

NAXOS

André-Ernest-Modeste

GRÉTRY

L'épreuve villageoise

(The Village Trial)

Junker

Trevigne

Dolié

Fernández-Rueda

Opera Lafayette

Ryan Brown



André-Ernest-Modeste
GRÉTRY
(1741-1813)
L'épreuve villageoise (1784)
An opéra bouffon in two acts

Libretto by Pierre Desforges (1746-1806)

Edition: Opera Lafayette, based on parts in the Bibliothèque de Rouen

Opera Lafayette thanks Catherine Hubbard and the Bibliothèque municipale de Rouen
for their assistance in obtaining copies of the 18th-century parts.

Opera Lafayette's recording of Grétry's *L'épreuve villageoise*
is underwritten by David C. Frederick and Sophia Lynn.

Denise Sophie Junker
Madame Hubert Talise Trevigne
La France Thomas Dolié
André Francisco Fernández-Rueda

Opera Lafayette
Ryan Brown, Conductor and Artistic Director
www.operalafayette.org

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Act I

1	Ouverture	4:19
2	J' n'avions pas encore quatorze ans (<i>Denise</i>)	2:09
3	Bonjour Monsieur (<i>Madame Hubert, La France</i>)	5:00
4	J'ai fait un bouquet (<i>André, Denise</i>)	3:52
5	J' commence à voir que dans la vie (<i>Denise</i>)	3:21
6	Finale: André, tu me l'payras j'en jure (<i>Denise, André, La France, Madame Hubert, Choeur</i>)	8:44
7	Entr'acte	1:09

Act II

8	Bon Dieu com 'à c'te fête (<i>Denise</i>)	2:30
9	Adieu, Marton, adieu, Lisette (<i>La France</i>)	3:36
10	Je vous revois (<i>La France, Denise, André</i>)	3:07
11	Viens mon André (<i>Denise, André</i>)	2:38
12	Allons tous rendre hommage (<i>La France, Choeur, Denise, André, Madame Hubert</i>)	8:46
13	Ballet: Allegretto	0:42
14	Ballet:	0:59
15	Ballet: Contredanse	3:08



Left to right: Francisco Fernández-Rueda,
Thomas Dolié, Talise Trevigne and Sophie Junker

André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry (1741-1813)

L'épreuve villageoise

L'épreuve villageoise was the only collaboration of André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry (1741-1813), leading composer of eighteenth-century *opéra comique*, and Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Choudard (1746-1806; known as Desforges), a Parisian-born actor and dramatist. The pair likely met through their mutual association with the Comédie Italienne, the theatrical company which produced the majority of Grétry's works and at which both Desforges and his wife were sporadically employed. (Madame Desforges would go on to play the wealthy *fermière* Madame Hubert during the opening run of the comic opera.)

L'épreuve villageoise was first performed under an alternate title (*Théodore et Paulin*) and in markedly different form – in three acts rather than two, and with a larger and more socially diverse cast. The *opéra comique* received only mixed reviews when it premiered before the French court at Versailles in March of 1784. The esteemed audience – which included Queen Marie Antoinette – appeared utterly indifferent to the principal plotline featuring noble characters, all the while delighting in the intrigues of rustic secondary figures. As the critic of the *Mercur de France*, a leading literary gazette, described it, the comic relief had completely overshadowed the main thrust of the drama (“l'accessoire a écrasé le principal”). In response, Grétry and his librettist undertook a drastic revision of their work, excising much of the serious material from the original and elevating the lighter-weight subplot into primary action. The result is a crisp and lively farce, centering on the clever farmer's daughter Denise and her two competing suitors – the ambitious valet La France and the jealous, if otherwise well-intentioned, André. In this altered form, *L'épreuve villageoise* was promptly returned to the stage, appearing at the Comédie Italienne from June of 1784 onwards, and warmly embraced by Parisian audiences and critics alike.

The reworking of *Théodore et Paulin* into *L'épreuve villageoise* – and the elevation of the rustic topos inherent in this process – attests to the vivid appeal of *paysannerie* in the music, art, and literature of the late *ancien régime*.

