

**Australian Brandenburg Orchestra**

# **MONTEVERDI'S L'ORFEO**

**Paul Dyer**, Artistic Director and Conductor

**Brendan Ross**, Staging

**Justin Nardella**, Styling

**Teresa Desmarchelier**, Italian Diction Coach

**Narelle French & Lynne Murray**, Surtitles

**Joanna Tondys**, Surtitled Operator

## **SINGERS**

**Markus Brutscher – Sara Macliver**

**Fiona Campbell – Wolf Matthias Friedrich**

**Tobias Cole – Robert MacFarlane – Morgan Pearse**

**Sarah Ampil – Siobhan Stagg – Anna Sandström**

**Richard Butler – Nick Gilbert – Paul Sutton**

## **ORCHESTRA**

**Brendan Joyce – Aaron Brown – Monique O'Dea – Marianne Yeomans**

**Jamie Hey – Kirsty McCahon – Laura Vaughan**

**Melissa Farrow – Mikaela Oberg – Matthew Manchester – Russell Gilmour**

**Roslyn Jorgensen – Nigel Crocker – Jamie Kennedy – Keal Couper – Brett Page**

**Brian Nixon – Jess Ciampa – Tommie Andersson – Samantha Cohen**

**Marshall McGuire – Paul Dyer – Donald Nicolson**

This concert will last approximately 2 1/2 hours including interval.

We request that you kindly switch off all electronic devices during the performance.



Australian Government



The Australian Brandenburg Orchestra is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.



Trade & Investment  
Arts NSW

The Australian Brandenburg Orchestra is assisted by the NSW Government through Arts NSW.



AUSTRALIAN  
MAJOR PERFORMING  
ARTS GROUP



MACQUARIE

PRINCIPAL PARTNER

# CAST AND CHARACTERS

**PROLOGUE:** *La Musica (Music)* Sara Macliver

## THE UPPER WORLD

*Apollo, god of music and the sun*  
Morgan Pearse

*Orfeo, son of Apollo*  
Markus Brutscher

*Shepherds, friends of Orfeo*  
Robert Macfarlane  
Richard Butler  
Tobias Cole  
Morgan Pearse

*Eco (Echo)*  
Robert Macfarlane

## THE UNDERWORLD

*Plutone (Pluto), King of the Underworld*  
Wolf Matthias Friedrich

*La Speranza (Hope)*  
Tobias Cole

*Caronte, the ferryman*  
Wolf Matthias Friedrich

*Infernal Spirits*  
Paul Sutton  
Nick Gilbert  
Tobias Cole  
Richard Butler  
Morgan Pearse

*Eurydice, loved by Orfeo*  
Sara Macliver

*La messagiera (Messenger), friend of Eurydice*  
Fiona Campbell

*Nymphs, friends of Eurydice*  
Siobhan Stagg  
Sarah Ampil  
Anna Sandström  
Paul Sutton  
Nick Gilbert  
Richard Butler

*Ninfa (Nymph)*  
Siobhan Stagg

*Proserpina, Queen of the Underworld*  
Fiona Campbell

# THE MUSICIANS

## AUSTRALIAN BRANDENBURG ORCHESTRA ON PERIOD INSTRUMENTS

### Baroque Violin 1

Brendan Joyce\*  
(Guest Concertmaster)

### Baroque Violin 2

Aaron Brown\*

### Baroque Viola

Monique O'Dea\*<sup>1</sup>  
Marianne Yeomans

### Baroque Cello

Jamie Hey\*\*

### Baroque Double Bass

Kirsty McCahon\*\*

### Lirone/Gamba

Laura Vaughan\*

### Recorder

Melissa Farrow\*\*  
Mikaela Oberg

### Cornett/Baroque Trumpet

Matthew Manchester\*  
Russell Gilmour

### Sackbut

Roslyn Jorgensen\* (Alto)  
Nigel Crocker\* (Tenor)  
Jamie Kennedy (Tenor)  
Keal Couper (Tenor & Bass)  
Brett Page\* (Bass)

### Timpani/Percussion

Brian Nixon\*

### Percussion

Jess Ciampa

### Theorbo/Baroque Guitar

Tommie Andersson\*\*  
Samantha Cohen

### Baroque Harp

Marshall McGuire\*

### Harpsichord/Organ

Paul Dyer\*

### Harpsichord/Regal

Donald Nicolson

\* Section Leader

\* Brandenburg Core Musician

<sup>1</sup> Monique O'Dea appears courtesy of  
Presbyterian Ladies' College, Sydney (staff).

