

Baroque Carnival

A Carnival in Venice: circus arts, music and dances of the 17th century



A production conceived by Vincent Dumestre
Director Cécile Roussat

LE POEME HARMONIQUE
Vincent Dumestre

In Venice in the early seventeenth century, Carnival, during the ten days before Lent, was a time of splendid celebration. In the palaces the nobility would give sumptuous banquets to musical accompaniment, while the streets would be alive with crowds of people from every walk of life and every stratum of society – lackeys, peasants, pedlars and mountebanks, commoners and princes, laymen and friars – all eager to participate in the games and fun, and watch the funambulists, contortionists, tumblers and acrobats, fire-eaters, singers, dancers, musicians, masquers... entertainers of every kind. Carnival was a time of licence, when distinctions of rank and quality were cast to the wind along with restraint and respect.

In the seventeenth century, governed by the Church, people suffered from wars, famines and epidemics, and Carnival, recalling pagan celebrations of spring and Dionysian rites, represented a short reprieve from the harsh realities of life. It was seen by some as an opportunity to display pomp and power, by others as a means of turning the world on its head and using laughter and satire to eliminate enemies or masters. Carnival also enabled the community to maintain its cultural models and its social hierarchy through the enactment of violence or by directing that violence at suitable or symbolic targets. Meanwhile, the Church, in an attempt to divert the population from the excesses of Carnivaltime, organised processions and ceremonies in the streets that were as sumptuous as the celebrations of the nobility.

Music was heard in the religious processions, in chaconas and morescas, in the staged pastiches of opera and in the villanellas sung in the streets... a theatre of sound, a visual tale, inspired by the aesthetics of the Baroque stage: fragility, distancing, beauty, strangeness, corporal and vocal stylisation... Indeed, in the seventeenth-century theatre all realism was banished and illusion, fabrication and mystery were of great importance.

The lavish and jubilant celebrations in Venice, with their elements of enchantment and of the grotesque inspired our 'Baroque Carnival', in which acrobats, jugglers, mime artists, singers and musicians of today express the creative energy of the rites and symbols that were so important in Carnival celebrations. Rather than attempting to give an historical or realistic account – to recreate such festivities as they actually existed would be impossible, because of their spontaneous nature – we chose to create a dream world combining comedy and tragedy, and ranging from the farcical Commedia dell'arte to the blind fury of a crowd carried away by the intensity of the moment... Obviously, there can be no single narrative thread; the contrary would be out of keeping with the very spirit of Carnival. We present, successively, a palace on the evening of a banquet, a fairground at dawn, a street with the excitement of a popular dance, a performance on an improvised stage... True to the spirit of Baroque theatre and the Commedia dell'arte, the characters, have no psychological depth, but exist through situations and actions.

'Baroque Carnival', combining various artistic disciplines, is nourished by our experience of improvised popular music, mime, Baroque dance and Commedia dell'arte. The performance is stylised, and we are guided by the relationship that exists between gesture and music. In the Tarantella del Gargano the liveliness of the singing matches the energy of the dancing, while in the art music presented the more codified gestures of Baroque rhetoric are used. The irony of the comic servants – the zanni – of the Commedia dell'arte reflects that of some of the songs, caustic parodies of contemporary works and the vocal ravings of Pulcinellas with their deformed bodies... The music thus takes shape with respect for its context.

Vincent Dumestre, Cécile Roussat, Julien Lubek.

A production by Le Poème Harmonique

co-produced with Les Célestins - Théâtre de Lyon ; La Comète - Scène nationale de Châlons-en-Champagne ; le Grand Théâtre de Reims ; le Cirque-Théâtre d'Elbeuf - Centre régional des arts du cirque (Haute-Normandie) ; la Scène nationale d'Evreux-Louviers ; le Festival Automne en Normandie.

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Le Poème Harmonique is supported by DRAC Haute Normandie / Ministry of Culture and Communication, Région Haute Normandie, and Département de l'Eure.



Artistic Director

Costumes

Lighting

Vincent Dumestre

Chantal Rousseau

Christophe Naillet

Director

Sets

Makeup

Cécile Roussat

François Destors

Mathilde Benmoussa

Performers

Singers

Bruno Le Levreur
Serge Goubioud

countertenor
tenor

Hugues Primard
Arnaud Marzorati

tenor
bass

Acrobats

Stefano Amori
Antoine Hérou
Olivier Landre

Quentin Bancel
Ahmed Said

Julien Lubek
Rocco Le Flem

Musicians

Johannes Frisch
Lucas Guimaraes
Vincent Dumestre

Stéphane Tamby
Martin Bauer

Gebhard David
Maël Guezel

List of the works given during the performance

Litanie dei Santi– Maletti
Serenata che fa madonna Gola a messir Carnaval– Anonymous
L'altre nott' al far del giorno - Fasolo
Al me pias' il columbott' - Fasolo
Al me pias' il vin alban - Fasolo
Una volta fui al mar - Maletti
Finiam la dunque o fier Sguizzon - Maletti
Mentre per bizzaria – Fasolo
Ciaconna – Maletti
Villanelle del Pescatore – Anonymous (arr. Maletti)
Colascione – Kapsberger
Tarentella del Gargano – Anonymous
Preludio – Maletti
Lamento del Naso, pasticcio – Monteverdi / Lattarico
Ballo di tre zoppi – Fasolo
Lamento di madama Lucia con la riposta di Cola – Fasolo
Hor Cantar più non vogliamo, Moresca – Fasolo



Performances given

Théâtre des Célestins, Lyon	<i>January 6th to 20th 2006 (12 performances)</i>
La Comète, scène nationale de Châlons en Champagne	<i>January 27th and 28th 2006</i>
Grand Théâtre de Reims	<i>February 4th and 5th 2006</i>
CalPerformances Festival, San Francisco (United States)	<i>June 9th and 10th 2006</i>
Normandy tour	<i>October 12th to 21st 2006 (6 performances)</i>
Cité de la Musique, Paris	<i>March 24th to 25th 2007 (3 performances)</i>
Théâtre, Caen	<i>March 28th to 30th 2007 (3 performances)</i>
Yugoslavia Theatre, Belgrade (Serbia)	<i>April 21st and 22nd 2007</i>
Printemps des Arts, Nantes	<i>June 12th to 13th 2007 (3 performances)</i>
Grand Théâtre, Limoges	<i>November 28th and 29th 2007</i>
Concertgebouw, Bruges (Belgique)	<i>March 12th 2008</i>
Ile de France tour	<i>April 5th to 8th 2008 (3 performances)</i>
National Opera, Damascus (Syria)	<i>May 7th 2008</i>
Teatro San Carlo, Naples (Italy)	<i>June 20th and 21st 2009</i>
Opéra Comique, Paris	<i>December 22nd and 23rd 2010</i>
Grand Théâtre, Luxembourg	<i>December 29th to 31st 2010 (3 performances)</i>
Le Volcan, Le Havre	<i>February 9th and 10th 2011</i>
Odyssud, Toulouse	<i>December 9th and 10th 2011</i>
Palace of the Arts, Budapest (Hungary)	<i>February 12th and 13th 2012</i>