

Crusading for Reason in an Age of Anger: Redefining Opera's Role — Glimmerglass Festival 2012 and a Social-Centric Agenda

BY Seth Lachterman | September 11, 2012



L to R: Glimmerglass Festival Artistic & General Director Francesca Zambello, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Glimmerglass Festival Managing Director Linda Jackson. Photo: Karli Cadel/The Glimmerglass Festival.

Aida

Music by Giuseppe Verdi, Libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni, 1871

Ramfis, bass-baritone – Joseph Barron

Radamès, tenor – Noah Stewart

Amneris, mezzo-soprano – Daveda Karanas

Aida, soprano – Michelle Johnson

The King, bass – Phillip Gay

Amonasro, bass-baritone – Eric Owens

Conductor – Nader Abbassi

Director – Francesca Zambello

Sets – Lee Savage

Costumes – Bibhu Mohapatra

Lighting – Robert Wierzel

Choreographer – Eric Sean Fogel

Hair & Makeup Design – Anne Ford-Coates

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Lost in the Stars

Music by Kurt Weill, Book and Lyrics by Maxwell Anderson, 1949 (based on the novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton).

The Leader, tenor – Sean Panikkar
Answerer, mezzo-soprano – Bongiwe Nakani
Nika – Chebet Too
Grace Kumalo – Ernestine Jackson
Stephen Kumalo, bass-baritone – Eric Owens
Arthur Jarvis, baritone – Ryan MacConnell
James Jarvis – Wynn Harmon
John Kumalo, baritone – Amos Nomnabo
Linda, mezzo-soprano – Chrystal Williams
Absalom, tenor – Makudupanyane Senaoana
Irina, mezzo-soprano – Brandy Lynn Hawkins
The Judge – Jake Gardner
Alex – Caleb McLaughlin

Conductor – John DeMain
Director – Tazewell Thompson
Sets & Costumes – Michael Mitchell
Lighting – Robert Wierzel
Choreographer – Anthony Salatino
Hair & Makeup Design – Anne Ford-Coates

The Music Man

Book, Music and Lyric by Meredith Willson

Harold Hill – Dwayne Croft
Marian Paroo - Elizabeth Futral
Marcellus Washburn – Josh Walden
Mayor Shinn – Jake Gardner
Eulalie Mackecknie Shinn – Ernestine Jackson
Mrs. Paroo – Cindy Gold
Winthrop Paroo – Henry Wager

Conductor – John DeMain
Director & Choreographer – Marcia Milgrom Dodge
Sets – James Noone
Costumes – Leon Wiebers
Lighting – Kevin Adams
Hair & Makeup Design – Anne Ford-Coates

Armide (1686)

Music by Jean-Baptiste Lully
Libretto by Philippe Quinault (after Tasso's *La Gerusalemme liberateai*)
Co-production with Opera Atelier

Armide, soprano – Peggy Kriha Dye
Renaud, tenor – Colin Ainsworth
Hidroat, bass – João Fernandez
Hatred, bass-baritone – Curtis Sullivan

Conductor – David Fallis
Director – Marshall Pynkoski
Choreographer – Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg
Sets – Gerard Gauci
Costumes – Dora Rust D'Eye
Lighting – Bonnie Beecher
Light Director – Jennifer Parr,
Hair & Makeup Design – Anne Ford-Coates

Should Art be merely an escape or refuge from the realities of our difficult times? In the 1940s, the debate heated and divided artists, musicians and scholars. In Wallace Stevens's essay "The Noble Rider and The Sound of Words," the twain are resolved in the idea that art, even "abstract" art can assume the role of social commentary only through innate and ineffable transformations of reality rather than by any explicit agenda dogmatically imposed by the creator. Great art could not be manhandled ideologically. How this solution might apply to opera of the past becomes the task of the director and musicians in balancing the surprisingly diverse elements of the music's intent, the libretto's intent, the historical context, and, yes, the composer's objectives, if any. It is not surprising that Stevens regarded that an artistic creation had its own life apart from the creator's wishes. Thus, we have the license for interpretation and deconstruction that has become the hallmark of *Regietheater* in our times.

[A Report by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy](#) and subsequent findings by the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) conclude that major arts foundations have not been responsive in exposing individuals of troubled communities to nor inculcating with the "Western Canon." With hard times on the rise, a heavy metal band, a rap artist, or a folk singer can channel the anger, fear, frustration and aspirations felt by many to sympathetic audiences. By validating and affirming our yearnings, such popular music assuages anxiety and depression thus giving communities and, indeed, an entire generation the courage to face wars, famine, unemployment, sickness and death.

