

Ermione

1991-1992

Friday, June 26, 1992 8:00 PM

Sunday, June 28, 1992 2:00 PM

SFO_PUB_01_SFO_1991_07

Publications Collection

San Francisco Opera Archives

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA

LOTFI MANSOURI, *General Director*

Donald C. Runnicles, *Music Director*

presents

Gioachino Rossini's

ERMIONE



A CELEBRATION OF ROSSINI

WAR MEMORIAL OPERA HOUSE, SAN FRANCISCO

JUNE 26, 1992 AT 8 P.M., JUNE 28, 1992 AT 2 P.M.

Ermione / Synopsis

Pirro (Pyrrhus), King of Epirus and son of Achilles, has promised to marry Ermione (Hermione), daughter of Menelaus and Helen, but he has fallen in love with the Trojan prisoner Andromaca (Andromache), widow of Hector.

ACT I

In a dungeon, the Trojan prisoners recall the past greatness of their country and bewail their fate. Andromaca enters with her confidante, Cefisa, and Attalo and Fenicio, Pirro's servant and tutor, respectively. She has been allowed to spend a few minutes with her son Astianatte (Astyanax). Attalo advises her to stop mourning and to think instead about her son's future, which could be secure if Andromaca consented to Pirro's advances. Fenicio interrupts him, having understood that Attalo wants to encourage Pirro's love for Andromaca, a love that the Greeks will never tolerate and that could only lead to another war.

Outside the palace, handmaidens invite Ermione to enjoy the hunt, but the princess is suffering from jealousy. When Pirro enters she rebukes him for loving Andromaca and threatens revenge. But Pirro is not a weak man, even if he is worried by the announcement of the arrival of Oreste, son of Agamemnon and messenger from the Kings of Greece.

Upon entering the palace, Oreste's only thought is of meeting Ermione again, for he has long been in love with her. But his friend, Pilade (Pylades), urges him to control himself and to think rather of the mission with which Greece has entrusted him. Pirro enters with his attendants and, to Ermione's anger, invites Andromaca to sit with the nobles. Oreste explains his mission: the Kings of Greece want Astianatte put to death so that the power of Troy will not rise again in the person of this young boy. Pirro not only refuses this request, but publicly reveals his love for Andromaca and his plans to marry her. He dismisses the court.

Cleone, Ermione's confidante, advises the princess to let Oreste avenge her. When Oreste declares his love for her, Ermione can only think of her love for Pirro and vengeance for his unfaithfulness. Oreste's love does not waver. Pirro returns with his followers. Since Andromaca, true to the memory of Hector, has refused Pirro's hand in marriage, he has decided to allow Oreste to take Astianatte and to make his peace with Ermione. At the mention of Astianatte's name, Andromaca is overwhelmed by her maternal instincts and begs Pirro to give her time to think things over in order to save her son. Pirro is delighted, while Ermione and Oreste are overcome with consternation and rage.

ACT II

In the palace courtyard, Pirro is overjoyed to hear that Andromaca has finally consented to become his wife, and orders that the wedding ceremony take place without delay. But in reality, Andromaca plans to make him swear upon the altar to save Astianatte, then kill herself. Meanwhile, Ermione has conflicting emotions: her love for Pirro, a wish for death, and the desire for vengeance. Enraged by the sound of the wedding procession of Pirro and Andromaca, she demands that Oreste prove his love for her and kill the traitor. But she instantly regrets this, and feels inclined once again to forgive Pirro—all in vain, because Oreste has fulfilled his task. Ermione sharply reproaches him for not having understood her real feelings. Losing control of her senses, she invokes the Furies to punish the murderer and to end her life as well. Pilade and his men drag Oreste back to their ship to keep him from falling into the hands of the angry populace.

SAN FRANCISCO WAR MEMORIAL PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

War Memorial Opera House

Owned and operated by the City and County
of San Francisco through the Board of
Trustees of the War Memorial

The Honorable Frank Jordan
Mayor, City and County of San Francisco

TRUSTEES

Mrs. Melvin M. Swig
President

Thomas E. Horn
Vice President

Marie Acosta-Colon

Alan D. Becker

Mrs. Joseph D. Cuneo

Mrs. Mitchell V. Davies

Dr. Zuretti L. Goosby

Mrs. Walter A. Haas, Jr.

