

PRESS KIT

The Palazzetto Bru Zane presents

# PHÈDRE

BY JEAN-BAPTISTE LEMOYNE

New stage production

FIRST PERFORMANCE AT THE THÉÂTRE DE CAEN  
ON THURSDAY APRIL 27 AND FRIDAY 28, 2017

FRIDAY JUNE 9, SATURDAY 10 AND SUNDAY 11, 2017  
AT THE THÉÂTRE DES BOUFFES DU NORD  
AS PART OF 5<sup>th</sup> FESTIVAL PALAZZETTO BRU ZANE IN PARIS

AND FRIDAY NOVEMBER 10, 2017  
AT THE OPÉRA DE REIMS



PALAZZETTO  
BRU ZANE  
CENTRE  
DE MUSIQUE  
ROMANTIQUE  
FRANÇAISE



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After its revivals of Grétry's *Andromaque*, *Céphale et Procris* and *La Caravane du Caire*; Johann Christian Bach's *Amadis de Gaule*, Catel's *Les Bayadères* and *Sémiramis*, Salieri's *Les Danaïdes*, Sacchini's *Renaud* and Piccinni's *Atys*, the Palazzetto Bru Zane in collaboration with the Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles continues its exploration of the origins of Romanticism with Lemoyne's *Phèdre*.

*Tragédie lyrique* in three acts

Libretto by François-Benoît Hoffmann

First performed at the Château de Fontainebleau on 26 October 1786

*Version for four singers and ten instrumentalists*

**Musical director** *Julien Chauvin*

**Stage director** *Marc Paquien*

**Costume** *Claire Risterucci*

**Set design** *Emmanuel Clolus*

**Lightning** *Dominique Bruguière*

**Transcription and adaptation** *Benoît Dratwicki*

**LE CONCERT DE LA LOGE**

**Phèdre** *Judith Van Wanroij*

**Œnone** *Diana Axentii*

**Hippolyte** *Enguerrand de Hys*

**Thésée** *Thomas Dolié*

Associate producer: **Palazzetto Bru Zane**

Co-production: **Théâtre de Caen / Centre de musique baroque de Versailles / Opéra de Reims**

Co-realisation: **C.I.C.T. - Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord**



Judith van Wanroij (Phèdre), Théâtre de Caen, April 2017 © Grégory Forestier

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Marc Paquien

*'Phèdre is not a concerto for a woman; it is a symphony for an orchestra of actors.'*

Jean-Louis Barrault, 1946

We all know the myth of Phaedra, its founding texts by Euripides, Seneca, and then Racine . . . And suddenly a new story revealed itself to me, through the music of Lemoyne, another Phaedra, who also experiences the ravages of desire and the pain of a possible incest. There is something very moving about discovering this work today and re-creating it at the same time. Like his predecessors, Lemoyne puts his character in the state that comes before death, where you know your own end is inevitable, and where the words that accompany you foretell what you do not want to hear. But I now perceive this adventure as the creation of a totally new work, a powerful and condensed work, in all its purity and originality, as another burning way of recounting the myth that lives so strongly in us, and experiencing once more the story of the daughter of Minos and Pasiphae . . .

Our production concept is situated in precisely that gap between a work of the eighteenth century and its (re)creation today, for in fact we had not heard much of this *Phèdre* before the first rehearsals: a few arias with the singers, intuitions that came to us and gradually constructed the universe into which we will project ourselves. Then something quite singular occurred to me: a work that has never been seen, never been heard. All these elements made me lean more in the direction of *the creation of a contemporary work*, of which I have already have experience with music by Xavier Dayer and Philippe Fénelon, an approach that implies that we as artists must be *totally open to the work to come*. So what should we focus on? The myth or the score? I believe that the music is the decisive element here, and it was in this perspective that my collaborators and I conceived the project. The subject of the opera will be the music of Lemoyne, in all its force and modernity, and the musicians will be present on stage, not relegated to a corner of the performing area, but featured as an integral part of the acting space and the dramaturgical movement. The scenography, devised along with Emmanuel Clolus, represents the temple of Venus in which the action of the tragedy is set, and which thus becomes a 'temple of music'.