As funding becomes scarcer, it seems judicious for an arts organization to consider how the universality of arts' message can be nuanced to engage new audiences. Francesca Zambello, Artistic and General Director of the Glimmerglass Festival, and director of this year's production of *Aida*, has created a stir with some politically poised productions. Her manifesto, "Can Music and Opera Mean So Much More Today?" distributed with programs, clarified what might have puzzled or even startled the average operagoer. Strongly reshaping the accepted contours of Verdi's masterpiece, *Aida*, and surprising us with a time transposition and racial diversity in Meredith Willson's homey *Music Man* is risky. But Ms. Zambello is a savvy risk taker, and since she is, nothing she does goes unnoticed or is passively accepted. Kurt Weill's *Lost in the Stars*, unfamiliar to most in attendance, needed no interpretive political engineering; it is a searing and passionate plea for justice, forgiveness and mitigation. While set in South Africa at the inception of the apartheid laws, Weill's message reverberates today. Lully's *Armide*, inspired by historical events during the Christian Crusades of the Muslim world, presents a perspicacious gleaning of Christian and Islamic values in the face of common human needs. Hardly a musty seventeenth-century artifact, *Armide* makes its case as a challenge to our current sensibilities and social stereotyping.

Noting the fact that many operas in the past were inspired by political and/or social struggle, Ms. Zambello boldly "[chose] works that could inspire discussion about our world today. [She] also wanted to collaborate with organizations and artists who could help us in our quest to better understand other cultures, races, religions and ideologies." The array of international singers, conductors, musicians and designers from non-Western nations was remarkable: Nader Abbassi, conductor of *Aida* from Cairo; João

Fernandes who performed Armide's uncle, Hidraot, from Lubumbashi, Zaire; Michael John Mitchell, set and costume designer for *Lost in the Stars* from Odendaalsrus, Orange Free State, South Africa; Bibhu Mohapatra, set designer for *Aida* from Orissa, India; Charlotte Brathwaite, director of *Aida*, from London, England; Vasil Garvanlieve, Aronte in *Armide* from Strunica, Macedonia; Amos Nomnabo, singing John Kumalo in *Lost in the Stars* from Queenstown, South Africa; Bongiwe Nakani, "Answerer" in *Lost in the Stars*, from Cape Town, South Africa; and, finally, Makudupanyane Senaoana, Absalom in *Lost in the Stars*, from Johannesburg, South Africa (in which the opera is set).



Justice Ginsburg Speaking at Glimmerglass. Photo Karli Cadel.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, who is an extremely knowledgeable opera enthusiast, made a much heralded appearance at Glimmerglass's Saturday morning lecture series on August 11. Her booking, a real coup on the part of the Glimmerglass Festival, offered the over two hundred gathered in a conference room at the Otesaga Resort Hotel a rare perspective and insight into fictional trial scenes, capital punishment judgments, and portrayals of judges and lawyers in *Lost in the Stars*, *Aida*, *Billy Budd*, and other operas and operettas. While she offered little controversial judicial opinion (and was appropriately mute when insistently asked whether Tosca's murder of Scarpia was justified), it was fascinating to speculate how social right and wrong might have shaped her musical taste since her initiation to opera at the age of eleven. Justice Ginsberg was sixteen when *Lost in the Stars* premiered; she recalled how deep an impression this opera made. As well, African American conductor Dean Dixon's music appreciation series in Manhattan was a formative experience in her youth, nurturing a love of classical music. Justice Ginsberg coyly smiled when she noted in passing how "very different" the sentencing and entombment was in Ms. Zambello's production of *Aida*. "Different" is an understatement.

Aida

Francesca Zambello is not one to mince bold gestures. Her new *Aida* is a compelling, visceral production that flaunts its radical orientation against the venerations of the past. Verdi's Orientalist work, with some of the most sublime music he would compose, is, at times, mercilessly uprooted and cast into the nightmare that is the Middle East of today. Ms. Zambello is certainly justified in refusing to ignore ugly realities. How can a modern audience witness theater or opera about Egypt's conquests, the crushing of Ethiopia, and the horrific fate of Radamès and Aida without the loathsome images of destruction, violence, torture and death which haunt us daily from the news media? Even a setting in ancient Egypt forces us to compare and imagine how life under the Pharaohs was as despotic as is life under the despots and dictators in our times. Ms. Zambello never ignored the power of Verdi's music in her modern retelling. Over the course of centuries, the debate of "words" and "music," has become broadened to the way "words," "form," and "societal context" have a deconstructing effect on the music itself. The result is a mimetic endeavor to represent what "really is" using the raw materials of theater, libretto, stagecraft, and finally music. However, at times, in this production, the inherent lyricism of the music, an essential quality of Verdi's craft, was placed secondary among directorial considerations.

