in 1838, the son of a singing teacher. He entered the Conservatoire at the age of ten and even in childhood had some lessons, at least, from Charles Gounod. He later became a pupil of Fromental Halévy, a prolific composer of opera, whose daughter, subject like her mother to intermittent bouts of mental instability, he married in 1869. As a student Bizet won the expected successes, culminating in 1857 with the First Prize in the Prix de Rome, followed by three years at the Villa Medici, in accordance with the terms of the award, modified to allow him to remain in Rome for the final year, rather than move to Germany. In Paris, where he returned in September 1860 on receiving news of his mother's illness, he earned a living by hack work for the theatre and for publishers, interspersed with more ambitious undertakings, including *Les Pêcheurs de perles* ('The Pearl Fishers'), staged with moderate success by the Opéra Comique in 1863, followed, in 1867, by *La Jolie fille de Perth* at the Théâtre Lyrique. He won a lasting although largely posthumous success with the opera *Carmen*, staged, after considerable difficulty, in 1875 and running at the time of Bizet's sudden death in the same year.

In Ceylon, Zurga is chosen leader of the fishermen and resumes his friendship with the young Nadir, who has been wandering in the

forest, recalling their love for a girl they had once seen in Candy. A veiled woman arrives, to pray for the pearl fishers, accompanied by the priest Nourabad. She is recognised by Nadir as Leïla, the girl he had once seen, but not by Zurga. Leïla and Nourabad enter the Hindu temple, leaving Nadir, now alone, to admit his love for Leïla, whom he has followed. As she sings her temple prayer, she hears his voice and her song turns to a song of love. Nadir and Leïla meet at night in the temple where she is watching, but their discovery leads to popular anger and threats of death. Zurga intervenes to help Nadir and Leïla escape, but when Nourabad reveals the identity of Leïla, Zurga changes to anger, and condemns the couple to death once more. Leïla pleads with Zurga for his friend Nadir's life, but in vain. It is, however, Zurga who saves them, as they are about to be killed, diverting the attention of the people by setting fire to their camp, thus allowing them to escape.

Fashionably exotic in its story, *Les Pêcheurs de perles* reflects various musical influences, including those of Verdi, Meyerbeer and, inevitably, Gounod. The best-known music from the opera includes the priestess Leïla's moving cavatina, *Comme autrefois dans la nuit sombre* ('As once in the dark night'), as she awaits her nocturnal meeting with Nadir.

Karol SZYMANOWSKI (1882–1937)

Pieśni księżniczki z baśni ('Songs of a Fairy-Tale Princess')

I. Samotny księżyc ('The Solitary Moon')

II. Słowik ('The Nightingale')

IV. Taniec ('Dance')

Karol Szymanowski was born at Tymoszkówka in the Kiev District of Ukraine in 1882, the son of a Polish landowner and of a mother of Swedish extraction. The family and their immediate circle had a deep interest in the arts, a fact reflected in the subsequent careers of the five children of the marriage as musicians, poets or painters. His sister Zofia wrote the poems included in the *Songs of a Fairy-Tale Princess*. In Warsaw, Szymanowski found inspiration in the new Polish nationalism and the group that formed Young Poland in Music for the publication and promotion of new Polish music. The war years were spent in musical isolation at home at Tymoszkówka, turning his attention to a study of Greek civilisation and literature, to the early history of Christianity and to the culture of Islam, the last an extension of an interest aroused by translations of the poems of Hafiz by Hans Bethge, poet of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, some of which he had set to music in 1911.

The Russian Revolution put an end to Szymanowski's period of wartime seclusion. The family was compelled to move, for reasons of safety, to Elisavetgrad (now Kropyvnytskyi), and the property at Tymoszkówka was destroyed by revolutionaries. In 1919 they

moved to Poland, after the proclamation of the new republic. His friends Kochański and Rubinstein prudently chose to settle in the US, but Szymanowski determined to stay in his own country and to seek there a further source of inspiration, particularly in the more primitive aspects of indigenous music. His reputation grew at home and abroad, and in 1927 he rejected the offer of a position as director of the conservatory in Cairo in favour of the financially less rewarding position of director of the Warsaw Conservatory, which in 1930 became the Warsaw Academy of Music, an institution of which he remained rector until his resignation in 1932.