Mrs. Anthony J. Leones

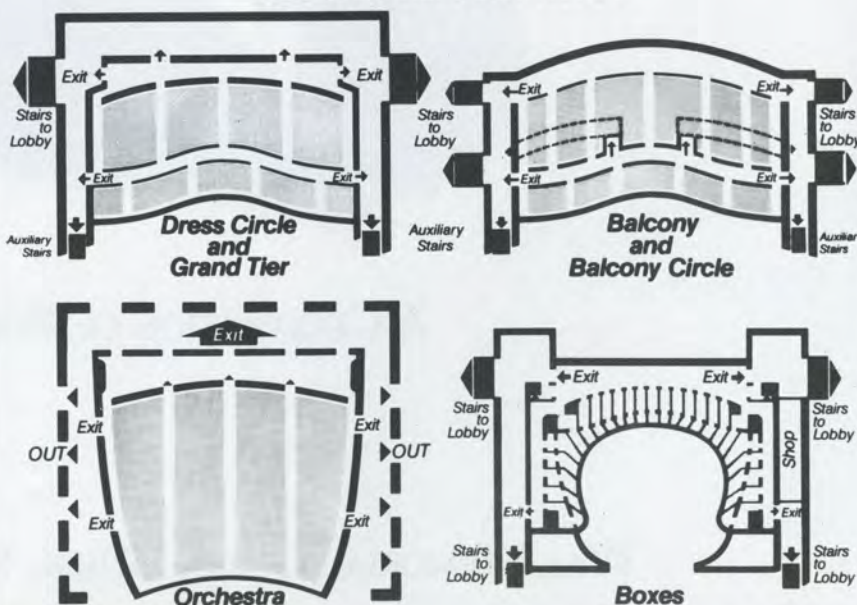
Mrs. George R. Moscone

Francesca P. Naify

Thelma Shelley
Managing Director

Elizabeth Murray
Assistant Managing Director

San Francisco War Memorial and Performing Arts Center War Memorial Opera House



Patrons, Attention Please! Fire Notice: There are sufficient exits in this building to accommodate the entire audience. The exit indicated by the lighted "EXIT" sign nearest your seat is the shortest route to the street. In case of fire please do not run—walk through that exit. (Refer to diagrams.)

United States Premiere

Staged Concert Version

Opera in two acts by GIOACHINO ROSSINI

Text by ANDREA LEONE TOTTOLA

Based on the drama *Andromaque* by JEAN BAPTISTE RACINE

(Critical edition by Patricia Brauner and Philip Gossett. Materials furnished by Fondazione Rossini Pesaro,
in cooperation with G. Ricordi & Co., S.p.A., Milan, Italy;
Hendon Music, Inc., a Boosey & Hawkes Company, sole agent)

Ermione

(in Italian)

Conductor

Patrick Summers

Staged by

Sandra Bernhard

Lighting Designer

Jennifer Norris

Chorus Director

Ian Robertson

Musical Preparation

Robert Morrison

Peter Grunberg

Philip Eisenberg

Prompter

Philip Eisenberg

Assistant Stage Director

Paula Williams

First performance:

Naples, March 27, 1819

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Andromaca Kathleen Kuhlmann

Fenicio Jeffrey Wells

Attalo Euro Nava+

Cefisa Yanyu Guo+

Cleone Man-Hua Gao*+

Ermione Anna Caterina Antonacci*

Pirro Hong-Shen Li

Oreste Jorge Lopez-Yañez

Pilade Craig Estep

*Trojan prisoners, followers of Oreste, Spartan maidens,
grandeess of Epirus*

*San Francisco Opera debut
+1992 Adler Fellow

PLACE AND TIME: Buthrote, capital of Epirus, after the Trojan War

THERE WILL BE ONE INTERMISSION

Supertitles by Steven White, San Francisco Opera.

Latecomers will not be seated during the performance after the lights have dimmed.

*The use of cameras, cellular phones and any kind of recording equipment
is strictly forbidden.*

The performance will last approximately two hours and forty minutes.

FRIDAY, JUNE 26 AT 8:00

SUNDAY, JUNE 28 AT 2:00



ANNA CATERINA ANTONACCI

One of Italy's fastest rising artists, soprano **Anna Caterina Antonacci's** first San Francisco Opera assignment is the title role of *Ermione*. During the 1987 season, she sang her first Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* in Arezzo and was winner of the "Premio Verdi" International Voice Competition in Parma. Within a year after winning the prestigious Maria Callas International Vocal Competition and the Opera Company of Philadelphia's Luciano Pavarotti International Voice Competition in 1988, she made acclaimed debuts as Elisabetta in *Maria Stuarda* at the Teatro Petruzzelli in Bari, and as Elcia in Rossini's *Mosè in Egitto* at the Rome Opera. The following year she was acclaimed as Orazia in Cimarosa's *Orazi e Curiazi* at the Rome Opera, and in her debut at the Opera Giocosa di Savona in Rossini's *Torvaldo e Dorliska*. The 1990 season opened with her successful performance as Orazia at Lisbon's Sao Carlos, which was followed by debuts at La Fenice in Venice as Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*, at the Philadelphia Opera as Ninetta in Rossini's *La Gazza Ladra*, and at the Teatro Bellini in Catania as Adalgisa in *Norma*. Additional performances that season included Fiordiligi in Macerata, and a return to Savona in the title role of Paisiello's *Elfrida* and as Polissena in Manfredi's *Ecuba*. Last year, she performed the title role of *Ermione* in Rome, Anaide in *Mosè in Egitto* in Bologna, Fiordiligi in Macerata, the title role of *Semiramide* in Catania, as well as *Elisabetta*, *Regina d'Inghilterra* and Rossini's *Stabat Mater* in Naples. Her most recent engagements include *Ermione* in London and *La Donna del Lago* in Amsterdam. Upcoming assignments include Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* at Milan's La Scala, *Ermione* in Buenos Aires, *Maria Stuarda* at Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, and *Mosè in Egitto* at Covent Garden.