Noah Stewart, a handsome Radamès, with a radiant tenor voice, is a new face for me. His burgeoning career recently brought him to the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden, and, I suspect after his appearance at Glimmerglass he'll figure prominently on the international stage. His opening "*Celeste Aida*," a difficult aria requiring absolute technique with no opportunity for vocal preparation, was delivered with the right balance of ardor, longing and vocal power. Soprano Michelle Johnson, Aida, is another rising star, and her supple yet perfectly controlled voice was a pleasure throughout. As well, Mezzo-Soprano Daveda Karanas, Amneris, who appeared in Ms. Zambello's Ring cycle last year, lent her role an intensity that was vivid and dramatically telling. Ms. Johnson's voice has low-lying velvety quality which mixed well with Ms. Karanas's somewhat lighter sonority. The trio in Act I, which depends so much on the balance of the three lead singers, was unusually transparent and effective. The quick succession of events in Act I where Aida is caught between her love for Radamès and her fatherland, the mounting call for "*Guerra*" by the Egyptians, leading up to "*Ritorna vincitor*," was thrilling in its dramatic pace without the loss of any lyricism.

Eric Owens, who was a powerhouse as Alberich in the Metropolitan Opera's latest Ring Cycle, appeared as a forceful Amonasro, demonstrating, together with *Lost in the Stars*, how flexible an artist he is. Mr. Owens's acting is as authoritative as his great voice. Phillip Gay, as the King, and Joseph Barron as Ramfis, both gave strong performances. Mr. Gay, a tall, magisterial artist, had an especially burnished bass voice, and Mr. Barron gave Ramfis a menacing edge.



Michelle Johnson as Aida and Eric Owens as Amonasro in The Glimmerglass Festival production of *Aida*. Photo: Karli Cadel/The Glimmerglass Festival.

Although some of the set designs and props were all-too-familiar tokens of *Regietheater* — scaffolding, laptop computers, automatic weapons, and a silly Jeep (inexplicably static with its headlights burning away) — there were many moments which boasted great visual appeal. The martial spectacle and processional scenes were artfully staged with minimal resources: the lines of physical movement were well coordinated with the splendor of the military regalia, costuming and ancient Egyptian icons and artifacts were subtly suggested. One doesn't need a large stage to give an audience a sense of the broadened canvas: the very alignment of performers and the patterns of their dress makes a grand impression in this right context.

Ms. Zambello's most controversial ideas were saved for the final Tomb Scene in which I was taken by the lapels and yanked into a drama that one could barely have imagined or anticipated from Ghislanzoni's pen, or from the tradition in which most of us have experienced *Aida*. After acclimating to the transposition from ancient Egypt to the look and feel of a modern, martial Egypt, one was not prepared for the shock of Radamès' trial or for the barbarism of his death. Frankly, it was a repellent to see Radamès *waterboarded* by the high priests. Although Stewart's head was tilted upwards rather than downwards, it was realistic enough. In some way, this obviously safe mock procedure made the entire matter unintentionally ironic. But, the idea of it all was very painful. Why torture someone who remains mute to interrogation as Radamès does? Perhaps this is a commentary by Ms. Zambello on what we know now about such methods: they're not productive, just barbaric.