The five years that Szymanowski spent at the Conservatory and the Academy brought many frustrations, particularly in dealing with musicians of a conservative turn of mind, and these difficulties finally led to his resignation. The remaining years of his life were not easy, without any regular source of income, and he therefore made more public appearances as a performer.

Szymanowski's *Songs of a Fairy-Tale Princess*, dedicated to his sister Zofia, were written in 1915 with orchestral versions of four of them made in 1933. The first piece,

its translated title as *The Solitary Moon*, suggests the influence of Ravel or Debussy, composers with whose work Szymanowski was familiar. The orchestrations continue with

The Nightingale and *Dance*, both making considerable use of demanding passages of vocalise for the singer.

Nikolay Andreyevich RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844–1908) **Hymn to the Sun, from *Le Coq d'or* ('The Golden Cockerel')**

Russian cultural nationalism in the 19th century had its musical reflection first in the work of Glinka and then in that of a group of five composers, Vladimir Stasov's Mighty Handful, dominated by Balakirev. The group included César Cui, a professor of military fortification, the young guards officer Mussorgsky, Borodin, a professor of chemistry, and a young naval officer, Rimsky-Korsakov. Born in 1844, this last had followed his childhood ambition and family tradition by entering the naval college in 1856. He had shown an early interest and ability in music, and these he was able to further during his naval career, which lasted until his resignation from the service in 1872. Thereafter he spent a dozen years as Inspector of Naval Bands, a civilian position specially created for him, through the influence of his family, and only abolished in 1884. This led him to develop a particular interest in instrumentation, an aspect of music that had fascinated him since his first experience of opera.

Rimsky-Korsakov's first meeting with Balakirev, Cui and Mussorgsky had been in 1861, but over the years his professionalism as a musician grew, while his association

with Balakirev weakened. Of the original group of five, Mussorgsky died in 1881 and Borodin in 1887, and Rimsky-Korsakov was left to undertake the revision, completion and publication of much that they had left unfinished. His later years were not without their troubles. In the 1890s he suffered from bouts of depression and there was a breach with the Imperial Theatres when approval was not given to various new operas. In 1905 he was involved in support of the student unrest at the St Petersburg Conservatory, where he had taught since 1871 and from which he was now dismissed, to be reinstated under the more liberal policies that followed the disturbances. Political trouble occurred again when his last opera, *Le Coq d'or* ('The Golden Cockerel'), was refused approval by the censors, who saw in it an attack on the regime. He died in 1908, while the opera had its first performance the following year. Based on a poem by Pushkin, the story tells of the miraculous golden cockerel, given by the Astrologer to old King Dodon, a bird that crows at any sign of danger. At the start of the opera, introduced by the Astrologer as a moral tale, the King and

his council discuss how to deal with imminent foreign attack. The King's elder son suggests staying safe in the capital city to talk the matter over, while the enemy waits outside, a proposal that wins the applause of the council. The King's younger son suggests that the army should be disbanded and then suddenly mobilised again, to take the enemy by surprise, a plan that is also welcomed. The Astrologer's answer is the golden cockerel, a bird to give warning of danger, a gift for which he will claim

a future reward. In the end the King, defeated in battle, takes the exotic Queen of Shemakha as his wife. The Astrologer re-appears to claim payment, demanding the hand of the Queen of Shemakha. The King angrily refuses and strikes the magician dead, to be killed in his turn by the golden cockerel. The *Hymn to the Sun*, as other exotic elements in the opera, is given to the Queen, who sings of the sun that will bring back her Orient, so dear to her.