*Harpsichord and organ preparation  
by Joanna Tondys in Brisbane.*

*Harpsichord preparation Geoffrey Pollard in  
Sydney and Alistair McAllister in Melbourne.*

*Organ preparation by Peter Jewkes  
in Sydney and Ken Falconer in Melbourne.*

## BRISBANE

*The Australian Brandenburg  
Orchestra gratefully acknowledges  
the support of Philip Bacon in  
presenting L'Orfeo as part of the  
2012 Brisbane Festival.*

## Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University

Wednesday 12 & Thursday  
13 September at 7.30pm

## Moreton Bay College, Power Family Concert Hall

Saturday 15 September  
at 7.30pm

## SYDNEY

### City Recital Hall Angel Place

Wednesday 19, Thursday 20,  
Friday 21, Tuesday 25,  
Wednesday 26 September at 7pm

## MELBOURNE

### Arts Centre Melbourne, Hamer Hall

Sunday 23 September at 5pm

# SYNOPSIS

## Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643)

### PROLOGUE

La Musica, the spirit of music, addresses the noble audience of the court of Mantua. She says she will tell the story of Orfeo, whose singing was so beautiful it tamed wild animals and so moved the gods that they allowed him to enter the Underworld, where the ancient Greeks believed souls went after death.

### ACT I

#### ***Scene: The fields of Thrace, in ancient Greece***

Shepherds and nymphs celebrate the wedding of Eurydice to Orfeo, the son of Apollo, god of music. Orfeo and Eurydice sing of their love for each other and then everyone goes to the temple to give thanks for their happiness.

### ACT II

Happy in love, Orfeo sings joyfully about his home, Arcadia, where it is always spring and the air is full of the sound of love-songs and the scent of flowers. Suddenly a messenger arrives: Eurydice is dead, bitten by a snake while picking flowers. Overcome with grief, Orfeo resolves to go down into the Underworld to convince the gods to give Eurydice back to him. If he cannot, he will stay there himself, rather than live in the world without her.

### INTERVAL

### ACT III

#### ***Scene: The banks of the River Styx, close to the entrance to the Underworld***

Orfeo and his companion, La Speranza (Hope), arrive at the entrance to the Underworld, but from here Orfeo must continue his journey alone. Caronte, the boatman who ferries souls across the Styx to the Underworld, refuses to take him: only the dead can cross the sacred river. Orfeo pleads that he is no longer alive; he has no heart now that his wife is dead. Caronte is unmoved by Orfeo's song of grief, but the gods intervene and Caronte is lulled to sleep. Orfeo takes his boat and crosses the river.

### ACT IV

#### ***Scene: The Underworld***

Proserpina, queen of the Underworld, is moved by Orfeo's singing and pleads with her husband, Plutone, to release Eurydice. He agrees, but he sets Orfeo a test: he must not look at Eurydice as they return to the world of the living, or she will be lost to him forever. Orfeo tells himself that he will obey, but begins to doubt that the gods really will let Eurydice return. He hears a noise and turns to reassure himself that she is still there. Too late, he realises what he has done: Eurydice is torn away from him to stay forever among the dead while he is forced to return to earth, alone.

### ACT V

#### ***Scene: The fields of Thrace***

Orfeo mourns for Eurydice, but only the echo of his voice shares his grief. Suddenly Apollo, god of music and the sun, descends on a cloud and offers to take Orfeo to heaven, where he will know joy and peace and see Eurydice's image in the sun and the stars forever. Orfeo and Apollo vanish, as the shepherds and nymphs sing and dance once more.

# NOTES

*Tomorrow evening the Most Serene Lord the Prince is to sponsor a play in the main room in the apartments which the Most Serene Lady of Ferrara used. It should be most unusual, as all the actors are to sing their parts; it is said on all sides that it will be a great success. No doubt I shall be driven to attend out of sheer curiosity, unless I am prevented from getting in by the lack of space.*

Carlo Magno, Mantua, 23 February 1607, to his brother in Rome

Four hundred years ago the fairytale city of Mantua in northern Italy was the capital of a city-state ruled by the powerful and wealthy Gonzagas, dukes of Mantua and one of the great noble families of Italy. The city was dominated by the ducal palace, said in the sixteenth century to be the largest in the world. A great prince needed a great court, to impress friends and potential enemies, and the duke's household consisted of eight hundred people (including alchemists to make poisonous gases for use in war) and five hundred horses. Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga was a generous patron of the arts, and surrounded himself with the greatest thinkers, scientists, artists, writers and musicians of the day. Peter Paul Rubens worked at Mantua for several years from 1600, and Galileo went to Mantua for a job interview with the Duke in 1603. When Monteverdi went to work for the Duke in 1590 as a string player he was already well known as a composer of madrigals.