On this large sloping expanse, which resembles a tombstone, each instrumentalist inhabits his or her own 'pit', and the singers move around above it. Hence the musicians of the orchestra become the priests of the temple, the chorus, as it were, who surround and accompany the protagonists.

Lemoyne's work is also unusual for its brevity and its violence, seen through the quartet that assembles the principal protagonists, omitting poor Aricie: thus each scene is a face-to-face confrontation, dense and heartrending, an ineluctable road to death. *Phèdre*, *Cenone*, *Hippolyte* and *Thésée*, in their gold and crimson costumes, arrive already consumed, ready to become dust, to vanish into the tombs scattered across the stage . . . This contrast between the grey of the floor and the gold of the tombs and costumes enables the creation of an imaginary space, between life and death, under the skilled lighting designs of Dominique Bruguière.



Judith van Wanroij (*Phèdre*), Théâtre de Caen, April 2017

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# SOME NOTES ON THE WORK

## HARKING BACK TO LOUIS XIV



Enguerrand de Hys and Thomas Dolié (Hippolyte and Thésée), Théâtre de Caen, April 2017 © Grégory Forestier

The choice of *Phèdre* as subject places the opera squarely in the ‘Louis XIV’ camp that advocated a return to the Grand Siècle, its proponents arguing that the arts, after the death of Rameau, had become over-indulgent and that only a return to the rigorous, classical traditions of the reign of Louis XIV could save them. In the world of opera, two schools of thought prevailed, their innovations meeting with varying degrees of success.

The first was to revisit the libretti set to music a century before by the great master Lully, and update them (basically rewriting and tailoring them to the tastes of the day). Gluck’s *Armide*, Philidor’s *Persée*, Gossec’s *Thésée*, Piccinni’s *Atys*, Johann Christian Bach’s *Amadis de Gaule* and Paisiello’s disastrous *Proserpine* all fall into this category. One may also include under the same umbrella of *tragédies lyriques* ‘quinaultiques’ or ‘enquinaudées’ (a reference to Lully’s great librettist Quinault) other works that drew on the ‘classic’ French repertory, such as Candeille’s *Castor et Pollux*, which premiered in 1791 but conserved whole sections of Rameau’s music, can also be included. The memory of the composer still burned too brightly for anyone to eliminate him completely from their work.

The second innovation consisted in mining the great ancient tragedies for literary material that could embody the new age the Revolution and the Empire were so eager to promote. 1781 saw the production of Grétry’s splendidly tragic *Andromaque* – despite clashes with the Comédie-Française. A few years later, Lemoyne dedicated his unprecedentedly violent *Électre* to M<sup>lle</sup> Saint-Huberti who was much derided for never taking to the stage unless it was drenched in incest, poison and adultery. In 1801, Catel’s *Sémiramis*, borrowing its plot from a 1748 tragedy by Voltaire, was premiered and as late as 1819 Spontini chose *Olympie*, again borrowed from Voltaire, as his final but ill-received musical bequest to France. That said, there is no doubt that *Phèdre*, too, is a perfect example of a newly created style of opera that was neo-classical in spirit if not in form, even if the term itself had yet to be invented.

## THE TRANSCRIPTION

Beginning with Marie Leczinska and her Concerts de la Reine in the reign of Louis XV and right up to those of the Empress Josephine during the First Empire, extensive archival sources point to the fact that shorter versions of operas or excerpts played by small forces were regularly performed at court. Arranged for a dozen or so musicians and a limited number of voices, these private concerts served both as an opportunity to exercise right of censorship before major works were premiered in the capital and a way of showcasing the most memorable passages once the works had been staged. The music arranged for these purposes was systematically and hurriedly set down by the Opéra’s teams of copyists who produced sets of manuscript parts not intended for publication. All these arrangements have been lost but administrative documents preserved in various national archives give us a fairly clear idea of the number and type of musicians involved in these occasional performances. It’s from these sources that this particular arrangement of Lemoyne’s *Phèdre* is drawn, embedding the quintet of strings in an ensemble of the kind of wind instruments most commonly deployed in the original score. Passages where a chorus is called for have been deliberately cut. In essence, the chorus was no more a key psychological player in the dramatic development of *Phèdre* in Lemoyne’s version than it was in Racine’s original.