Grétry's *opéra comique* is one of numerous contemporaneous examples of the genre engaging with a Rousseau-inspired validation of natural simplicity and the moral superiority of country life. It is hardly coincidental that the height of the work's success at the French court corresponded with the construction of Marie Antoinette's “hamlet” at the Petit Trianon, a pseudo-Norman village replete with a mill, a “pleasure” dairy, and a fully functioning farm. While the peasant Denise does not possess a formal education (when she receives a love letter from La France, for example, it is clear that she is unable to read it), she is nonetheless able to outwit her worldlier would-be suitor; in this case, common sense and country gumption prevail over the pretensions of the aspiring *beau monde*. And, throughout, La France is made an object of gentle ridicule for his insistence on the pleasures of the urban sphere. He adores fashionable theatre, concerts, and the brilliant splendours of court – which the villagers insist must pale in comparison to their own analogous entertainments: the beauty of nature, the warbling of birds, and the rising of the sun, respectively. Though, of course, there is a fair measure of irony here, given the dramatic medium through which this moral is communicated and the Parisian and courtly audiences to which it was originally addressed.

The peasant characters and village setting of *L'épreuve villageoise* are colourfully reflected in the poetic and musical idioms employed by the librettist and composer – though this should not be taken to imply a lack of polish in the construction of the work as a whole. As contemporary commentators underscored, the writing of Grétry and Desforges is based upon a careful balance of naiveté and finesse – of a jaunty veneer that belies a studied refinement of underlying form. One might draw a parallel between this superficial rusticity and the prevailing aesthetic of Marie Antoinette's aforementioned hamlet, where luxurious rococo interiors were concealed within straw-thatched outbuildings, and dairy pails were made of fine Sèvres porcelain but painted to look like

wood. While the characters in the *opéra comique*, with the exception of La France, speak in a heavily accented *patois*, their dialogue is, in fact, quite sophisticatedly structured. Desforges' libretto is written not in prose, but in the most elevated type of French poetic expression – largely in elegant verses of alexandrines. The villagers and farmers, in other words, fashion their country dialect into the same metric molds utilised by kings and princes in the classical tragedies of Corneille and Racine.

The music of *L'épreuve villageoise* offers a similar play in contrast and tension between divergent stylistic registers. On the one hand, the hypocritical pretensions of La France (as well as, perhaps, his unsuitability for Denise) are reflected in his self-consciously ornate music. For instance, as he sings of the attractions of the simple and charming country belle (*Adieu, Marton, adieu, Lisette* [9](#)), he nonetheless maintains the rather elaborate and mannered affect of the Italian operatic school – replete with *da capo* form, vocal virtuosity, and repetitive cadential structures. This idiom stands in distinction to the more “natural” default expression of Denise, who begins each act with a set of strophic couplets (“Je n'avions pas encore quatorze ans”; “Bon dieu, bon dieu, comme à c'te fête”) reminiscent of the popular song tradition of the *vaudeville*, albeit in updated and polished form. Grétry's finest music is contained in his extended ensemble finales, multi-sectional numbers that combine a vigorous surface energy – derived in part from the gestural rhetoric of dance – with a complex interplay of voicing, well-suited to the depiction of the farcical imbroglíos at hand.

L'épreuve villageoise was one of Grétry's most popular works, maintaining a presence on Parisian stages for more than a century after its première. In addition to hundreds of performances in the French capital, the opera was extensively disseminated elsewhere in Europe and in the New World, with documented productions in Amsterdam, Bern, Brussels, Cologne, Moscow, St Petersburg, New York, Cap François, and Port-au-Prince, to name just a few. The extraordinary reach of *L'épreuve villageoise* is indicative of the international success attained by *opéra comique*, more broadly, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Over and

above the more prestigious *tragédie lyrique*, comic opera came to define French music outside of France because it was readily transportable – generally modest in scale and economically efficient to reproduce. Moreover, because it contained spoken dialogue rather than recitative, the genre was relatively straightforward to translate, further contributing to its exportability. Indeed, *L'épreuve villageoise* was eventually published in both Dutch and German in addition to the original French. *Opéra comique* had from its very start been defined by a spirit of adaptability, even beyond the professional stage. The greatest musical “hits” of *L'épreuve villageoise* were spun off in low-cost commercial prints, made widely available in chamber music arrangements for domestic use. And in his memoirs, Grétry himself suggested changes to the opera that an amateur troupe might make to render it easier to perform. Despite its fashionable status at the Bourbon court, then, this was a work – and an art form – tailored for flexibility, accessibility, and broad popular appeal.