Mantua was famous for the quality of its music, and the Duke employed a permanent establishment of fifteen singers and about the same number of instrumentalists to provide music for everything from regular Friday evening concerts and church services to grand entertainments and receptions to honour important visitors. When Monteverdi was promoted to *maestro di capella* (director of music) in 1601 providing new compositions for these occasions took up a large part of his time.

In 1607 the Duke's son, Prince Francesco, and a group of Mantuan intellectuals asked Monteverdi to compose a musical work which combined continuous music with drama. This was opera, a new musical genre which had emerged in the 1590s (although its origins were earlier than that). The Duke of Mantua and his retinue, including Monteverdi, had heard the first opera, *Eurydice*, by Florentine court composer Jacopo Peri, at the wedding of the king of France to Maria de Medici in Florence in 1600 and the Mantuan court was not to be outdone. They even chose the same story, the classical Greek myth of Orpheus (Orfeo) whose music was so powerful that it triumphed over death. Court secretary and poet Alessandro Striggio wrote the libretto. Their "story in music", as Monteverdi called it, was not a grand spectacle at a state occasion, however, but an intimate private performance for the Mantuan intellectuals and their guests, given in a small room on the ground floor of the ducal palace. A temporary stage covered by a curtain was erected at one end of the room. There were no intervals and scene changes took place in front of the audience. It was common for huge spectacles to last for hours with no breaks, so early operas like *Orfeo* would have seemed brief by comparison.

Afterwards Francesco Gonzaga wrote to his brother: "The play was performed to the great satisfaction of all who heard it. The Lord Duke ... has ordered it to be given again; and so it will be, today, in the presence of all the ladies resident in the city."

*Orfeo* had its second performance fifteen days after the first one, and apart from a handful of performances in Salzburg in the 1610s, it would not be heard again in public until 1904. It is now recognised as one of the greatest operas ever written.

## THE PLAY

The Renaissance saw a revival of interest in ancient Greek and Roman culture, which had a huge influence on Italian architecture, art, music, and even gardening. *Orfeo* drew heavily on classical Greek tragedy, with five acts, a messenger delivering news about an off-stage event, and a chorus pointing out the moral at the end of each act, although Monteverdi and Striggio broadened the chorus's role to make them part of the action as shepherds, nymphs and spirits. The opera's setting came from the Greek pastoral idyll, a dramatic form which was extremely popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The pastoral was set in a mythical countryside, and was populated by shepherds and shepherdesses, nymphs, and gods interested only in love.

The educated, cultured men who formed the audience at the Ducal palace in 1607 would have been very familiar with the Orpheus myth, either from reading the original Latin by the Roman poets Virgil or Ovid, or from translations by some of the great Italian Renaissance poets. Interested in the way that music can heighten language and emotion, they would have recognised the references to Greek culture, and understood the poetry of the libretto and the subtleties of the language.

## THE MEANING

The story of *Orfeo* is about the struggle between reason and emotion. In heaven, where the gods reside, reason and harmony prevail. In the Underworld, however, emotions dominate. The challenge for humans living on earth, between these two regions, is to find the balance between them. The god-like part of Orfeo gives him mastery of harmony through his great musical skill, but because he is also human he acts on impulse, ruled by his emotions, with disastrous consequences.

It is no longer the mark of the educated person to read Latin and classical Greek, and although Western culture and languages still retain elements of the stories of Greek mythology, and plays from ancient Greece are still performed, we do not have the immediate knowledge of them that a seventeenth century audience would have. Yet, four hundred years after it was written, Monteverdi's *Orfeo* still moves us because, like all great art, it reflects the human condition. It is a story of great happiness but great suffering, of bravery and weakness, faith and doubt.

## THE MUSIC

### The Singers

*I have decided to have a play in music performed at carnival this year, but as we have very few sopranos here, and those few not good, I should be grateful if Your Excellency would be kind enough to tell me if those castrati I heard when I was in Tuscany are still there. ... My intention is to borrow one of them for a fortnight at most.*

Prince Francesco Gonzaga to his brother in Florence, 5 January 1607

The sopranos to whom Prince Francesco was referring were castrati, men who had been castrated as boys so that the high pitch of the voice was retained. Mantua was famous for its virtuoso singers and employed some of the best female sopranos in Italy, but women were not allowed to appear in any kind of spectacle, and as this was to be a public performance for an audience of men, they could not sing. Instead, at least four of the main roles were sung by castrati, even the role of Orfeo's wife Eurydice.