Giacomo PUCCINI (1858–1924)

Tu che di gel sei cinta and Signore, ascolta! from *Turandot*

Giacomo Puccini's last opera, *Turandot*, remained unfinished at the time of the composer's death in 1924. Based on a fairytale by Carlo Gozzi, and set in China, the plot centres on the cold-hearted princess of the title. By imperial decree, Princess Turandot is to marry the first royal suitor able to answer her three riddles, failure leading to execution, a fate to be suffered by the Prince of Persia. Calaf resolves to try his chance with the cold-hearted Princess, although Ping, Pang and Pong and his father try to dissuade him. Turandot poses her three riddles, which Calaf answers correctly, offering her a chance of escape, if, before morning, she

can find out his name. Every effort is made to find out Calaf's name, with the slave girl Liù tortured, but remaining loyally silent, killing herself rather than reveal it. Finally Calaf tells Turandot his name, but now she has learned that his true name is Love. Liù tries to dissuade Calaf from his endeavour in *Signore, ascolta* ('Listen, master!'). Under interrogation she is brave enough to tell the Princess of the power of love, in *Tu che di gel sei cinta* ('You who are bound in ice'). Puccini had recourse to Chinese melodies for his score, transposing them into a very different setting.

Jules MASSENET (1842–1912)
Dis-moi que je suis belle, from *Thaïs*

Jules Massenet was born in 1842 at Montaud, near Saint-Étienne, the youngest of eleven children. The family prosperity depended on his father's activity as a foundry owner and a producer of scythes, but a decline in business led the family to move in 1847 from Saint-Étienne to Paris, where Madame Massenet supplemented the family income by giving piano lessons, her youngest son among her pupils. At the age of eleven Massenet entered the Conservatoire, where, in 1863, he won the Prix de Rome with his cantata *David Rizzio*. His residence in Rome at the Villa Medici brought some respite from the period when, as a student, he had found it necessary to support himself by serving as a percussionist at the Opéra and as a café pianist. In Rome he met Liszt, who introduced him to Mme de Sainte-Marie, whose daughter became his piano pupil and, two years later, his wife.

Success in Paris came to Massenet through the support of his teacher at the Conservatoire, Ambroise Thomas, and of his enterprising publisher Georges Hartmann. After a series of attempts at opera, only one of which had briefly reached the stage, in

1872 he won his first operatic success with the Victor Hugo adaptation *Don César de Bazan*, followed in 1873 by the concert sacred drama *Marie-Magdeleine*, a choice of heroine that was characteristic in an age that made much of the repentance of a fallen woman. *Thaïs* takes a libretto by Louis Gallet, based on a novel by Anatole France, and was first staged at the Opéra in March 1894, to be revised in 1898. The courtesan Thaïs, a role written for the American soprano Sibyl Sanderson, shocks the ascetic cenobite Athanaël, who, in his monastic cell, is tormented by visions of her and resolves to bring about her conversion. The second act brings an aria in which Thaïs looks at herself in the glass, asking it to tell her that she is beautiful (*Dis-moi que je suis belle*). The act brings her conversion and resolve to follow Athanaël, who conducts her to a desert convent, where she is to spend the rest of her life.

In a storm Athanaël is troubled by a vision of Thaïs, who is dying, and, in love himself, makes his way to the convent, where she lies on her deathbed. She dies, leaving Athanaël to confess his love for her over her body.

Keith Anderson

Seljan Nasibli

Originally from Baku, Azerbaijan, soprano Seljan Nasibli studied at the Royal College of Music and in Oxford. She made her debut at Kings Place in the UK premiere of Nono's *Donde estas hermano* (2014 Schoenberg Festival), and gave her first performance at the Barbican Hall as a soloist in a tribute to the Azerbaijani composer Niyazi. Recent engagements include Debussy's *Three Nocturnes* for Woven Words – Lutosławski Centenary 2013 at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Jan Gorjanc's *Arahnes* at Cadogan Hall and Ravel's *Shéhérazade* with the Brazilian Symphony Orchestra in Rio de Janeiro. Nasibli has also appeared in *Don Giovanni* with the Westminster Opera Company, *Falstaff* with the European Opera Centre and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under Laurent Pillot, and *La traviata* with the Oxford Alternative Orchestra. She recently performed at the Laeishalle in Hamburg with the Taurida State Symphony Orchestra, and made her debut as Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* with the National Opera Center in New York at Carnegie Hall.

