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Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–87)



FULL CD III: TRACKS 7–8
CONCISE CD II: TRACK 9

Orfeo ed Euridice (Orpheus and Eurydice) (1762)

Orfeo ed Euridice was the first opera Christoph Willibald Gluck wrote in collaboration with the librettist Ranieri Calzabigi (1714–95) and also the first example of their operatic reform. Gluck and Calzabigi aimed to reestablish the dramatic integrity—in the eighteenth-century German art historian Johann Winckelmann's terms, the “noble simplicity”—of opera lost in the over-complicated plots and vocal pyrotechnics of opera seria. Calzabigi reduces the plot of his *Orfeo* to its essentials and involves only three characters: Orpheus, Eurydice, and Cupid (Amore). In this version of the tale Cupid helps Orpheus on his trip to the Underworld to regain his wife, Eurydice, who died on the day of their wedding. Orpheus loses Eurydice for a second time when he disobeys the gods by looking at her before they emerge from the Underworld. All ends well, however, since Cupid, moved by Orpheus's love, brings Eurydice back to life once again.

Calzabigi's reduction of characters was matched by Gluck's purposeful elimination of da capo arias and reduction of virtuosos passages associated with opera seria. In place of an emphasis on da capo arias, the opera is packed with choruses; their prominent role is one of several aspects of the work that reflect the influence of French opera on Calzabigi and Gluck's work. Ironically, the success of *Orfeo*, an opera that intended to counter the artificiality of opera seria, was partly due to the fine interpretation of Orpheus's role by the alto castrato Gaetano Guadagni, for whom Handel had revised *Messiah* for showy operatic effect a dozen years before. Since that time Guadagni had transformed himself into a paragon of nobly simple and realistic acting under the influence of the great Shakespearean actor David Garrick.

a. Opening Chorus and Recitative

The opera begins after the death of Eurydice. The scene takes place on the field surrounding Eurydice's tomb. Shepherds and nymphs bring offerings while Orpheus lies prostrate on a rock. The shepherds and nymphs sing a solemn chorus that evokes a feeling of somber ritual. Orpheus's role in the first chorus is reduced to three cries of “Eurydice,” which Gluck once urged the French tenor Joseph Legros to “scream with as much pain as if someone were sawing your leg off.” There is nothing showy about this elegy. Besides short sigh motives, the vocal parts avoid embellishment and move along with the continuous quarter-note pulse in the

bass. Contrast and variety are achieved through occasional syncopation in the rhythm; through alternating blocks of short, *piano* three-part soli passages (mm. 32–33; mm. 42–47) with *forte tutti* responses; and through orchestration, which, in addition to the usual strings and continuo, includes independent parts for trombones and cornetto—instruments used at the time more in church than in the theater.

The recitative that follows the first chorus, in which Orpheus sends away his mourning friends, is set as an accompanied recitative in which all parts of the orchestral strings are written out. This form of recitative, formerly reserved for dramatic high points in opera seria, is the only type of recitative that Gluck employs in *Orfeo*.

Chorus

Ah! se intorno a quest'urna funesta

Euridice, ombra bella, t'aggiri;

Orpheus

Euridice!

Chorus

Odi i pianti, i lamenti, i sospiri,

che dolente si spargon per te.

Orpheus

Euridice!

Chorus

Ed ascolta il tuo sposo infelice,

che piangendo ti chiama, e si lagna.

Orpheus

Euridice!

Chorus

Come quando, la dolce compagna,

tortorella amorosa perdè.

Orpheus (recitativo)

Basta, basta, o compagni!

Il vostro duolo aggrava il mio!

Spargete purpurei fiori,

inghirlandate il marmo,

partitevi da me!

Restar vogli'io solo fra quest' ombre

funebri e oscure coll'empia compagna

di mie sventure.

Chorus

Ah! If around this funeral urn,

Eurydice, sweet spirit, you wander;

Orpheus

Eurydice!

Chorus

Hear the crying, the laments, the sighs,

which are sadly scattered for you.

Orpheus

Eurydice!