The main role of Orfeo was taken by Francesco Rasi, whose voice was probably a high baritone. He was "a handsome man, jovial and with a strong and sweet voice ... His animated face and dignity ... made his singing seem angelic and divine." Rasi was part of the Mantuan court music establishment and was a student of Caccini, the most famous singing teacher of the time. He was described as singing "bass or tenor, with a range consisting of many notes, and with exquisite style and passage-work [fast, often ornamented notes], and with extraordinary feeling and a particular talent to make the words clearly heard." He would have been

ideally suited for the highly virtuosic music Monteverdi wrote for *Orfeo*. The seventeen other roles were shared among probably nine singers, who would also have sung the choruses. Plutone and Caronte are bass-baritone parts, the deeper sound reinforcing their fearsome nature as the rulers of the Underworld.

## The Orchestra

Monteverdi had some of the best players in Italy at his disposal, and he used many different instruments to add colour and variety, and to show off what he and his orchestra could do. The Australian Brandenburg Orchestra will play seventeen different types of string, wind and brass instruments as well as percussion. Although many instruments are specified in the score the total number of players was probably fairly small, about fifteen, and some of them would have played more than one instrument. This was possible because there is never a time when the whole orchestra plays together.

Monteverdi used different groupings of instruments to represent different places or people. The scenes set in the upper, real world are accompanied by strings, those in the Underworld by mournful winds – sackbuts and cornetts – and a regal [see below]. A third group of instruments – organ, harpsichord, guitar, cello, and theorbo – is used to provide harmonies during the sections of recitative [see below]. These players are improvising: the score gives only the bass line with figures representing the chords.

Short instrumental pieces act as musical motifs and are repeated throughout the opera to signify a change of scene. For instance, the instrumental interlude we first heard between the verses of La Musica's song in the Prologue recurs at the end of Act II and again at the end of Act IV.

### Recitative:

The word comes from the Italian "recitare", to recite. Recitative might be thought of as being mid-way between speech and song, and is for solo voice accompanied by unobtrusive chord playing instruments. It was developed by Italian composers around the beginning of the seventeenth century to convey the way actors recited poetry, but in a musical form with specific

pitches and rhythms which follow the contours and rhythms of dramatic speech. It was not intended to be melodic but expressive.

Recitative continued to be a feature of Baroque and classical operas, for example those by Handel and Mozart, where the story is told via short recitatives which link the arias and ensembles.

Monteverdi uses three instruments – sackbuts, cornetts and a regale - to evoke the awesome nature of the Underworld.

A **sackbut** was an early slide trombone most in use in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It began to be phased out in the eighteenth century with the development of the modern trombone. Its unusual name is an anglicised version of *sacqueboute*, a French word meaning to shove violently, probably describing the movements of the player! Its sound is more muted and less brassy than a modern trombone.

A **cornett** in a period instrument orchestra is not a brass instrument, but a wooden wind

instrument that looks somewhat like a curved recorder with a tiny, trumpet-like mouthpiece. It was mainly used from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, but went out of fashion during the eighteenth century partly because it was so difficult to play. Its velvety sound has been described as being most like the human voice of any instrument. Like the sackbut, it was often used in church to reinforce the voices of the choir.

A **regal** was a type of small reed organ with a buzzy, coarse timbre. Monteverdi uses it in *Orfeo* only as a 'special effect' to accompany Caronte the ferryman, where its harsh sound underlines his gruff, unyielding nature.



## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opera begins with a trumpet fanfare. This was the Duke of Mantua's "signature" fanfare and the same tune would have been played to mark his arrival wherever he was. Here it is played three times: the first to silence the audience, the second to announce the arrival of the Duke (the musicians had to wait for him – the Duke waited for nobody). The third playing signalled that the opera was about to start. The Prologue is sung by La Musica, the spirit of music, who sets the scene. Because the main purpose of all court entertainment was to glorify the ruler, she flatters the audience (really the Duke) acknowledging their "noble blood of kings".

### Act I

Shepherds and nymphs sing and dance with happiness to celebrate the marriage of Orfeo and Eurydice. In this act Monteverdi uses every type of musical form at his disposal – madrigals (dramatic and elaborate part-songs for chorus), trios, duets, dances, virtuoso solo songs and charming instrumental interludes – to engage the audience and to create a joyful atmosphere against which to contrast the tragedy to come.