Mezzo-soprano **Kathleen Kuhlmann** sings the role of Andromaca in *Ermione*. She made her San Francisco Opera debut in the summer of 1982 as Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and was seen here in 1989 as Alcina in *Orlando Furioso*, and in the title role of *Carmen* last fall. Born in San Francisco, she studied at the Chicago Lyric Opera School, where, in a park performance, she sang her first *Carmen*, a role which she has also sung in Sydney, Montreal, Tel Aviv, Cologne, Hamburg, Naples, Vienna and, most recently, in a new production at the



KATHLEEN KUHLMANN

Royal Opera Covent Garden. She has sung numerous roles at the Cologne Opera since her 1980 debut, including Charlotte in *Werther*, the title role of *La Cenerentola*, Orfeo in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, and Rosina. Other European credits include Rosina, and Ino/Juno in Handel's *Semele* at Covent Garden; Rosina at the Vienna State Opera, in Bilbao, Lucca and Hamburg; Arsace in *Semiramide* in Parma, Naples, Bilbao, Vienna, Bonn, Toulouse and Munich; *La Cenerentola* at the Glyndebourne Festival and in Stuttgart; Bradamante in Handel's *Alcina* in Geneva and Paris; and the role of Charlotte throughout Germany, most recently in a new Harry Kupfer production at the Hamburg State Opera. Appearances in the U.S. include her Metropolitan Opera debut in 1989 as Charlotte, Rosina at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Falliero in Rossini's *Bianca e Falliero* at Miami Opera. As concert soloist, she has sung the Mozart Requiem with the English Chamber Orchestra, *Roméo et Juliette* for Radio France, *Le Nozze di Teti e di Peleo* for the Rossini Festival, Mozart's *Coronation Mass* with The Philharmonia, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* in Dublin and London, and has appeared numerous times at the BBC Proms. During the Rossini bicentennial this year, Miss Kuhlmann sang the title role of *La Cenerentola* in Dresden, Malcolm in *La Donna del Lago* at Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, and took part in two Rossini gala concerts which were televised worldwide from the Kennedy Center. Future engagements include *Alcina* at Covent Garden, Ottavia in *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* in Cologne and at the Schwetzingen Festival, Cornelia in *Giulio Cesare* in Munich, and *Carmen* in Cologne and Barcelona.

A 1992 Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, soprano **Man-Hua Gao** makes her first appearance with the Company as Cleone in *Ermione*. Born in China, she received her training at the Shanghai Conservatory and at the Boston University School of Music. In 1984, she won first place in the Beijing National Voice Competition, competing against the foremost singers from all 29 provinces. She was also a prizewinner at the International Belvedere Competition in Vienna, which led to performances with the Shanghai Symphony, Shanghai Philharmonic, Beijing Central Opera Orchestra, Budapest Philharmonic, and extensive tours to Canada, Japan, Thailand,



MAN-HUA GAO

Singapore and Hong Kong. A winner of the New England Metropolitan Auditions, she has been a fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center and a guest soloist at Carnegie Hall. As a participant in the 1990 Merola Opera Program, Miss Gao sang the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, repeating the role on Western Opera Theater's national tour. She returned to the Merola Program last year, winning the prestigious Schwabacher Family Award at the Grand Finals, and sang Violetta in Western Opera's national tour of *La Traviata*. She recently appeared as Ginevra in the Showcase presentation of *Ariodante*, and will be seen on the War Memorial stage this fall as Adina in the student matinee performances of *L'Elisir d'Amore*.