Even more shocking was Radamès death by lethal injection, then, later, to witness Aida's suicide by the same means. This is a sort of *Gran Guignol* that, while we've been grown accustomed to it, with the endless barbarities in the Middle East, we instinctively feel should be bulwarked from these acts during a civilized stage production. Mr. Stewart's bare body twitched (more correctly, his pectorals flexed) as the poison took effect. Should Verdi's opera be subjected to such a premeditatedly gruesome treatment? Ms. Zambello, trumping her role as provocateur here, is being very deliberate in making this final scene not the usual, expected melancholic going-gently-into-this-good-night. Verdi's gorgeous music, repeated

three times in increasing poignancy, was completely transformed by the visual context, and we were forced to listen with different ears. The major sevenths that arch Aida and Radamès's vocal lines do not merely reveal their love or passive longing, but rather their vain, painful cries as their bodies begin to shut down. Thus, musically, there was no lingering on those ethereal high notes, although I'm sure both singers could do so beautifully in a traditional interpretation. Verdi's music may evoke our tears, but Ms. Zambello's rendition reminded us of the horror and inhumanity of capital punishment in the hands of religious and militaristic hegemonies. While I grappled to find the shards of ineffable beauty in "*O terra, addio*," I accepted Ms. Zambello's shocking conclusion to a taut theater piece as underscoring the great tragic fate of all human beauty and love in the lethal and dust-ridden cradle of civilization.



L to R: Brandy Lynn Hawkins as Irina, Eric Owens as Stephen Kumalo and Makudupanyane Senaoana as Absalom in The Glimmerglass Festival's production of Kurt Weill and Maxwell Anderson's *Lost in the Stars*. Photo: Karli Cadel/The Glimmerglass Festival.

The great appeal of the 2010 Glimmerglass production of [Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land*](#) was in no small part due to the outstanding work of Emmy-nominated director and playwright, Tazewell Thompson. In 2011 he directed Kurt Weill and Maxwell Anderson's "Broadway Opera," *Lost in the Stars*, for Cape Town Opera and now presented at the 2012 Glimmerglass Festival. Based on the 1948 novel by Alan Paton, *Cry, The Beloved Country*, the story brings us to the land of a now banished racist apartheid policy that was instituted by the white separatist National Party shortly after novel's publication. Anderson's adaptation is transposed a year later, in 1949, already after Nationalist Party's coming into power, but before the apartheid laws of 1950. Interesting, until Marion Anderson's appearance in 1955, no black performers had been excluded from the Metropolitan Opera. Weill, who eschewed the European cult favored at the Met, felt particularly satisfied in distancing this work from the establishment by embracing the culturally inclusive world of Broadway.

The story unfolds like an ageless classic: A "Leader" and "Answerer" appear like a Greek chorus, and references abound both to the biblical tale of David and his son Absalom as well as the journey in Dante's *Divina Commedia*. Maxwell's eloquent libretto complements Paton's stirring tale. A rural priest, Stephen Kumalo, receives a letter from his brother, John, to intervene in the supposedly wayward ways of their sister Gertrude in Johannesburg. As well, Stephen wants to find his own son, Absalom, who has left home

to work in the mines but has recently been released from a stint in jail. Stephen's journey is no less a life challenge and test of faith than Dante's descent to Hell. Absalom, disenfranchised laborer in the slums borne of the oppressive work conditions in the mines, takes part in a robbery and, panicked by being discovered, shoots and kills the home's owner, Arthur Jarvis. Stephen is a friend of Jarvis, who is a young, affluent white liberal and who represents the minority of Afrikaners that promoted integration. Arthur's father, James, on the other hand, is a separatist through and through. Absalom, who will not lie to save himself, is sentenced to death. The execution, though, brings James and Stephen together through the common loss of their sons, and James, in the one bright thread of redemption in this story, becomes active in helping the black community from which he once distanced himself.

The story has been adapted for the screen twice in the original Paton version: one featuring Sidney Poitier in 1951 with Paton's own screenplay and a second starring James Earl Jones in 1995. The Weill-Anderson opera was filmed in 1974 and starred Brock Peters. However, *Lost in the Stars* is certainly unfamiliar to most of those in attendance at Glimmerglass this year. Yet, I'm sure no one who saw this production will forget it. The brilliance of this production rested on the unity and coordination of the elements which is far greater than the mere sum of its parts. Weill's music, its identity straining, at times, through a stylistic patois of European, American and African material, is not as memorable as the poetic lyrics by Maxwell Anderson. With an exceptionally strong singing and acting cast, a visionary director, and superb set design and costumes, *Lost in the Stars* emerged as the most memorable production this year. Michael Mitchell, who designed the sets both for the Cape Town production and for Glimmerglass, succeeded in creating a manifold of South African social and political locales in his minimal exteriors and interiors, all limned with parallel lines and colors evocative of the communities' tribal roots. Thompson's liquid pacing and scene transitions made the impending tragedy at the end all the more crushing.

