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Giulio Cesare

in Egitto

299
1992
11-6

"He doth stride the narrow world like a Colossus"

William Shakespeare

Libretto by Nicola Paganini
[first performed in 1724]

MUSIC DIRECTOR
Peter Erd

STAGE DIRECTOR
Theodore Deacon

SET & LIGHTING DESIGNER
Robert A. Dahlstrom

COSTUMERS
Susan Edie

CHORUS MASTER
Gabriel Dannerereri

NOV 6, 1992

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Edited by Priester Zechoch

THE ROMANS

Gaius Cesare [Julius Caesar] Catherine Treadgold
 Cornelia (Pompey's widow) Carolyn Gronlund
 Sextus [Sextus] (Pompey's son) Alisa Pearson
 Cato (a tribune) Guy Bogas

THE EGYPTIANS

..... Nancy Gregory
 Regina Flak
 Kevin Jackson
 Jennifer Lee Robinson

ACT I

Scene I: 12.083
 Scene II: 12.084
 Scene III: 12.085
 Scene IV: 12.086
 Scene V: 12.087

Locations:
 Caesar's Encampment
 Pompey's Palace
 Caesar's Chambers
 Pompey's Chambers
 The Pen of Alexandria

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Preface: During a time of great civil war, two powerful Roman generals, Pompey the Great and Julius Caesar, struggled for dominance. After a disastrous defeat, Pompey fled to Alexandria to seek aid from the young pharaoh, Ptolemy.

ACT I

Scene I: Triumphant Caesar enters the port of Alexandria to the praise of his people. In response to pleas from Pompey's wife and son, Cornelia and Sextus, Caesar magnanimously pardons his old enemy and asks that he be brought forth. In reply Ptolemy's general, Achillas, presents Caesar with Pompey's head, severed in the hope that Caesar would look with favor upon the act. Instead, Caesar is enraged at the thought of so noble a hero having been so treacherously killed.

Scene II: Alone, Cornelia grieves over the death of her husband while Sextus cries out for vengeance. Ptolemy enters, begging to learn that his "gift" has pleased Caesar. Finding quite the opposite to be true, the boy king and his general plot Caesar's destruction. In reward for killing Caesar Achillas asks that Cornelia be given to him for a wife.

Scene III: In his encampment Caesar lays Pompey's ashes to rest in a solemn ceremony. A young woman calling herself Lydia enters, seeking from Caesar redresses for crimes committed upon her by Pompey. Entranced by the woman's beauty, Caesar promises to aid her. When Caesar departs, "Lydia" reveals herself to be none other than Cleopatra and her deception a ruse to enlist Caesar's support for her claim to the Egyptian throne.

Scene IV: In a great chamber Caesar and Ptolemy sign a peace treaty though neither trusts the other's intentions. When all have gone Achillas has Cornelia and Sextus captured. Spurned by Cornelia, Achillas imprisons them both. Cornelia and Sextus bid each other a poignant farewell.

Scene V: Nireus, Cleopatra's servant, leads Caesar to his mistress's chamber. There Caesar is seduced by the queen in her guise as "Lydia."

ACT II

Scene I: In Ptolemy's seraglio Cornelia mourns the death of her husband. Though presented with both gifts and threats, she finally rejects the advances of Achillas and Ptolemy. Unable to endure watching his mother's dignity assaulted, Sextus enlists Nireus' aid in helping them to escape and wreak revenge.

Scene II: Curio breaks into Cleopatra's chambers to warn Caesar of plots against his life. Fearing for Caesar's safety, Cleopatra reveals her true identity. Caesar rushes off to battle leaving the distraught queen behind. After the battle, Ptolemy enters proclaiming victory. Contemptuously he orders his sister imprisoned.

Scene III: Washed up on shore after his defeat at sea, Caesar reflects upon how greatly his fortunes have fallen. Nearby Sextus and Nireus find Achilles wounded. Achilles gives Sextus a ring that will authorize him to call upon troops. Before dying, he urges the boy to save Cornelia from the hands of Ptolemy. Caesar takes this ring vowing victory or death. Sextus calls upon Caesar's men to assist him in killing Ptolemy.