Opera Lafayette's production of *L'épreuve villageoise* draws upon this rich history of adaptation and cultural transfer, situating Grétry's comedy on the outskirts of the operatic capital of the antebellum United States: New Orleans. New Orleans was the first city in North America to host a permanent opera troupe. And by the opening decade of the nineteenth century, remarkably, it boasted not one but two lyric companies to serve its population of roughly 12,000 residents, the competing theaters of the Rue St Philippe and the Rue St Pierre. *Opéra comique*, in general, and the compositions of Grétry, in particular, dominated the repertoires of these rival institutions during this period. Grétry's *Silvain* is the first opera known to have been presented in the city (at the St Pierre in 1796); and in the next fifteen years New Orleans would be treated to a further 79 performances of twelve different works from his oeuvre. It is only fitting that Opera Lafayette – an American company at the vanguard of the modern revival of French comic opera – should return *L'épreuve villageoise* to this site of its first “homegrown” efflorescence.

Julia Doe

Synopsis

[2] Denise, daughter of a well-to-do widow farmer, complains that her fiancé has such a jealous nature that marriage to him would be unbearable. When her mother, Madame Hubert, arrives, Denise reveals the source of the jealousy: Monsieur de la France, the overseer of the local plantation, has been wooing her. Madame Hubert is angered; it wasn't so long ago that Monsieur de la France was courting her. The two women decide to find a way to punish both men.

[3] When Monsieur de la France arrives, Madame Hubert pretends to think he is there to court her, and he is forced to admit he is after Denise instead. The mother feigns reluctant consent to his courting her daughter.

[4] Denise catches her fiancé, André, spying on her and chides him for his jealousy. [5] He promises to stop and pretends to leave, but in fact hides to observe her. He witnesses her receiving a bouquet and love note from Monsieur de la France. [6] He flies into a rage and tears up the note. To spite him, Denise asks Monsieur de la

France to speak the words of the note out loud in André's presence. The three quarrel until Madame Hubert arrives, and they ask her to settle the matter. She does by announcing that André's punishment will be Denise's marriage to Monsieur de la France.

At that moment, revellers from the village arrive to invite all to the festivities. [7] As they dance, André storms off in anger, and Monsieur de la France assumes himself the victor.

[8] Left alone for a moment, Denise muses that although Monsieur de la France is a fine dancer and a handsome gentleman, she still prefers André. [9] She then overhears the vain Monsieur de la France sing a farewell to all the fine ladies he has known in town and declare his new love for the "rural girl" he is wooing. [10] When André finds him, the two men quarrel, and Denise tries to intervene. André claims that he has given up on Denise and found a new lover at the village festivities. Delighted, Monsieur de la France leaves to summon the rest of the village to witness his triumph.

In his absence, Denise urgently tries to find out from André who his new love is. He plays her along but finally admits that Denise is his one and only love. [11] She realises that she, too, is susceptible to the pangs of jealousy and forgives André.

Her mother arrives, and Denise reveals that she has no intention of marrying Monsieur de la France, who will always look down on her as his social inferior. Madame Hubert at first pretends to resist the idea but finally admits she is delighted at Denise's choice.

[12] When Monsieur de la France returns to make his formal proposal to Denise in front of the entire village, he promises her all the wonders the city can offer: fashion, art, and entertainments. She declares that none of them offers an appeal greater than the joys of village life and declares that André is her choice. Humiliated, Monsieur de la France storms off as the rest of the cast sings in praise of love and a happy marriage.

Nick Olcott

Sophie Junker



Photo: Christina Raphaelle

The Belgian soprano Sophie Junker studied at the IMEP (Institut Supérieur de Musique et de Pédagogie) in Namur, and at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. She is a Samling Scholar and winner of the first prize at the 2010 London Handel Competition and the 2012 International Cesti Competition. Ms. Junker's operatic repertoire includes Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Marzelline (*Fidelio*), Serpette (*La finta giardiniera*), Despina (*Così fan tutte*), Atalanta (*Xerxes*), Adina (*L'elisir d'amore*), Zdenka (*Arabella*), and Sophie (*Werther*). She has appeared with such prestigious ensembles as the King's Consort, the Academy of Ancient Music, Wiener Akademie, Bach Collegium of Japan, and The English Concert.

Thomas Dolié



Photo: Alix Laveau

Born in Bordeaux, the baritone Thomas Dolié entered the Conservatoire National de Région de Bordeaux and made his concert début in Montpellier in the rôle of Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*) under the direction of Marc Minkowski. He was then invited by the opera houses of Marseille, Strasburg, Nancy, Toulon, Avignon, and Bordeaux to perform as Papageno, and was included in the version of *Die Zauberflöte* directed by Peter Brook for the Théâtre des Bouffes-du-Nord. Thomas Dolié has sung Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* and Figaro at the National Opera of Bordeaux, as well as Figaro at the Opera of Toulon. He has also appeared on stage in *Carmen* (Moralès), *Madama Butterfly*, in *Così fan tutte* at the Opera of Avignon, in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* on tour in Nantes, Rennes and Lille, and in a production by Patrice Caurier and Moshe Leiser in Paris.