Chorus

And listen to your unhappy husband,

who, weeping, calls you and moans.

Orpheus

Eurydice!

Chorus

As when the amorous dove

has lost her sweet companion.

Orpheus (recitativo)

Enough, enough, my friends!

Your grief increases my own!

Scatter purple flowers,

And place garlands on the marble tomb,

leave me!

I want to remain alone among these

mournful and dark shadows,

in the company of my misfortunes.

Moderato



Soprano
Ah! se in -

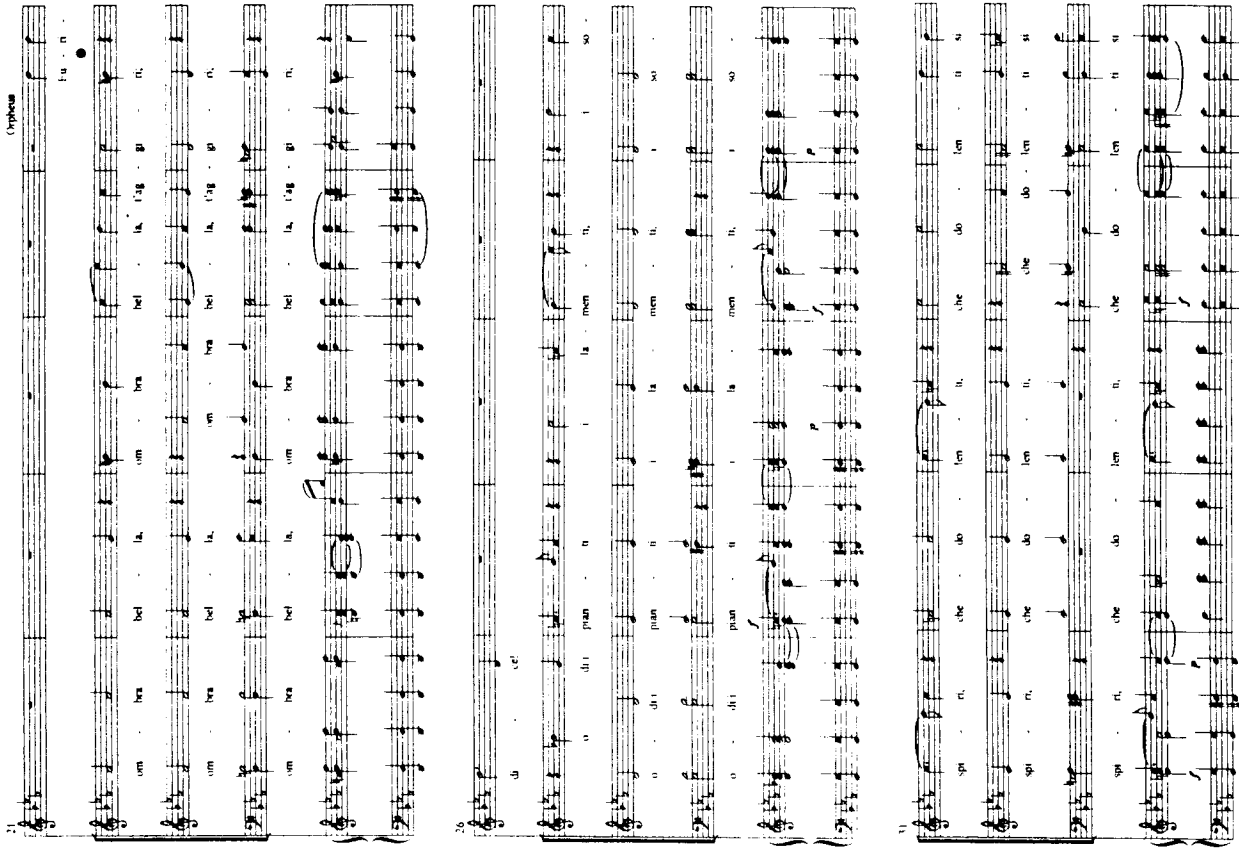
Alto
Ah! se in -

Tenore
Ah! se in -

Basso
Ah! se in -

tu - ra qua - quest' ur - na lu - ne - sta. Eu - ni - di - ce.
tu - ra qua - quest' ur - na lu - ne - sta. Eu - ni - di - ce.
tu - ra qua - quest' ur - na lu - ne - sta. Eu - ni - di - ce.