# RECEPTION AND POSTERITY

The first performances of *Phèdre* at court and in Paris were well received, with regard to both poem and music. Hoffmann's libretto was based directly on Racine's tragedy *Phèdre* (1677), thus reflecting the current taste for transforming French classical tragedies into *tragédies lyriques*. In that same year of 1786, two further examples of the trend could be seen on the stage of the Opéra in the shape of Salieri's *Les Horaces* (The Horatii) and Vogel's *La Toison d'or* (The Golden Fleece). All these works reopened the debate on the appropriateness of taking tragedies from the repertory of the Comédie Française and adapting them for the operatic stage. The premiere of Grétry's *Andromaque* in 1780 had already raised the issue. Contemporary writers pointed out longueurs in some scenes of *Phèdre*, which the authors immediately pruned, but without entirely managing to erase a certain monotony due to the absence of contrast during long stretches of recitative. The *Mercure de France* found Hoffmann's poetry, 'mellifluous, pleasant, fluent'. But, obliged as it was to express the same ideas as Racine, 'his verse could not withstand comparison with that of such a rival'. The *Affiches, annonces et avis divers* welcomed Hoffmann's abridgment of the text, which was dictated by its new function as a libretto. Indeed, with this tragedy, the young man – then only twenty-six years old – was judged to be one of the most promising poets of the moment.

It was widely thought that Lemoyne had turned to his profit the advice he had been given by critics and public after the premiere of his first *tragédie lyrique*, *Électre* (1782), which had been condemned for being too harsh and violent on account of its over-zealous application of Gluck's system. The press considered that the score of *Phèdre* was more personal, and therefore more natural. The *Affiches, annonces et avis divers* deemed that Lemoyne possessed 'the rare merit of having a style of his own', judging the music of *Phèdre* to be 'from beginning to end, sound, serious, and filled with the sweetest expression, though this sometimes degenerates into a sort of melancholy'. The third act, 'exceptionally well crafted', redeemed this fault. Several commentators thought that Lemoyne had attempted, in some of the scenes in recitative, to replace the latter style by vocalism in the strict sense: a lyricism already tinged with Romanticism made its appearance. The most widely applauded numbers were the Hymn to Diana and the Prayer to Venus at the start of the opera, the air for Phaedra (I, 4), her duet with Œnone (II, 1), Theseus' invocation to Neptune in the same act, the justification of Hippolytus in the following act, and above all the monologue for the remorse-stricken Phaedra in Act Three. 'This piece is no more than a recitative, but the way in which it is conceived, the mysterious, profound, terrifying strains in the orchestra, must give us the most elevated idea of the talents of M. Lemoyne', declared the *Mercure*.

In general, the production, 'magnificently staged', garnered great praise. The ballets, though episodic, were applauded; however, the priestesses of Venus were thought too modest, and better suited to serving the chaste Diana. It was suggested that they should model themselves on M<sup>lle</sup> Guimard, whose 'deportment – playful yet not lacking in nobility, and voluptuous without indecency' was a perfect match for her role. M<sup>lle</sup> Saint-Huberty, then at the peak of her career, played Phaedra in truly sublime fashion, repeating the miracle of her appearance in the title role of Piccinni's *tragédie lyrique* *Didon* three years previously. 'It would be impossible to employ inflections that are more authentic, more sensitive or nobler. This great actress expresses all the nuances of passion, and she deserves no less praise for her singing than for her declamation', assured the *Mercure*. The only reproach levelled at her was that she sometimes abandoned 'the musical voice to assume the spoken voice. It is only a cry, it is only for a moment, but that moment is disagreeable'. M. Rousseau, as Hippolytus, showed 'infinite grace' and 'a precious sensibility'. As for M. Chéron, in the role of Theseus, he impressed the critics with 'the nobility of his performance and his clear, resonant voice'. M<sup>lle</sup> Gavaudan, finally, gave the role of Œnone as much interest as it was capable of arousing.