Talise Trevigne and Sophie Junker

Francisco Fernández-Rueda



Photo Michael Novak

Born in Seville, the tenor Francisco Fernández-Rueda began his musical training as a clarinetist. He holds a degree in French studies from the University of Seville. Later he moved to Barcelona where he studied singing with Lambert Climent and art song with Lynne Dawson, Assumpta Mateu, and Francisco Poyato at the Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya (ESMUC). He is currently coached by Raúl Giménez in Barcelona. He won the First Prize at Concurs Mirabent i Magrans (Barcelona) and was a semifinalist at Concorso Toti dal Monte (Treviso). As a soloist, he works with distinguished ensembles, appearing at major festivals and venues.

Talise Trevigne



Photo: Rayfield Allied

The American soprano Talise Trevigne sang the heroine rôles in *Les contes d'Hoffmann* at Knoxville Opera, Opéra de Lyon and Israeli Opera. At Washington National Opera she revived the rôle of Pip (*Moby Dick*), a part specially written for her by composer Jake Heggie, which she inaugurated at the world première of the piece at Dallas Opera in 2010. She sang the world première of Jake Heggie's song cycle *Pieces of 9/11 – Memories from Houston* at Houston Grand Opera. In Britain she performed the title rôle in the world première of Judith Weir's *Armida* for the BBC, made her UK stage début as June Gibbons in the world première of Errollyn Wallen's *The Silent Twins* with Almeida Opera, and won the Royal Philharmonic Society Music Award (2007) for her portrayal of Violetta in Graham Vick's production of *La traviata* with Birmingham Opera. She studied at the Manhattan School of Music and graduated with a master's degree in music.

Opera Lafayette

Opera Lafayette is an American period instrument ensemble that specialises in French repertoire, rediscovers masterpieces, and creates a recorded legacy of its work. Founded in 1995 in Washington, DC, by Conductor and Artistic Director Ryan Brown, Opera Lafayette has earned critical acclaim and a loyal following for its performances and recordings with international singers renowned for their interpretations of baroque and classical operas. Opera Lafayette recently completed its 21st season, which included performances of Vivaldi's *Catone in Utica*, Chabrier's *Une Éducation Manquée* (An Incomplete Education), and *Opera and the French Revolution*: Three dramatic scenes from *Œdipe à Colone* by Antonio Sacchini, *Sapho* by Jean-Paul-Égide Martini (a modern première), and *Médée* by Luigi Cherubini. At the invitation of Château de Versailles Spectacles, Opera Lafayette made its international début at the Opéra Royal in February 2012 with the modern world première of Monsigny's *Le Roi et le fermier*. Opera Lafayette returned to Versailles for five sold-out performances of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and Philidor's *Les Femmes Vengées* in January and February of 2014. Opera Lafayette's discography on the Naxos label has expanded to twelve releases, including Gluck's *Orphée et Euridice* (2005), Sacchini's *Œdipe à Colone* (2006), Rameau *Operatic Arias* (2007), Lully's *Armide* (2008), Rebel and Francœur's *Zélindor, roi des Sylphes* (2009), Monsigny's *Le Déserteur* (2010), Philidor's *Sancho Pança* (2011), Grétry's *Le Magnifique* (2012), Monsigny's *Le Roi et le fermier* (2012), Félicien David's *Lalla Roukh* (2014), Philidor's *Les Femmes Vengées* (2015), and now Grétry's *L'épreuve villageoise* (2016).