Eric Owen's stellar portrayal of Stephen, and he powerfully delivered the crowning piece of the evening:

*But I've been walking through the night, through the day
Till my eyes get weary and my head turns grey
And sometimes it seems maybe God's gone away
Forgetting the promise that we've heard him say
And we're lost out here in the stars*

The utter intensity of his acting, and the tragic nobility he brought to this role, was enough to bring the audience, many with tears in their eyes, to a standing ovation at the end.

Actor Wynn Harmon who played James Jarvis with a perfect Afrikaans-English dialect, while having nothing actually to sing, was the perfect counterpart to Owens: his fall from the indifference of patrician bigotry to that of an all-too-human brother-in-suffering to Stephen was convincing and palpable.



Dwayne Croft as Harold Hill with members of the ensemble in The Glimmerglass Festival's production of *The Music Man*. Photo: Karli Cadel/The Glimmerglass Festival.

The Music Man is one of those musicals that divides audiences. Such is the case of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, a genre to which Meredith Willson's unique patter-infused story of grifter Harold Hill belongs. It's a far cry from the realities portrayed in the Weill-Anderson work. *The Music Man* is light entertainment, yet the whimsy of the plot together with Willson's skillful music has great appeal. Not to argue the case from a highbrowed stance, but you have to admire Willson's great fun with prosody and meter. For example, in the song "Iowa," the trochees of "you can have the fill of all the food you bring yourself" is in clear metric relief to its iambic context "you really ought to give Iowa a try."

I feel more people should give *The Music Man* a try as well. It's the first American stage work to feature singspiel-like patter, which, to my ears sounds like white man's rap. "You got trouble, trouble right here in River City," is hugely entertaining in its play with rhythmic cadence and language.



Dwayne Croft and Elizabeth Futral in *The Music Man*, Finale. Photo Karli Cadel.

Marica Milgrom Dodge updates the setting of *The Music Man* to the 1940s, and, in doing so, the bucolic Iowan landscape is both despoiled by industrialism and enhanced by racial pluralism. Most ingeniously, the backdrop is a reworking of Grant Wood's "Stone City, Iowa" with some billboards, refineries and with the visual smattering of industry's attendant air pollution.



Grant Wood (American, 1891–1942),
Stone City, Iowa , 1930
oil on wood panel, 30¼ x 40, 76.84 x 101.6 cm
Gift of the Art Institute of Omaha, 1930.35

Metropolitan Opera star Dwayne Croft, who grew up in Cooperstown, makes his pitch for a role so closely associated with the original Broadway performer that anything short of the Preston approach is a risk. Mr. Croft’s voice is rich, beautifully controlled, classically trained, and, in many ways better than Robert Preston that we can indeed accept another variation of Harold Hill. In a “question and answer” session following the show — an audience interaction that Ms. Zambello instituted this year — Mr. Croft discussed how the looming figure of Preston was always with him. When asked about how an opera singer approaches the Broadway-style of singing, Mr. Croft gave away the secrets on how not to sound so operatic. International opera star, Elizabeth Futral, who played Marian Paroo, while possessing both a gorgeous voice and stage appearance, was always in High Opera gear, replete with a rather prominent vibrato. She obviously never conferred with Mr. Croft on downsizing. Josh Walden, who played the comic sidekick Marcellus Washburn, stole much of the show with his vivid portrayal. He was the Associate Director and Choreographer and his “shave and a haircut, bang bang!” presence kept numbers like “Shipooopi” far more memorable and lively than in the original Broadway production and the subsequent film.



Peggy Kriha Dye as Armide and Jack Rennie as Love in The Glimmerglass Festival/Opera Atelier production of Armide. Photo: William M. Brown/The Glimmerglass Festival.

Opera Atelier's production of Jean Baptiste Lully's tragédie lyrique masterpiece, *Armide*, succeeds in several ways in being faithful to the highly stylized format the Lully and his great librettist, Philippe Quinault. Much of this fidelity is due to both to director Marshall Pynkoski and choreographer Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg, both of whom have an eye for the apposition of sensuality and order which is central to this work. When the opera premiered in 1686, Louis XIV absented himself thus spurning Lully who had previously been a court favorite. The gesture was as much a repudiation of the composer's dissolute ways as it was for the highly sophisticated operatic form and subtlety of text that *Armide* represents. The long prologue, which extols "Glory" and "Love," which was intended as a clear tribute to the king, never mentions Louis by name, only by metonymy. Pynkoski omits this prologue, probably for several practical reasons. But, for fans of William Christie's unabridged version, the omission here was a disappointment.

