

ORFEO

Music by Claudio Montiverdi

With a world premiere orchestration by Nico Muhly

Libretto by Alessandro Striggio

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SYNOPSIS

Prologue

A trumpet flourish introduces the spirit of Music, La Musica, who welcomes the audience. She sings of the demigod Orfeo, Son of Apollo, whose music-making tamed wild beasts and infernal spirits alike.

Act I

The Fields of Thrace

It is the wedding day of Orfeo and Euridice. Shepherds and nymphs sing and dance. The bridal couple proclaim their perfect happiness, and make their way to the temple to offer tribute. Those who are left behind sing of how Orfeo's love has brought him happiness.

Act II

Orfeo is happy to be home. Making merry with the shepherds, he sings... and his song turns the very air to gold.

Silvia, the Messenger, has tragic news: Euridice has been bitten by a serpent and is already dead.

Stunned by the news, Orfeo refuses to believe that he can ever be parted from Euridice. He vows to find her in the underworld, where he will either bring her back to the light of the day... or remain in Hades with her forever.

Act III

The Underworld.

Orfeo has journeyed to the gates of hell. Speranza, the goddess of Hope, encourages him to seek Euridice in the underworld. She leaves, but not before pointing out the sign, which reads: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter."

The ferryman refuses to take Orfeo across the river Styx, even after Orfeo sings a flattering song about him. Orfeo then sings the man into a deep sleep. Orfeo steals his boat and crosses the river. The chorus of Spirits champion the undaunted human spirit, singing: "He has tamed the sea with fragile wood, and disdained the rage of the winds."

Act IV

Moved by Orfeo's singing, Proserpina begs her husband Plutone, the King of Hades, to release Euridice in the name of love. The Spirits second her plea.

Plutone relents. He allows Orfeo to reclaim Euridice, his love, subject to one condition. As he leads her home, he may not look back at her. If he does, that single glance will condemn him to eternal loss.

Orfeo is confident... at first. But as begins to doubt, he turns to look back at her.

All is lost. Euridice is drawn away to remain in the Underworld forever, and Orfeo is forced back to the land of the living. The Spirits sing: "A man may conquer hell, but if he conquer not himself, he has not won the victory."

Act V

The fields of Thrace.

Orfeo wanders the fields alone in grief, singing of Euridice's beauty. He resolves that his heart will never again be pierced by Cupid's arrow.

His father Apollo, god of music, invites Orfeo to join the gods, where he will be able to see Euridice in the stars.

As a shepherd's chorus sings: "He who sows in suffering shall reap the fruit of every grace," father and son ascend to Heaven together.