Opera Lafayette Orchestra

Violin I

Claire Jolivet*
June Huang
Alexandra Eddy
Elizabeth Field
Theresa Salomon

Violin II

Christof Richter**
Leslie Nero
Gesa Kordes
Johanna Novom

Viola

Karina Schmitz**
C. Anne Loud

Cello

Loretta O'Sullivan**
NJ Snider
Alice Robbins

Double bass

John Feeney

Flute

Colin St Martin**
Kathryn Roth

Oboe

Debra Nagy**
Margaret Owens

Bassoon

Anna Marsh**
Marc Vallon

Horn

Todd Williams**
Linda Dempf

Harpsichord

Andrew Appel

* concertmaster
** principal

Opera Lafayette Chorus

Soprano

Sara Mackimme
Shaina Martinez

Tenor

Charles Humphries
Nicholas Houhoulis

Bass

Andrew Sauvageau
Jonathan Woody

Ryan Brown



Photo: Louis Forget

Ryan Brown is the founder, conductor, and artistic director of Opera Lafayette. Through his work with Opera Lafayette, he has gained an international reputation for his interpretations of French opera and for his role in the revival of significant works from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His frequent performances of Italian works by Mozart, Haydn, Paisiello and Cimarosa have also met with acclaim. He has led three Opera Lafayette productions at the Opéra Royal in Versailles: Monsigny's *Le Roi et le fermier*, Philidor's *Les Femmes Vengées*, and Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. In 2015 he conducted Vivaldi's *Catone in Utica* for the Glimmerglass Festival. Recent Opera Lafayette programmes have included a production of Rameau's *Les Fêtes de l'Hymen et de l'Amour, ou Les Dieux d'Égypte* notable for its integration of three different dance companies, and the rediscovery of operas from the period of the French Revolution. In early 2017 Ryan Brown and Opera Lafayette present the modern première of Gaveaux and Bouilly's *Léonore, ou l'Amour Conjugal*, to be followed in 2018 by Beethoven's *Leonore* (1805). Ryan Brown was raised in a musical family in California, and performed extensively as a violinist and chamber musician before turning his attentions to conducting. His teachers included Dorothy DeLay and Gustav Meier. Ryan Brown is a recipient of La Médaille d'Or du Rayonnement Culturel from La Renaissance Française.



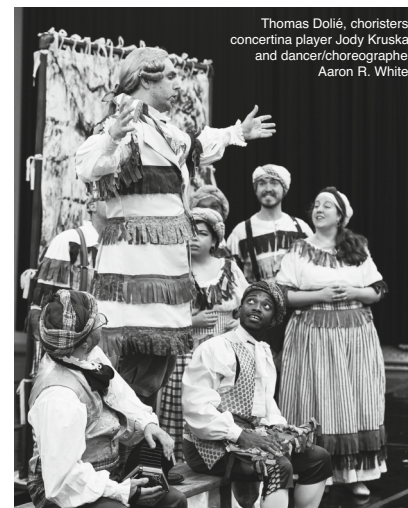
Talise Trevigne



Thomas Dolié



Sophie Junker and Francisco Fernández-Rueda



Thomas Dolié, choristers,
concertina player Jody Kruskal
and dancer/choreographer
Aaron R. White.



Sophie Junker, Thomas Dolié and Francisco Fernández-Rueda

Soloists, choristers,
and dancer/choreographer
Aaron R. White

All performance photographs by Louis Forget

Costume design by Kendra Ra
Set design by Luciana Steccoli
Lighting by A. J. Guban



L'épreuve villageoise (The Village Trial) – which, in its original form as *Théodore et Paulin*, was first performed before Marie Antoinette at Versailles – was one of André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry's most popular works. For a century after its 1784 première it enjoyed huge acclaim across Europe and even travelled to the New World, where it captivated audiences in New York. Grétry was a master of eighteenth-century *opéra comique* and this crisp and lively farce centres on a clever farmer's daughter and her two competing suitors. Employing divergent stylistic registers – finesse and naiveté, music reminiscent of popular song, and extended ensembles – Grétry fashioned a score of sophisticated wit and huge charm.



André-Ernest-Modeste
GRÉTRY
(1741-1813)



L'épreuve villageoise
An opéra bouffon in two acts (1784)

Libretto by Pierre Desforgés (1746-1806)

Edition: Opera Lafayette

WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING

Denise	Sophie Junker
Madame Hubert	Talise Trevigne
La France	Thomas Dolié
André	Francisco Fernández-Rueda

Opera Lafayette • Ryan Brown

A full track and cast list can be found on pages 2 and 3 of the booklet

The French libretto and an English translation of the libretto, including the spoken dialogue omitted from this recording, can be found online at www.naxos.com/libretti/660377.htm

Recorded at Dekelbourn Hall, The Clarice, University of Maryland, USA, on 25th and 26th January, 2015

Producer: Barbara Wolf • Engineer: Antonino D'Urzo

Editors: Antonino D'Urzo and Ryan Brown • Booklet notes: Julia Doe and Nick Olcott

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