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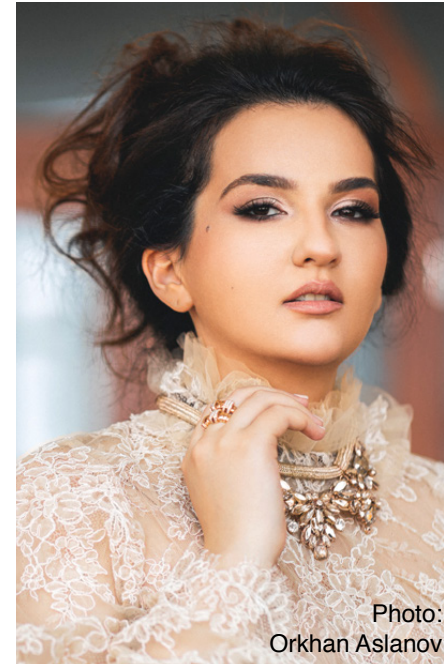


Photo:
Orkhan Aslanov

Yalchin Adigezalov

Yalchin Adigezalov was born in Baku in 1959, and is a third generation member of an Azerbaijani musical dynasty. After studying piano at the Azerbaijan State Conservatory, he specialised in conducting at the St Petersburg State Conservatory and received his Master's degree in Vienna. Adigezalov was appointed music director and chief conductor of the 'Gaya' Chamber Orchestra, Baku in 1991, and the Azerbaijan State Symphony Orchestra from 1991 to 1998. He has been the conductor of the Azerbaijan State Academic Opera and Ballet Theater since 2000. In 1993, he received the 'Best Conductor of the Year' National Award of Azerbaijan. Adigezalov



has been invited to appear as a guest conductor with prestigious orchestras all over the world, and has led the Istanbul State Opera and Ballet and Helikon-Opera, Moscow in numerous successful performances. He has performed with many outstanding soloists, and has released 15 recordings. Adigezalov is a professor at the State Music Academy of Azerbaijan, the Baku Music Academy and Azerbaijan State Conservatory.

National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine



The National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine (NSOU) is considered to be one of the finest symphony orchestras in Eastern Europe. The ensemble has given many international performances, including in Australia, Europe, China, the UAE and the US. Since April 1999, Volodymyr Sirenko has served as artistic director and chief conductor, and Alexander Hornostai has been NSOU's managing director and producer since June 2006. Since 1993, the NSOU has released more than 100 albums, which include both Ukrainian and international repertoires. Many of these recordings have been highly praised, garnering international acclaim. In 1994, the Australian Broadcasting Company (ABC) rated NSOU's recording of Boris Lyatoshynsky's *Symphonies No. 2 and No. 3* as 'The Best Recording of the Year'. Its recordings of Silvestrov's *Requiem for Larissa* and Bloch/Lees *Violin Concertos* were nominated for 2004 and 2009 GRAMMY Awards respectively.

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A detailed tracklist can be found inside the booklet.

The available sung texts can be accessed online at www.naxos.com/libretti/579066.htm

Recorded: 4–7 December 2017 at the Great Concert Studio of the National Radio Company of Ukraine

Producer: Alexander Hornostai • Engineer: Andriy Mokrytskiy

Editors: Alexander Hornostai, Andriy Mokrytskiy • Booklet notes: Keith Anderson

Publisher: Éditions Durand & Cie [1]–[3], G. Schirmer, Inc. [4], Universal Edition [6]–[8],

P. Jurgenson [9], Casa Ricordi [10]–[11], Éditions Huegel & Cie [12]

Cover image: *Cherry blossoms and Japanese sword* by Yuuji (www.iStockPhoto.com)

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