The score of *Phèdre* shows Lemoyne taking care to smooth out the asperities for which he had been criticised in *Électre* four years earlier. Although the music loses something in originality, it gains in lyricism. The subject lends itself to particularly intense scenes of introspection, notably for the roles of Phaedra and Theseus. Lemoyne, perfectly familiar with M<sup>lle</sup> Saint-Huberty's resources, wrote a role tailor-made for her: while exploiting her fearless top notes, he also knows how to showcase her lower register at appropriate moments – notably in the recitatives – in order to obtain somewhat expressionistic special effects. Indeed, the singer was accused of overdoing such effects by not shrinking from using her spoken voice. Lemoyne's rather conventional orchestration is sometimes a little on the heavy side and imposes on the singers an unremitting engagement that is doubtless rather tiring. Nevertheless, the composer skilfully colours the most picturesque numbers (like those for the huntsmen) and occasionally strikes pre-Romantic notes (as in Phaedra's final monologue). At the opposite pole from the Italian school represented by Piccinni, Sacchini and Salieri, Lemoyne cultivates a more typically French art, following in the tradition of Gossec especially, in which theatricality and declamation retain their superiority over vocalism in the strict sense.

# SYNOPSIS

## Act I

The scene is set in the countryside near Troezen. The buildings of the city may be seen in the background, towards the right; to the left, also in the background, is a wooded hillside, while to the right is a newly built temple consecrated to Venus. Day is breaking. Hippolytus (Hippolyte) and his companions are setting off for the hunt. Phaedra (Phèdre), who arrives without being seen, observes Hippolytus as he leaves; her expression reveals the burning passion she feels for him. The queen hopes to soothe her tormented heart with a sacrifice in honour of the goddess. But she mixes up the words of her prayers, and her visions betray her. She finally confesses her love for Hippolytus to her attendant Œnone, who points out the dangers it entails. At this very moment, however, the queen is informed that her husband Theseus (Thésée), who has gone down into the Underworld, is very unlikely to return. Phaedra herself must ascend the throne; she begins to believe in a love that was hitherto impossible.

## Act II

The scene is set in a gallery in the palace of the kings of Troezen. Phaedra has been crowned. The queen asks Hippolytus how he is feeling; the young man's submissive attitude further inflames her passion. She reveals to Œnone that she plans to marry him and have him crowned king. Supported by her attendant, she declares her love, but is rejected. *Coup de théâtre*: Theseus, who had been thought dead, now returns. Hippolytus rushes to his father's arms, but promises himself not to reveal anything of what he has learned. Theseus is astonished not to see the queen, and wishes to go to her apartments with Hippolytus. The latter declines to do so and even requests permission to leave the kingdom. Theseus, believing Phaedra has come to hate her stepson, laments the division that reigns in his family and prays the gods to restore its peace and happiness.

## Act III

The scene depicts, to the right, the outer colonnade of the palace, and to the left a garden adorned with statues. In the background, porticoes offer a view of the sea between the columns; behind one of the porticoes, to the right, is an ancient temple of Neptune built on the rocks by the shore. Œnone, fearing that Hippolytus has been indiscreet, accuses the prince of wishing to besmirch the queen's honour. Theseus believes her; the very fact that Phaedra is absent appears to him to provide certain proof. He beseeches Neptune, who has promised to grant the king's first wish, to punish his son. Hippolytus is surprised by the anger of his father, who refuses to hear him justify himself. Theseus, still furious, exiles him from the kingdom. Phaedra appears. Stricken by remorse, she is unaware of Hippolytus' fate. Œnone informs the queen of what she has done for her; Phaedra is revolted, and dismisses her attendant. Left alone, she senses that death is her only recourse; she will live only long enough to vindicate Hippolytus' innocence. Thunder rumbles and a dreadful storm comes up. Theseus seeks to calm the wrath of heaven, fearing for the life of the son he has outlawed. But a messenger comes to announce his death: a monster sent by Neptune has dragged him down into the depths of the sea. Hearing the news, Phaedra can restrain herself no longer: she declares her crime and kills herself at the feet of Theseus, whose despair is all the more immense when he learns that his son was innocent.