Orpheus



om - bra bel - la, om - bra bel - la, lag - gi - ri,
om - bra bel - la, om - bra bel - la, lag - gi - ri,
om - bra bel - la, om - bra bel - la, lag - gi - ri,
di - cet' o - di pian - ti - la - men - ti, i so -
o - di pian - ti - la - men - ti, i so -
o - di pian - ti - la - men - ti, i so -
spi - ri, che do - lem - ti, che do - lem - ti su
spi - ri, che do - lem - ti, che do - lem - ti su
spi - ri, che do - lem - ti, che do - lem - ti su

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Ea - ri - di - ceri
 spe - gem per te. Ed a - scol - ta il tuo spo - so in fe.
 spe - gem per te. Ed a - scol - ta il tuo spo - so in fe.
 spe - gem per te. Ed a - scol - ta il tuo spo - so in fe.

41

Ea - ri - di - ceri
 li - ce che pian - gen - do ti chia - me e si - la - gra e si -
 li - ce che pian - gen - do ti chia - me e si -
 li - ce che pian - gen - do ti chia - me e si -

46

la - gra. co - me quan - do, la dol - ce com -
 la - gra. co - me quan - do, la dol - ce com -
 la - gra. co - me quan - do, la dol - ce com -

51

pug - na tor - to - red - la
 pug - na tor - to - red - la
 pug - na tor - to - red - la

56

ro - sa. tor - to - red - la. sa - mo - ro - sa per - da.
 ro - sa. tor - to - red - la. sa - mo - ro - sa per - da.
 ro - sa. tor - to - red - la. sa - mo - ro - sa per - da.

Orpheus

da - na. be - sta, o cam - pa - gni: il vo - stro lus - to ag - gra - va il mio, spe - re - te per -

5

pu - ret flo - ri, in - ghir - lan - da - ce il mar - mo; per - ti - te - vi da me!
 re - star vo -

gfi - o - so - to fra quesi' om - bre fu - ne - bi - e o - so - su - re colli - om - pia cum - pa - gna ubi me - ven - tu - re

b. “Che farò senza Euridice!” (“What am I to do without Eurydice!”), Act III, Scene 1

The most striking example of “noble simplicity” in Gluck’s opera is Orpheus’s signature aria, “Che farò senza Euridice?” which he sings after losing Eurydice for the second time. Frustrated that Orpheus was unwilling to look at her while he was leading her out of the Underworld, Eurydice pretends to die. Losing his composure, Orpheus turns around, thus breaking his vow to the gods not to look at his wife until they leave the Underworld behind. In contrast to the dark key of C minor in the opening chorus, this aria, despite the tragic content of its text, is set in the bright key of C major—the beauty of this lament, not its tragic feeling, moves the gods to intervene on Orpheus’s behalf. Although written for Guadagni, a virtuoso castrato, it lacks long melismas and has few of the embellishments typical of opera seria. The paired eighth notes that characterize the vocal line give a plain and simple quality to the aria, inspiring Gluck’s contemporary, the music historian Charles Burney (1726–1814), to compare it to English ballads.

Gluck’s decision to set Orpheus’s aria of noble mourning as a two-episode rondo (ABACAA’), a form favored by composers of French opera, again points to French influence on Gluck and Calzabigi’s operatic reforms. In Orpheus’s aria the vocal refrain or rondo theme (A) appears three times in the tonic key (see chart), framing two episodes (B and C), the first in G major (the dominant of the tonic key), the second in C minor (the parallel minor of the tonic key). The episodes contrast with the rondo theme not only in their key but also in their slower tempo and short, fragmentary motivic structure. While the A section of the rondo unfolds in a balanced antecedent-consequent pair (4 + 4 with a two-measure extension), the episodes lack symmetrical structure and break into shorter phrases, often only one measure in length. The short, threefold descending phrase over a dominant pedal (mm. 42–45) that follows Orpheus’s cries of “Euridice!” captures the tragic monotony of Orpheus’s hopeless situation. As a gentle nod towards word painting, the range of the melodic line illustrates the difference between the world of the humans (“né dal mondo,” medium range, mm. 45–46) and the world of the gods (“né dal ciel,” higher range, mm. 47–48), both incapable of easing Orpheus’s despair.

