

Season 2014/15

Christoph Willibald Gluck

EZIO

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Gluck's *Ezio* is a new co-production by Parnassus Arts and the exciting young ensemble Collegium 1704, who, under the incisive leadership of their conductor Vaclav Luks, have already gained a reputation as one of the most impressive baroque groups from the Czech Republic. As befits a work first heard in Prague in 1750, *Ezio* will be staged in that city's opulent Estates Theatre (Stavovské Divadlo), celebrating the 300th anniversary of Gluck's birth on 2 July 2014. Under the direction of cutting-edge duo Skutr (Martin Kukucka

and Lukáš Trpišovský), and broadcast by Clasart TV, Munich, this production promises to restore this powerful drama to its rightful place in Gluck's output.

For many years Gluck was almost a one-opera composer, famous only for *Orfeo ed Euridice*, the archetypal "reform opera", that cast aside the *ancien régime* conventions of Italian *opera seria*. In recent decades, his later French works have also entered the mainstream repertoire, but the *opere serie* of his early career have been unjustly neglected.

Christoph Willibald von Gluck was born in Erasbach, Bavaria on 2 July 1714, the son of a forester. Shortly afterwards the family moved to Bohemia, and, though he claimed to have been "obsessed with music" from an early age, in 1731 Gluck went to study law and mathematics at the Charles University in Prague. There he came into contact with the city's lively musical life, in which imported Italian opera played an important part. By 1737 he was a composition student of Giovanni Battista Sammartini in Milan, where his first opera, *Artaserse*, was premiered in 1741. An important career breakthrough came in 1748, when he was summoned to the Viennese court to compose a setting of Metastasio's *Semiramide riconosciuta* for the birthday of the newly-crowned Empress Maria Teresa in 1748. The work was performed 27 times to huge popular acclaim, but the librettist himself put this down to anything but Gluck's "unbearable, arch-vandalistic music".

This comment may partly account for Gluck's absence from Vienna for a considerable time – he spent two years touring with the opera troupe of impresario Pietro Mingotti, venturing as far as Copenhagen, and contracting a venereal disease from Mingotti's *prima donna*. Ezio saw the composer return to the familiar territory of Prague, where, under the auspices of a former member of Mingotti's company, Giovanni Battista Locatelli, the work was presented at the Kotzen Theatre ("Divadlo v Kotcích", since 1739 the home of Italian theatre in the Bohemian capital) during the carnival season of 1750.

Though in musical aesthetic worlds away from the "modernising" *Orfeo*, it is worth noting that one aria at least found its way from the earlier to the later work: like many of his contemporaries Gluck was happy to re-use a good tune, so Massimo's aria *Se povero il ruscello* turns up in his *Antigono* of 1756, before finding its way into the Elysian Fields scene of *Orfeo*. As notable for fiery virtuoso arias, such as Ezio's *Se fedele mi brama* (Act I, scene 8), as for charming pastoral (Varo's *Nasce al bosco in rozza cuna* in Act 2, scene 7), the score also includes such rarities as the dramatic terzetto *Passami il cor, tiranno* that closes Act II, and is also rich in accompanied recitatives, notably Fulvia's climactic *Misera, dove son* in Act III. It should be noted that Ezio was by no means Gluck's farewell to *opera seria*: he wrote another ten settings of libretti by Metastasio (two of them after *Orfeo*), and it was only with his 1767 setting of *Alceste* (to a libretto by Calzabigi, also the writer

of *Orfeo*) and then his French tragedies, beginning with *Iphigénie en Aulide* of 1774, that he finally turned away from earlier traditions.



EZIO

Synopsis

The action of the opera is set in 451 AD: Ezio, General of the Roman Imperial army, has returned victorious from a campaign against Attila the Hun. The Roman aristocrat Massimo wishes to be revenged on the Emperor, Valentiniano III, who before the events depicted in the opera itself had attempted to seduce his wife.

Valentiniano receives the victorious general and praises his triumph. Ezio modestly declares that the victory was not his alone. On meeting his beloved Fulvia, Massimo's daughter, he is puzzled at her cold greeting: he does not yet know that she is now promised to the emperor. When he is told, he accepts his destiny – nothing will break his fidelity to the Emperor – and promises Fulvia that all will be well. Fulvia rails against Valentiniano's tyrannous desires, and Massimo plots the Emperor's downfall through his jealousy of Ezio.