YANYU GUO

A 1990 Merola Opera Program participant and a 1991-92 Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, mezzo-soprano **Yanyu Guo** sings the role of Cefisa in *Ermione*. She made her Company debut in 1990 as the Second Alms Sister in *Suor Angelica*, a Turkish Woman in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and received critical acclaim when she stepped in for an ailing colleague as Penelope in a performance of *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*. During last summer's Mozart Festival she portrayed the Second Lady in *Die Zauberflöte* and Don Ramiro in *La Finta Giardiniera*, and was seen with the Company last fall as Flora in *La Traviata*, Murat's Aide-de-Camp in *War and Peace*, Mercédès in *Carmen*, and a Maidservant in *Elektra*. The native of Beijing, China, studied



HONG-SHEN LI

at the Beijing Central Conservatory and continued her studies in the U.S. at the Eastman School of Music and at the Juilliard Opera Center. The recipient of numerous prizes and awards, she has appeared with the Minnesota Orchestra, Columbus Symphony, New York Choral Society, the Opera Orchestra of New York, the Ashland Opera Festival, Chattanooga Opera, Virginia Opera, Opera Carolina, Augusta Opera, Baltimore Opera, and at the Spoleto Festival. Roles she has performed include Dorabella in *Così fan tutte*, the title role of *La Cenerentola*, Cherubino in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly*. Miss Guo recently sang the title role of *Ariodante* for the Opera Center's Showcase series, and will appear with the Company this fall in *Andrea Chénier*.

Tenor **Hong-Shen Li** appears as Pirro in *Ermione*. A 1990 Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, he made his Company debut in 1989 as Goro in *Madama Butterfly*, and also sang in *Idomeneo*, *Aida* and *Lohengrin*. In 1990, he portrayed the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto*, and also appeared in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and *Capriccio*. He was seen on the War Memorial stage last summer as the First Armored Man in *The Magic Flute* and Aufidio in *Lucio Silla*, and last fall as Alfredo in the student matinee performances of *La Traviata*, Tebaldo in *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, and a Shepherd in *Tristan und Isolde*. A native of the People's Republic of China, he received his initial training while studying under a five-year Highest Fellowship Scholarship at the Central Conservatory of Beijing and traveled throughout Asia and Eastern Europe with the Art Ensemble of Beijing. He continued his studies at the Juilliard School, where he appeared as Benedict in Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict*. As a member of the 1987 Merola Opera Program, he performed the role of Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi*, and returned to the Merola Program in 1988 to sing Lindoro in *The Italian Girl in Algiers*. During Western Opera Theater's 1988-89 tour he portrayed Goro in *Madama Butterfly* and, with the Opera Center Singers, sang Count Almaviva in the 1989 *Barber of Seville*. Recent engagements include his Metropolitan Opera debut in *The Flying Dutchman*, Nemorino in the student performances of *L'Elisir d'Amore* for the Dallas Opera, the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto* for the Washington Opera and the Stockton Sym-



JORGE LOPEZ-YAÑEZ

phony, a debut with San Diego Opera in *Die Zauberflöte*, participation in the farewell gala for soprano Régine Crespin in Paris, the role of the Colonel in the Opera Center's Showcase production of Reimann's *The Ghost Sonata*, and Mozart's Requiem with the Sacramento Symphony. Li is a recipient of a 1990 George London/William Matheus Sullivan grant, and was a winner in the 1991 Metropolitan Opera National Council Competition.

Jorge Lopez-Yañez appears as a Fisherman in *Guillaume Tell*, Count Almaviva in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and Oreste in *Ermione*. The Mexican tenor made his 1990 San Francisco Opera debut as Alfred in *Die Fledermaus* and was seen here last fall as Alfredo in *La Traviata*. Since his debut in Hannover in 1988 as the Duke in *Rigoletto*, he has been performing leading roles with important European houses and has been a regular guest at several German opera houses including those in Munich, Frankfurt, Cologne, Düsseldorf and Stuttgart. His busy 1989-90 schedule included *Le Postillon de Longjumeau* and Handel's *Alcina* for the Geneva Opera, Fenton in *Falstaff* at the Los Angeles Music Center Opera, his debut with the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Alfred in *Die Fledermaus*, and debuts at the Châtelet in Paris in *Alcina* and at the Cologne Opera as Nemorino in *L'Elisir d'Amore*. He began the 1990-91 season with a return to Europe for various assignments including *La Cenerentola*, *Rigoletto*, and *La Fille du Régiment* in Zurich. The 1991-92 season included debuts with the Canadian Opera, where he opened the season in *La Traviata*, and with the Pittsburgh Opera in *La Cenerentola*. He most recently appeared in *Rigoletto*, *La Bohème*, and *Der Rosenkavalier* in Düsseldorf, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at the Vienna Staatsoper, *Der Rosenkavalier* at San Diego Opera, and in a Rossini concert in Frankfurt. Future engagements include *Rigoletto* for the Canadian Opera, *La Traviata* for the Sydney Opera, as well as *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and a new production of *I Puritani* at the Vienna Staatsoper. After earning an engineering degree in Mexico, Lopez-Yañez came to the U.S. for vocal studies at California State University in Northridge. He began his professional career with the Los Angeles Music Center Opera, where he sang the Prince in student performances of *La Cenerentola*, and the Long Beach Civic Light Opera, where he gained experience in operetta, appearing in *The Merry Widow* and *The New Moon*. He won second and



CRAIG ESTEP

third prizes, respectively, in the 1985 and 1986 Metropolitan Opera West Coast Regional Auditions and was a finalist in several other competitions, including the San Francisco Opera Auditions and the Zachary Auditions, which awarded him first prize in 1987. The tenor has sung a number of recitals in California and has appeared in concert and on several television programs in Mexico.