Scene IV: Once more Ptolemy attempts to defile Cornelia, but now he is confronted with the armed Sextus. Sextus kills Ptolemy and Cornelia hails her son as worthy of his father name.

Scene V: Caesar brings Cleopatra before the people proclaiming peace and a great celebration of freedom. Cornelia puts an end to her mourning and Sextus swears allegiance to Caesar. Cleopatra and Caesar vow eternal love and fidelity.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

During George Frideric Handel's lifetime (1685-1759) Opera Seria was the dominant art form in Western music theatre. With its plots of heroic adventure, death-taking rescues, and gloriously shilling set designs it dazzled the eyes and stimulated the imagination of its aristocratic patrons. Combined with Handel's genius, the marvelously florid "da capo" arias (a three-part aria that repeats an opening section after a short middle section) that are the heart of these scores attained a level of musical magnificence rarely matched before or since.

But since Gluck's reforms in the mid-eighteenth century, Opera Seria has consistently fallen under severe criticism by scholars and audiences alike, making the prospect of reproducing this art form in today's theatrical environment daunting to say the least. The marvelous set changes once dear to its creators tax the resources of even the most comfortably-funded opera companies. The plots, with all their tangled secondary love-interests and "deus ex machina" absurdities, seem hopelessly outdated to modern audiences. And what can one do with the profusion of castrato roles, those heroic parts written for the uniquely Baroque phenomenon of the elegantly trained and excessively pampered singing eunuch? Chromaticism and octave transpositions have often been employed but rarely with an adequate substitute for the mezzo-soprano voice.

With this production of Handel's *Julius Caesar in Egypt* we hope to dispel the impression that Opera Seria is a remote and unengaging theatrical experience. Nicola Haym's libretto is sensibly economical, lacking incomprehensible celestial interventions and concentrating on the exciting exploits of its familiar his-

torical personages. The prodigious variety of mood and instrumental writing with which Handel invests his "da capo" arias eliminates any trace of monochromatic texture. Each succeeding aria explores even deeper aspects of character and motivation in a manner that seems almost dramatically "modern."

In any contemporary production of Opera Seria, compromises must be made. We have chosen to cast all of *Julius Caesar's* castrato roles (Caesar, Tolomeo, and Nireus) with women, a practice that Handel himself preferred. In these parts the brilliant qualities of these voices perfectly match the edgy excitement of the arias' moods. To aid in disguising the sex-transfers of these roles we have chosen to set our production in the Napoleonic Age. Napoleon thought of himself as the "New Caesar," even to the extent of invading Egypt during one of his campaigns. These neo-classical ambitions manifested themselves in the dress of his day. Using these designs for our costumes makes an apt complement to the classical Roman plot line, while the inherently feminine quality Napoleonic dress gave to its masculine clothing design works perfectly well with our casting decisions.

As the full length of an uncut Handel opera would tax the singers' and (likely) the audience's endurance, we have chosen to carefully edit portions of the score. A maximum number of "da capo" arias have remained untouched, as they are the backbone of any Handel work. Our selection of these arias has been thoughtfully worked over so as not to seem repetitively or melodically obtuse. Most of all, the structure and sequence of Handel and Haym's dramatic design has been left virtually intact so as to retain the *grandeur* of this most magisterial of Baroque operas.

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UPCOMING OPERA PRODUCTIONS:

L'ORFEO (The Fable of Orpheus) by Claudio Monteverdi: February 17, 19 and 21, Meany Studio Theater.

H.M.S. PINAFORE, by Gilbert and Sullivan: May 19, 21, 22 and 23, Meany Theater.

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 Guy Bogart
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 Margie Skreen
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 Susan Brewer
 Todd Sible

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 Kai Ho
 Leah Sui Shen
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 Halyng Lu
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