This is also fuelled by Valentiniano's sister Onoria, who secretly loves Ezio, but having been spurned by him, desires his ruin. Valentiniano offers his sister to Ezio, but Ezio reveals that Fulvia is his true love. Onoria then reveals to Fulvia that the Emperor will marry her on the morrow, and Fulvia is left in despair.

Massimo tries to have the Emperor murdered by a servant, Emilio. Valentiniano survives, so Massimo plants a suspicion that the real culprit was Ezio. At Fulvia's questioning of his motives, Massimo becomes angry. When she meets Ezio, he cannot believe that

the Emperor suspects him, but at length he is arrested by Varo, Prefect of the Praetorian Guard.

In order to gain his confidence, Fulvia now swears to love Valentiniano, but warns him of the people's anger should Ezio be condemned. Ezio is horrified at Fulvia's seeming inconstancy. Valentiniano bids him account for himself, but Ezio responds boldly, and Fulvia admits that her professions of love to the Emperor were false. Ezio goes gladly to prison, Fulvia swears that nothing will shake her constancy, and all three cry out against their fate.

Onoria visits Ezio in his cell, and reveals her love for him, promising him freedom if he reveals the plot against the Emperor. Ezio, who of course knows nothing, scorns such fakery. Onoria, convinced of Ezio's innocence, tries to convince Valentiniano to give up Fulvia. The Emperor now summons Varo, orders him to have Ezio killed, and congratulates himself on his own duplicity: when Massimo praises him for having removed the traitor, Valentiniano rebukes him. Ezio is now brought from prison, and Valentiniano offers him the hand of Fulvia if he confesses to the plot. He refuses to perjure himself and his honourable bearing seems to persuade the Emperor of his innocence. Valentiniano strikes off his chains, and Ezio goes to show himself to the people of Rome. Fulvia is overjoyed, but Varo returns, announcing Ezio's death.

With Fulvia in tears, Onoria now enters with the news that she has proof of Ezio's innocence: at death's door Emilio told her that the person who had plotted against the Emperor was "dear to him and betrayed by him in love". Valentiniano, remembering the past, now suspects Massimo, but Fulvia, desperate to save her father, says that she herself was the traitor. Confused and frustrated, Valentiniano leaves and Massimo tries to thank his daughter. Fulvia repulses him: she is beside herself with grief at her lover's fate and her father's treachery.

Massimo now tries to incite the people to rebellion, but the Emperor is saved by Varo and Ezio, whose death he had only reported, rather than encompassed! The grateful Valentiniano gives Fulvia to Ezio, and even Massimo is forgiven.



EZIO Cast



Max Emanuel Cencic (*Ezio*)



Yuriy Mynenko (*Valentiniano*)



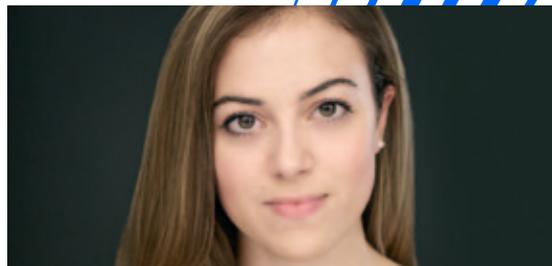
Vaclav Luks (*conductor*)



Mary Ellen Nesi (*Fulvia*)



Collegium 1704 (*orchestra*)



Lauren Snouffer (*Onoria*)



SKUTR (*Martin Kukucka & Lukás Trpisovský*)

Stage productions

EZIO in concert

2 july 2014 Premiere

Stavovské divadlo, Prague, CZ

4 july 2014

Stavovské divadlo, Prague, CZ

6 july 2014

Stavovské divadlo, Prague, CZ

8 july 2014

Stavovské divadlo, Prague, CZ

10 july 2014

Stavovské divadlo, Prague, CZ

july 2014 - august 2014

Ezio
Valentiniano
Massimo
Fulvia
Onoria
Varo

Max Emanuel Cencic
Yuriy Mynenko
N.N.
Mary Ellen Nesi
Lauren Snouffer
N.N.

director
set designer
costume designer
orchestra
conductor

SKUTR (Martin Kukucka & Lukás Trpisovský)
Jakub Kopecký
Lynda Boráros
Collegium 1704
Vaclav Luks

a production of Collegium 1704 and Parnassus Arts Productions at Stavovské divadlo, Prague

Partners

Collegium I704

