

connection between their durations, and the other, that passion does almost what it likes with prosody; it jumps over the widest intervals, so that a man crying out from the depths of his grief: "Ah, malheureux que je suis!"³⁰ goes up in pitch on the exclamatory syllable to his highest and shrillest tone, and down on the others to his deepest and most solemn, spreading over an octave or even greater interval and giving each sound the quantity required by the turn of the melody without offending the ear, although the long and short syllables are not kept to the length or brevity of normal speech. What a way we have come since we used to cite the parenthesis in *Armide*: *Le vainqueur de Renaud (si quel-qu'un le peut être)*, or: *Obéissons sans balancer* from *Les Indes galantes*³¹ as miracles of musical declamation! Now these miracles make me shrug my shoulders with pity. The way the art is advancing I don't know where it will end! Meanwhile let's have a drink.

(And he had two or three without realizing what he was doing. He would have drowned himself, just as he had exhausted himself, without noticing, had I not moved away the bottle he was absentmindedly feeling for. Then I said:)

I: How is it that with a discrimination as delicate as yours and your remarkable sensitiveness for the beauties of the musical art, you are so blind to the fine things of morality, so insensitive to the charms of virtue?

He: Apparently because some things need a sense I don't possess, a fiber that hasn't been vouchsafed me, or a slack one that you can tweak as much as you like but it won't vibrate; or again it may be that I have always lived with good musicians and bad people. Hence it has come about that my ear has become very sharp and my heart very deaf.

30. "Ah, how unhappy I am!"

31. See nn. 11 and 10.

15 Christoph Willibald Gluck

Born in 1714 near the German-Bohemian border, Christoph Willibald Gluck is the master who liberated the opera from the conventions of contemporary Italian *opera seria* and created a new operatic style based on truly dramatic expression. After studying for four years with Sammartini in Milan and visiting London and various cities on the Continent, Gluck settled in Vienna in 1750.

The opera *Orfeo ed Euridice*, written in 1762, marks a turning point in Gluck's career. Here he applied for the first time his new ideas, supported by his able and original librettist, Ranieri de' Calzabigi. Gluck gives an explanation of his aims in the prefaces to the printed scores of his operas *Alceste* (1768) and *Paride ed Elena* (1770). In 1772, Gluck found a new and congenial collaborator in F. L. G. le Bland Du Rouillet, who had adapted Racine's *Iphigénie* as an

opera libretto. The new score—*Iphigénie en Aulide*—was accepted by the Paris Opéra, and Gluck himself went to Paris to direct the rehearsals. After reinforcing his position with *Armide* (1777) and *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1779), Gluck returned, crowned with fresh laurels, to Vienna, where he died in 1787.

Dedication for *Alceste*

(1769)

YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS:

When I undertook to write the music for *Alceste*, I resolved to divest it entirely of all those abuses, introduced into it either by the mistaken vanity of singers or by the too great complaisance of composers, which have so long disfigured Italian opera and made of the most splendid and most beautiful of spectacles the most ridiculous and wearisome. I have striven to restrict music to its true office of serving poetry by means of expression and by following the situations of the story, without interrupting the action or stifling it with a useless superfluity of ornaments; and I believed that it should do this in the same way as telling colors affect a correct and well-ordered drawing, by a well-assorted contrast of light and shade, which serves to animate the figures without altering their contours. Thus I did not wish to arrest an actor in the greatest heat of dialogue in order to wait for a tiresome *ritornello*, nor to hold him up in the middle of a word on a vowel favorable to his voice, nor to make display of the agility of his fine voice in some long-drawn passage, nor to wait while the orchestra gives him time to recover his breath for a *cadenza*. I did not think it my duty to pass quickly over the second section¹ of an aria of which the words are perhaps the most impassioned and important, in order to repeat regularly four times over those of the first part, and to finish the aria where its sense may perhaps not end for the convenience of the singer who wishes to show that he can capriciously vary a passage in a number of guises; in short, I have sought to abolish all the abuses against which good sense and reason have long cried out in vain.

I have felt that the overture ought to apprise the spectators of the nature of the action that is to be represented and to form, so to speak, its argument; that the concerted instruments should be introduced in proportion to the interest and the intensity of the words, and not leave that sharp contrast between the

TEXT: As translated by Eric Blom in Alfred Einstein, *Gluck* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1936), pp. 98–100.

1. By "second section" Gluck means the central or contrasting section of the da capo aria. The first section of such an aria regularly presented its full text twice and had then to be repeated after the central or contrasting section, hence Gluck's reference to repeating the words of the first part "four times over." Frederick the Great says much the same thing in a letter of May 4, 1754, quoted in *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich*, vol. 15 (1904), p. ix.

aria and the recitative in the dialogue, so as not to break a period unreasonably nor wantonly disturb the force and heat of the action.

Furthermore, I believed that my greatest labor should be devoted to seeking a beautiful simplicity, and I have avoided making displays of difficulty at the expense of clearness; nor did I judge it desirable to discover novelties if it was not naturally suggested by the situation and the expression; and there is no rule which I have not thought it right to set aside willingly for the sake of an intended effect.

Such are my principles. By good fortune my designs were wonderfully furthered by the libretto, in which the celebrated author, devising a new dramatic scheme, for florid descriptions, unnatural paragons, and sententious, cold morality, had substituted heartfelt language, strong passions, interesting situations and an endlessly varied spectacle. The success of the work justified my maxims, and the universal approbation of so enlightened a city has made it clearly evident that simplicity, truth, and naturalness are the great principles of beauty in all artistic manifestations. For all that, in spite of repeated urgings on the part of some most eminent persons to decide upon the publication of this opera of mine in print, I was well aware of all the risk run in combating such firmly and profoundly rooted prejudices, and I thus felt the necessity of fortifying myself with the most powerful patronage of YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS, whose August Name I beg you may have the grace to prefix to this my opera, a name which with so much justice enjoys the suffrages of an enlightened Europe. The great protector of the fine arts, who reigns over a nation that had the glory of making them arise again from universal oppression and which itself has produced the greatest models, in a city that was always the first to shake off the yoke of vulgar prejudices in order to clear a path for perfection, may alone undertake the reform of that noble spectacle in which all the fine arts take so great a share. If this should succeed, the glory of having moved the first stone will remain for me, and in this public testimonial of Your Highness's furtherance of the same, I have the honor to subscribe myself, with the most humble respect,

Your Royal Highness's

Most humble, most devoted, and most obliged servant.

CHRISTOFORO GLUCK