Tenor **Craig Estep** appears as a Fisherman in *Guillaume Tell* and Pilade in *Ermione*. A 1990 Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, he made his Company debut in 1989 as Dr. Caius in the family performance of *Falstaff*, and was also seen in *Madama Butterfly* and *Lohengrin*. In 1990, he appeared here as Borsa in *Rigoletto*, the Italian Tenor in *Capriccio*, Alfred in the family performance of *Die Fledermaus*, and Anfimono in *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*. During last summer's Mozart Festival he was seen as Don Curzio in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and as Il Contino Belfiore in *La Finta Giardiniera*, and was here last fall as a French Abbé, Kutuzov's Aide-de-Camp and Gérard in *War and Peace*, Noboru in *Das Verrätene Mère*, and Uldino in *Attila*. A 1987 and 1988 Merola Opera Program participant, Estep sang in *Madame Butterfly* on Western Opera Theater's national tour and in Japan with the Center's Pacific Rim Exchange Program. The tenor traveled to Shanghai in 1988 to sing Spoletta in the first production of *Tosca* ever seen in China. In 1989 he appeared in the Opera Center's Showcase production of Handel's *Giustino*, and was a soloist in the San Francisco Symphony Pops Series. Last year he visited Japan and Guam with other Company and Opera Center personnel for a collaborative presentation of *Carmen*. Earlier this year, he made an acclaimed debut with Miami Opera as Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and was recently seen on national television in the Rossini Bicentennial Celebration from New York's Avery Fisher Hall. Estep will travel to Siena, Italy, later this season to appear in Rossini's rarely performed pasticcio *Ivanhoe*. The North Carolina native has a master's degree in vocal performance and has also sung with the North Carolina Opera, Connecticut Grand Opera, the Charleston Opera, Calgary Opera and Marin Opera.



JEFFREY WELLS

American bass-baritone **Jeffrey Wells** makes his first San Francisco Opera appearance as Walter Fürst in *Guillaume Tell* and Fenicio in *Ermione*. His 1988 debut at the Metropolitan Opera as Ferrando in the opening night production of *Il Trovatore* marked his arrival as one of the most promising young artists active today. He first attracted international attention during the 1986-87 season as Assur in *Semiramide* at the Opéra de Nice, and was immediately re-engaged for leading roles in *Les Troyens*, *Guillaume Tell* and *Pique Dame* in Nice, with *Guillaume Tell* in Paris as well. Additional engagements that season included Ferrando in *Il Trovatore* with Washington Opera, Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Canadian Opera and Cleveland Opera, and Timur in *Turandot* with the Baltimore Opera. A bel canto specialist, Wells appeared as Oroveso in *Norma* and as Raimondo in his debut season with the New York City Opera, and also sang Count Rodolfo in *La Sonnambula* with Washington Opera, Basilio in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* with Canadian Opera, and Capellio in the U.S. premiere of Rossini's *Bianca e Falliero* for Miami Opera. He has also appeared at the Spoleto Festivals in the U.S. and Italy as Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*; at San Diego Opera as Colline in *La Bohème*, Sparafucile in *Rigoletto* and Ferrando; and at the Dallas Opera as Collatinus in *The Rape of Lucretia*. Wells made his British debut at the 1989 Glyndebourne Festival as Nick Shadow in *The Rake's Progress*, and was first seen in Italy at Palermo's Teatro Massimo as John Sorel in *The Consul*. He has appeared on the concert stage in Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and *Missa Solemnis*, the Verdi Requiem, Haydn's *Creation*, and Mendelssohn's *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht*, a work which he has recorded, in addition to the role of Antony in the Grammy Award-winning recording of Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Recent highlights include *La Bohème*, *Turandot*, *Aida* and *Don Carlo* at the Met, *Don Giovanni* for Washington Opera, *Anna Bolena* in Seattle, *La Forza del Destino* in New Orleans, and *Don Carlo* in Houston. He returns to the Met next season for nine operas, including *La Fanciulla del West*, *Semiramide*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and *Il Trovatore*.