The accompanied recitative, which works so grandly and powerfully in conveying the tragedy of *Armide's* unrequited love for her enemy, Renaud, demands intelligence and expressivity from the soloists as well as a thorough understanding of Lully's style. The *divertissements*, or balletic dances which are counterparts to the choir in movement and gesture, provide repetition, often through ground bass

variations, providing structure for the vocal sections. While the challenges of the vocal parts are formidable and the balletic vision is vital, costumes and *mise-en-scène* can be trump cards to an alluring Lully production. Here, Gerard Gauci's sets and Dora Rust D'Eye's costumes conveyed the appearance of the fourteenth-century illustrated manuscripts of the Mongol *Shahnama*. Female dancers were, at times, outfitted in completely unique tints of pink and red; male dancers were scantily clad, and, like Jack Rennie, who played Amor, quite muscular. At times, duets were sung far downstage with a colored backdrop close behind. This allowed for an intimacy during key duets and contrasted with the full stage settings. As well, some singers, like Hatred, were positioned upstage, furthering the verisimilitude to the layered trompe l'œil of an elaborately illustrated Persian miniature. At other times, though, the staging and décor broke away from any familiarity and seemed completely unique to MM. Pynkoski and Gauci's vision. Opera Atelier's production of Jean Baptiste Lully's *tragédie lyrique* masterpiece, *Armide*, succeeds in several ways in being faithful to the highly stylized format of Lully and his great librettist, Philippe Quinault. Much of this fidelity is due to both to director Marshall Pynkoski and choreographer Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg, both of whom have an eye for the apposition of sensuality and order which is central to this work. When the opera premiered in 1686, Louis XIV absented himself thus spurning Lully who had previously been a court favorite. The gesture was as much a repudiation of the composer's dissolute ways as it was for the highly sophisticated operatic form and subtlety of text that *Armide* represents. The long prologue, which extols "Glory" and "Love," which was intended as a clear tribute to the king, never mentions Louis by name, only by metonymy. Pynkoski omits this prologue, probably for several practical reasons. But, for fans of William Christie's unabridged version, the omission here was a disappointment.

The dramatic crux of the opera is the enchantment of Renaud in Act II and Armide's great monologue "*Enfin, il est en ma puissance,*" in which Lully underscores Armide's hesitation by some of the most amazing and daring music of the seventeenth century. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's criticism of this monologue a generation later notwithstanding, Lully's genius in interlacing long pauses in Armide's vocal line with harmonic modulations marking her inner struggle confirms *Armide* as being the pinnacle of the composer's career. Soprano Peggy Kriha Dye mounted the challenges of this vocally and dramatically intense role and, without undo hysteria, never allowed the beauty of her voice to suffer at the expense of physical and theatrical demands. Tenor Colin Ainsworth's attractive light voice was suited to his character's overly decorous virtuousness. João Fernandes's rich bass was especially notable as Hidraot, Armide's uncle. Sonorous bass-baritone Curtis Sullivan, as a powerfully built and striking Hatred, was positively baleful in his bearing, especially when surrounded by his "hateful" spirits. Amor, a non-singing dance role was performed by Jack Rennie who caresses, consoles, advises, and protects both Armide and Renaud solely with his expressive body language.

The basis of Philippe Quinault's libretto was Torquato Tasso's *La Gerusalemme liberata* of 1574. In Olga M. Davidson's lecture of August 11, the Tasso sources were compared to Quinault's text as well as the art of Lully's and Quinault's contemporary, Nicolas Poussin, in his famous portrayal of Rinaldo and Armida of 1625. The image of the childlike and epicene Amor in the Poussin is hardly suggested by Mr. Rennie's physique. However, in Mr. Pynkoski's production, it might be that the goodly Christian's knight's zeal for the conquest of Muslims and the camaraderie of his fellow Crusaders is a self-serving hypocrisy all too familiar in our times. A certain homoerotic element is suggested in this production, and perhaps Renaud's incorruptibility is merely a cover for a personal sexual conflict aligning his own emotional fragility with his Muslim enchantress. Perhaps it is sexual yearning that motivates both protagonists hence leveling both cultural stereotypes.

Opera Atelier's *Armide* has been performed at the palace of Versailles, where it should have premiered over three hundred years ago. Ms. Zambello promised a first-rate French baroque production a year ago, and we were very fortunate that she made good on her promise.