Note on Editions

Our piano reduction of “Che farò senza Euridice” follows the original Viennese version of the score (1762). For the 1774 French version of the opera Gluck rewrote Orpheus’s part for tenor, transposed this aria to F major, and increased the range by a half step to achieve a higher climax

Measure Nos.	Section	Text	Key	Comments
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1–16	A	“Che farò senza Euridice!”	C	6-measure orchestral intro precedes 1st full statement of A
17–29	B	“Euridice, Euridice!”	G	
30–39	A	“Che farò senza Euridice!”	C	
40–48	C	“Euridice, Ah! non m’avanza più soccorso!”	c	
49–66	A	“Che farò senza Euridice!”	C	A lengthened by 2 mm., and followed by 6-measure orchestral conclusion

in the final strophe. This change to the end of the aria is sometimes used even when the aria is performed in its original C major.

Orfeo

<i>Che farò senza Euridice!</i>	Orfeo	What will I do without Eurydice?
<i>Dove andrò senza il mio ben!</i>		Where will I go without my love?
<i>Euridice, Euridice,</i>		Eurydice, Eurydice,
<i>Oh Dio! Rispondi!</i>		O Gods! Answer!
<i>Io son pure il tuo fedele.</i>		I am still faithful to you.
<i>Che farò senza Euridice . . .</i>		What am I to do without Eurydice . . .
<i>Euridice! Euridice!</i>		Eurydice! Eurydice!
<i>Ah! non m’avanza,</i>		Ah! There is no relief,
<i>più soccorso più speranza,</i>		and no hope to offer me,
<i>né dal mondo, né dal ciel!</i>		neither on earth nor in heaven!
<i>Che farò senza Euridice . . .</i>		What am I to do without Eurydice . . .

Andate espressivo

Orpheus

3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

Che fa - rò sen - za Eu - ri - di - cel do - ve an - d'ò sen - za il mio ben?

11
12
13
14
15

che - fa - rò, do - ve an - d'ò, che - fa - rò sen - za il mio - ben, do - ve an - d'ò

16
17
18
19
20

sen - za il mio - ben? Eu - ri - di - cel, Eu - ri - di - cel, oh

Un poco lento

21
22
23
24
25

Di - cel ni - spon - di, ni - spon - di lo - son - pu - re il tuo fe - del, il tuo fe - del. Che fa -

Tempo!

26
27
28
29
30

ro - sen - za Eu - ri - di - cel do - ve an - d'ò sen - za il mio ben, che - fa - rò, do - ve an - d'ò

31
32
33
34
35

do - ve an - d'ò sen - za il mio - ben, do - ve an - d'ò

35

36
37
38
39
40

d'ò, che - fa - rò sen - za il mio - ben, do - ve an - d'ò sen - za il mio - ben? Eu - ri -

Moderato

Adagio

41
42
43
44
45

di - cel, Eu - ri - di - cel, Ah! non m'a - van - za - più soc - cor - so, più spe -

Tempo!

46
47
48
49
50

ran - za né dal mon - do né dal ciel! (che fa - rò sen - za Eu - ri - di - cel, do - ve an -

51
52
53
54
55

d'ò sen - za il mio ben, che - fa - rò do - ve an - d'ò, che - fa - rò sen - za il mio -

56

56
57
58
59
60

ben, che - fa - rò do - ve an - d'ò, che - fa - rò sen - za il mio - ben!

61

61
62
63
64
65

do - ve an - d'ò sen - za il mio - ben, do - ve an - d'ò