EURO NAVA

A 1992 Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, tenor **Euro Nava** makes his first appearance with the Company as Rodolphe in *Guillaume Tell* and Attalo in *Ermione*. The native of Caracas, Venezuela, received his undergraduate degree from the Central University of Venezuela, and continued his graduate studies in opera performance at Philadelphia's Academy of Vocal Arts. His professional appearances in Caracas have included Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*, Grimoaldo in *Rodelinda*, Arturo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and Goro in *Madama Butterfly*. Roles at the Vocal Arts Academy include Count Almaviva in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Alfred in *Die Fledermaus*, Belmonte in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*. He sang the Podestà in the Opera Center's 1991 Showcase production of *La Finta Giardiniera*, and Alfredo in *La Traviata*, both for the Merola Opera Program and on Western Opera Theater's 1991-92 national tour. Recent appearances include Handel's *Messiah* with the Stockton Symphony and the Reno Chamber Orchestra, as well as the role of Lurcanio in Handel's *Ariodante* for the Opera Center. Nava is the winner of the Alfred Hollander Competition (the national competition of Venezuela), the Carmen Teresa de Hurtado Latin America Competition, the Gargiari Bel Canto Competition at the Academy of Vocal Arts, the Grand Prize of the Greater Buffalo Opera Competition, and the Mario Lanza Competition.

In his third year as Music Director of the San Francisco Opera Center, **Patrick Summers** leads the U.S. premiere of *Ermione*. Recently on the podium of the War Memorial for the Pacific Voices Gala Concert, he made his Company conducting debut in 1990 with performances of *Die Fledermaus*, and has since led the 1991 Mozart Festival production of *Così fan tutte* and last fall's student matinee presentation of *La Traviata*. An apprentice coach for the Merola Opera Program in 1986 and 1987, he was twice awarded the Otto Guth Memorial Award. As assistant conductor, he joined Western Opera Theater's 1986-87 tour of *La Bohème*, which culminated in performances in Shanghai, and led the Shanghai Orchestra in a joint concert with American and Chinese sing-



PATRICK SUMMERS

ers. He acts as liaison between the Center and San Francisco Opera, and has conducted numerous Opera Center performances, including the Merola Opera Program Grand Finals and the Fall Season Preview Concert, as well as *The Bartered Bride* at Stern Grove and *Don Pasquale*, *Madama Butterfly* and *Carmen* at Villa Montalvo. He also conducted Western Opera's national tours of *Don Pasquale* and *Madama Butterfly*. For the Opera Center's Showcase series, Maestro Summers led the 1988 West Coast premiere of Hiram Titus's *Rosina*, 1990's U.S. premiere of Reimann's *The Ghost Sonata*, and this year's presentation of Handel's *Ariodante*. He has traveled to China four times since 1987, coaching students at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in preparation for their performances of *Rigoletto* (1989) and *Don Pasquale* (1990), as well as preparing and conducting the first production of *Tosca* ever presented in China. Last year, Summers conducted Opera Center-sponsored performances of *Carmen* in Japan (with the Sendai Philharmonic) and Guam. Recent credits include *Lucio Silla* for the Long Beach Opera, and, in his European debut, *Le Nozze di Figaro* in Belgium.

Ermione: An Introduction

By PHILIP GOSSETT

Of all Rossini's operas, *Ermione* is surely the one that made the least impression on his contemporaries. Stendhal dismisses it in two sentences:

"*Ermione*, 1819, had only a partial success: few of its pieces were applauded. It was an experiment in which Rossini tried to explore the genre of French opera."

Despite the presence of a superb cast (including Isabella Colbran as *Ermione*, Rosmunda Pesaroni as *Andromaca*, Andrea Nozzari as *Pirro*, and Giovanni David as *Oreste*), its premiere, at the Teatro San Carlo of Naples on March 27th, 1819, was soon forgotten, and *Ermione* was never revived during Rossini's life. A few compositions from *Ermione*, along with others from *Adelaide di Borgogna* and *Ricciardo e Zoraide*, were absorbed into the pastiche opera Rossini prepared for Venice later that spring, *Eduardo e Cristina*; a chorus found its way into *Le Siège de Corinthe*; part of *Ermione*'s Gran Scena was given to Giuditta Pasta in an aria added for a Parisian performance of *Zelmira*; and some individual phrases were recalled in later works. Otherwise, silence. There have been few concert presentations in recent years, but the performances at the 1987 Rossini Opera Festival at Pesaro represented the first staging since the premiere.

Yet there have been hints all along that the historical failure of *Ermione* bears little relation to its inherent quality. Rossini clearly treasured it. The most obvious indication is that he turned to its music when he projected a new opera for England in 1824, the phantom *Ugo, Re d'Italia*; additional texts underlaid to several pieces in the autograph manuscript of *Ermione* refer to this unfinished project. That Rossini might want *Ermione* to live on in a *Ugo* written for England is consistent with his decision to permit *Maometto II*, whose original success was only marginally greater than that of *Ermione*, to survive in his first French opera, *Le Siège de Corinthe*.