### Act II

The mood is still happy, but at the arrival of the Messenger with the news of Eurydice's death, delivered in the new declamatory style of recitative, the music suddenly changes. No longer rhythmic and tuneful, it is harsh, jarring – as if the harmony makes no more sense than this shocking news. A change in accompanying instruments also underlines the change in mood. When Orfeo finally answers, the difficult harmonies and confronting intervals convey that he is racked with grief and rage. He decides to go to the Underworld to bring Eurydice back, and a beautiful moving lament for the chorus finishes the Act. A repeat of La Musica's instrumental interlude played by upper world strings is immediately followed by a solemn instrumental piece for winds, the Underworld instruments. The scene is now the entrance to the Underworld, where no living person may go, and guarded by Cerberus, a monstrous three-headed dog.

## INTERVAL

### Act III

The gloomy scene is described by La Speranza, the personification of Hope, who has come this far with Orfeo but can go no further. Twice Hope sings the words written above the gates of the Underworld: "Abandon hope all you who enter here" (a quotation from Dante's *Inferno*). Orfeo is challenged by the terrifying ferryman Caronte, whose gruff bass voice is accompanied by the harsh sound of a regal.

After a short sinfonia which represents divine intervention, Orfeo pleads with Caronte to let him pass. As Orfeo was the greatest singer who ever lived, he uses every technical skill known to the early seventeenth century singer in an astonishing display of virtuosity over four varied verses. Each verse features different solo instruments - two solo violins, two cornetts, a double harp, and lastly a quartet of strings. Caronte still refuses but the repeat of the "divine intervention" sinfonia causes him to fall asleep. The Underworld instrumental music from the start of the act is repeated: Orfeo has entered the Underworld itself.

### Act IV

Plutone, the king of the Underworld, agrees to let Eurydice return to life. Orfeo sings joyfully, accompanied by strings which signify his imminent return to the upper world. However the music becomes disjointed as he becomes anxious, jealous and fearful. Eurydice sings a short wrenching farewell ("So through loving too much you have lost me"), and a long chorus points the moral: "only the person who can conquer himself is worthy of eternal glory." The Underworld sinfonia followed by La Musica's instrumental motif marks Orfeo's transition back into the world he left behind in Act II.

### Act V

Orfeo, bereft, sings a musical conversation with his own echo. The divine intervention sinfonia last heard in Act III heralds the arrival of Apollo, god of music and the sun. He and Orfeo sing a duet, their close harmony representing the true harmony found only in heaven.



YEAR	MONTEVERDI	CONTEMPORARY EVENTS
1567	Born in Cremona, Italy	Mary Queen of Scots forced to abdicate
1582	Publishes first collection of vocal music	Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway
1587	Publishes first book of five part madrigals	Mary Queen of Scots executed for treason
1590	Appointed court musician at the court of the dukes of Mantua	Palestrina publishes his sixth book of madrigals
1595	Travels to Hungary with the duke who is waging war against the Turks	Shakespeare writes <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
1599	Marries, but his wife remains in Cremona	Completion of Rialto bridge, Venice
1600	Travels with the Duke to the wedding of Henri IV of France where first opera, <i>Euridice</i> , by Jacopo Peri, is performed	Sumo wrestling becomes professional sport in Japan
1601	Appointed music director at Mantua. By now known throughout Italy and Europe due to publication of madrigals	First performances of <i>Hamlet</i> and <i>Twelfth Night</i>
1607	Composes and directs performance of <i>Orfeo</i> . Returns to Cremona. Wife dies, leaving him with three children. Forced to return to Mantua for royal wedding	First permanent English settlement established in America
1608	Composes his second opera <i>Arianna</i> (now mostly lost)	Telescope invented
1609	Score of <i>Orfeo</i> published	<i>Three Blind Mice</i> published
1610	<i>Vespers of the Blessed Virgin</i> published	Galileo observes Jupiter's moons
1612	Duke of Mantua dies, Monteverdi dismissed by the new duke	Ten "witches" hanged in Lancashire England
1613	Appointed music director at St Marks Basilica, Venice	JS Bach's grandfather born
1614-1619	<i>Orfeo</i> performed several times in Salzburg	Catholic theologians declare "foolish and heretical" the idea that the sun is stationary
1631	Becomes a priest	Mantua sacked by Austrian soldiers who bring the plague. Mantuan delegation asking for help take the plague to Venice – 50,000 die
1640	<i>Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria</i> one of first operas publicly performed in a theatre in Venice	First European coffee house opens in Venice
1643	Opera <i>L'incoronazione di Poppea</i> performed in Venice. Dies aged 77	English Civil War.