PHÈDRE

# JEAN-BAPTISTE LEMOYNE (1751-1796)

Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne received his musical training at the hands of one of his uncles, a Director of Music at Périgueux Cathedral. He began his career as an orchestra-leader in France then, in 1770, took off for Berlin with a theatre company where he continued his compositional studies under Graun, Kirnberger and Schulz. It was there that he premiered his first opera, *Toinon and Toinette* which was well received. Travelling on to Poland, he wrote *Le Bouquet de Colette* which was given its first performance in 1775 in Warsaw. Lemoyne's pupil, the young Antoinette Clavel (also known as M<sup>lle</sup> Saint-Huberti) took the title role and, in 1780, her growing European reputation opened the doors of French opera to him. In 1782, Lemoyne, a self-proclaimed disciple of Gluck, staged his opera *Électre* in Paris. The opera, dedicated to Marie-Antoinette and as unappealing to followers of Gluck as to fans of Gluck's rival, Piccinni, was coolly received and resulted in Gluck slighting his want-to-be disciple. Deeply disappointed by his lack of success, Lemoyne switched to Piccinni as his new "master". *Phèdre*, written in 1786 and understandably more Italianate in style, was an instant hit. Lemoyne took himself off to Italy to familiarize himself with the opera of that country, returning to France in 1788. Between then and the end of his life, he developed a style that was purely French, writing operas for the Paris Opera and the Opéra-Comique (Théâtre Favart), notable among them *Nephté* and *Les Prétendus*, a lyric comedy staged in 1789. Rehearsals for his *L'Île des femmes* were abandoned on his death in 1796.



Thomas Dolié (Thésée), Théâtre de Caen, April 2017 © Grégory Forestier

# ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

## MARC PAQUIEN *stage director*

Marc Paquien first came to the public's attention in 2004 with his productions of Stanisław I. Witkiewicz's *The Mother* and Martin Crimp's *Face to the Wall*; he returned to the British author with the French premiere of *The City* in 2009. He has recently staged Carlo Goldoni's *La locandiera* and Samuel Beckett's *Oh les beaux jours*. At the Comédie-Française, Marc Paquien has directed *Les affaires sont les affaires* by Octave Mirbeau and a double bill of Jean Cocteau's play *La Voix humaine* preceded by *La Dame de Monte-Carlo* (Cocteau/Poulenc). His operatic productions include Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio segreto* and Ravel's *L'Heure espagnole*. He has just staged Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* for the Comédie-Française.

## JULIEN CHAUVIN *violin, musical director*

Julien Chauvin performs the Baroque, Romantic and modern repertoires. For ten years he was joint director of Le Cercle de l'Harmonie with Jérémie Rhorer before founding a new orchestra, Le Concert de la Loge, in 2015. Alongside this, he continues to play the quartet repertoire with the Quatuor Cambini-Paris, formed in 2007. He also appears as a guest conductor directing other orchestras from the violin, among them the Esterházy Hofkapelle, the Orchestre Régional d'Avignon Provence and Orkiestra Historyczna of Katowice. He has recorded works by Haydn, Beethoven and Berlioz. Julien plays a Baroque violin by Jacob Stainer dated 1670 (the 'ex Mozart-Wranitzki') loaned to him by a patron, and a Romantic instrument by Giuseppe Rocca of 1839 within the framework of the 'Adopt-a-Musician' project. He is an associate artist of the Fondation Singer-Polignac in Paris. Notable among his projects with the Palazzetto Bru Zane have been Félicien David's *Le Saphir* and Piccinni's *Atys*.

## LE CONCERT DE LA LOGE *orchestra*

In January 2015 Julien Chauvin formed a new period-instrument ensemble with the aim of reviving a famous French orchestra, Le Concert de la Loge Olympique, founded in 1783. With a repertoire ranging from the Baroque to the early twentieth century, this new incarnation also sets out to explore concert formats inspired by the usages of the late eighteenth century. Following a dispute with the French National Olympic Committee (CNOSF), the ensemble chose to adopt the name Le Concert de la Loge. It has already appeared in such major venues as the Salle Gaveau, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and Wigmore Hall, with artists including Karina Gauvin, Sandrine Piau, Philippe Jaroussky, Eduarda Melo, Jean Rondeau and Justin Taylor. The ensemble has begun a complete recording of Haydn's 'Paris' Symphonies on the Aparté label. The first release, 'Haydn-La Reine', featuring Sandrine Piau, was warmly received by the press.

Le Concert de la Loge receives support from the French Ministry of Culture and Communication, the Caisse des Dépôts (principal patron), the Fondation Orange, the Caisse d'Épargne Île-de-France, the Banque de France and the Fonds de dotation F. Kahn-Hamm. Since September 2016 it has been in residence at the Conservatoire Jean-Baptiste Lully in Puteaux.

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