His feelings about the work are described in an anecdote transmitted by Léon and Marie Escudier, in their 1854 biography of the composer:

"[...] Rossini knew the quality of his work: he withdrew the misunderstood score from the hands of [Domenico] Barbaja [the Neapolitan impresario], saying: You will encounter it again, sooner or later, and perhaps then the Neapolitan public will recognize its error."

The master has carefully preserved the manuscript of *Ermione*. Recently, he was asked whether he might permit this work to be translated for the French stage: No, he replied, it is my little *Guillaume Tell* in Italian, and it will not see the light of day until after my death."

Whether or not this anecdote has some authentic basis, it must at least be grounded in public perception of the truth. How can we explain the enormous gulf between the work's contemporary reception and its apparent or perceived importance to the composer?

Contradictory legends have swarmed around *Ermione* over the years. Stendhal associated it with "the genre of French opera"; Azevedo, another contemporary biographer, claimed that in *Ermione* Rossini used "a system of lyric declamation that often approaches the school of Gluck." Yet earlier this century, in his monumental study of Rossini, Giuseppe Radiciotti insisted that with the exception of a single scene at the end of the second act, *Ermione* was indistinguishable from the composer's other Neapolitan operas from the same period. And for Radiciotti, impatient with a style of florid singing he had never heard and did not understand, this sufficed to condemn the work.

Ermione is indeed an extraordinary opera, and in its protagonist Rossini created one of the most fully developed characters in all of nineteenth-century Italian opera. But the reference to French style, while not inappropriate, is incomplete. There is no reason to imagine that Rossini, in his effort to compose a true *tragédie-lyrique*, was prepared to abandon his own musical language, his own stylistic world. Rossini had no need to imitate anyone, let alone Gluck; the grandeur of his musical and dramatic vision in *Ermione* is a development fully consistent with his individual development as a composer of serious opera.

The very choice of subject, of course, makes comparisons with French classicism inevitable. Its libretto was derived by Andrea Leone Tottola from Racine's *Andromaque* (1667). Tottola was a far more significant figure, both historically and aesthetically, than is usually acknowledged. Poet for the royal theaters in Naples, author of almost a hundred libretti, and an important theatrical administrator, Tottola expertly adapted themes as diverse as *Mosè in Egitto* (based on the biblical story and an Italian play), *La Donna del Lago* (from Sir Walter Scott's poem *The Lady of the Lake*), and *Zelmira* (from a French eighteenth-century drama) for the Italian operatic stage. Yet while each of his opera seria librettos for Rossini is largely constructed according to the convenience of the time, with carefully arranged entrance arias, cabalettas, duets, and ensembles, Tottola provided structures diverse enough so that the composer could stamp each of these works with an individuality that emerges ever more clearly as we come to know them better. Though Racine's drama is itself based upon the *Andromache* of Euripides and an earlier collection of Greek legends tracing the history of the children and consorts of the heroes of the Trojan war, the French dramatist significantly altered the story. In Euripides, the child of Hector and Andromache, Astyanax, was put to death at Troy. Andromache became the slave of Achilles' son, Pyrrhus, with whom she had another child, provoking the fury of his barren legitimate wife, Hermione (daughter of Menelaus and Helen). As he explained in a preface to *Andromaque*, Racine decided to make Hector's widow a more sympathetic heroine by presenting Andromache as a woman torn between her fidelity to the memory of Hector and her love for Astyanax, who is allowed to survive the Trojan war: "I doubt that Andromache's tears would have affected my audience's feelings to the same extent had they been shed for a child different from the one she bore Hector." Even where Tottola

Philip Gossett, Dean of the Division of the Humanities at the University of Chicago, is the General Editor of the Edizione critica delle opere di Gioachino Rossini (published by the Fondazione Rossini of Pesaro) and of the Works of Giuseppe Verdi (published jointly by The University of Chicago Press and G. Ricordi & C. of Milan). He writes extensively on Italian opera and works closely with singers and opera houses throughout the world in productions of Rossini operas based on the new critical editions. For his services to Italian culture, education, and the arts, he was awarded the Medaglia d'Oro, first class, of the Italian Government in 1985. On the occasion of the Rossini bicentennial, he was named an honorary member of the Accademia Filarmonica of Bologna.

freely manipulated the order of events, particularly in the first act, adapting Racine's play to the needs of the Italian lyric stage as they were understood in the early nineteenth century, his work is dominated by the atmosphere of the *tragédie-lyrique*. As the second act develops, with its emphasis on Hermione's anguish and the murder of Pyrrhus, Tottola adheres ever more faithfully to the French original, following its major points of dramatic articulation and even its verses. At the heart of Tottola's libretto are four characters consumed in a chain of tragic love: Andromaca, the widow of Hector, faithful to the dead Trojan hero; King Pirro of Epirus, son of Achilles, infatuated with his royal slave Andromaca, bounty from the spoils of Troy; Ermione, Pirro's betrothed, furious at having been shunted aside yet deeply in love with Pirro; and Oreste (already pursued by the Furies for having murdered his mother Clytemnestra and her husband Aegisthus), whose blind passion for Ermione drives him to murder. Oreste arrives at the head of a Greek delegation seeking the death of Astianatte, to prevent the child of Hector from even seeking to avenge his father. Using the child as a pawn, Pirro wrests from Andromaca a promise to marry him, though she intends to commit suicide before the marriage can be consummated. Ermione in turn plays on Oreste's long-smoldering passion, convincing him that, by killing Pirro at the altar, he can win her affection. But when Oreste emerges from the temple carrying a dagger red with Pirro's blood, she turns on him in fury for not having read her soul and understood that she still loves the murdered Pirro. Ermione swoons and Oreste, pursued by the Epirians, is dragged off by the fleeing Greeks.

Rossini treats this powerful tale of passion and murder with the utmost artistic integrity, and the opera focuses its attention on the four protagonists. There are five additional characters in the drama, four of whom are taken directly from Racine: Pilade, whose efforts to restrain the passions of his friend Oreste go unheeded; Fenicio, tutor to Pirro, who tries to dissuade the king from pursuing Andromaca; and Cleone and Cefisa, confidantes of Ermione and Andromaca. To these figures, the librettist added Attalo, a follower of Pirro. Tottola uses these characters to fill in the gaps in the action, the inevitable result of the transformation of a complex play into a libretto. Pilade and Fenicio are the best defined, and Rossini and Tottola provide them with a short but attractive duettino (an "aria di sorbetto" a 2) near the end of the second act, a piece whose primary function is to allow Ermione some rest between her Gran Scena and the following Scena e Duetto with Oreste.

But it is to the musical realization of his major characters that Rossini's art is devoted in *Ermione*, as he constantly presses against the conventions of his art for dramatic ends. Each character has one major aria, and there are four intensely dramatic duets: Pirro encounters each of the women once and there are two duets for Oreste and Ermione (near the start of the first-act Finale and at the end of the opera). The absence of a duet for Ermione and Andromaca in Tottola's libretto may seem surprising, but it is perfectly consistent with Racine's tragedy, where they exchange only a few words. The conflict is not between the women, after all, but within each of them.

Only the splendid women's chorus and a short orchestral march, the latter brought back with striking dramatic effect in Ermione's Gran Scena, do not center on the emotions of the principal characters. At the same time, notice the extent to which additional soloists and the chorus participate in numbers that are ostensibly arias or duets: Pirro's aria, for example, develops into a major ensemble.

This mixing of genres is already apparent in the overture. It begins "Maestoso," with a stark descending F minor scale in unison, largely *fortissimo*, to be repeated *piano* by a reduced orchestra in a delicate harmonization. As tension builds again, a men's chorus is heard from behind the curtain, lamenting the fall of Troy: "Troia! qual fosti un dì." If the effect is startling today, imagine what it must have been like at the first performance. In a series of abrupt changes of tempo and mood, Rossini alternates lyrical choral meditations on the fast and furious orchestral figures, which gradually develop into a full overture design, though not without the reappearance of the chorus. There can be no clearer indication of Rossini's intent: the overture already serves to bring the audience into the world of the drama. There will be few moments in the opera in which this dramatic tension is not sustained.

There are few personal documents pertaining directly to Rossini during the period in which he was actively composing operas. We cannot reconstruct his psychological states from his surviving letters of the period, nor from those of his contemporaries, nor from meager newspaper reports. Study of the Neapolitan operas themselves, however, reveals a composer striving to create mature, independent works of art, each with a definite character, each coming to grips with the problem of convention and originality. Is it too much to presume that Rossini's disillusionment with the Italian theater of his time can be read in these still-born masterworks, these non-facts of music history, whose complete rejection by the Neapolitans, one of the most cultivated operatic publics of Europe, was essentially a rejection of the best Rossini could offer? He responded first by leaving Italy, then by retiring from the stage, a cynically detached observer, conscious of what he had to offer but psychologically incapable of pressing his claim.

In a certain sense, a work such as this is being heard today for the first time. As we learn more about it, it plays an ever larger role in our conceptual systems. We can no longer see other, more familiar works in quite the same light. Certain aspects of *Le Siège de Corinthe* seem to represent a cry of defeat, a trivialization of the art of *Maometto II*. *Semiramide* becomes not the pinnacle of Rossini's career as a composer of Italian *opera seria* but rather a measured retreat from the ambitions of his Neapolitan works. Acknowledgment of the variety of these compositions makes it more difficult to generalize about Rossini's art, and leads us instead to investigate with more attention individual qualities of his operas. In this reevaluation, *Ermione* must play a treasured part. It is a major accomplishment, and must be reckoned one of the finest works in the history of nineteenth-century opera. □