

ORFEO ED EURIDICE

Music by Christoph Willibald Gluck

Libretto by Raniero de' Calzabigi

Premiere: Burgtheater, Vienna, 5 October 1762

Characters

Orfeo (countertenor)

Euridice (soprano)

Amor (soprano)

Shepherds, nymphs, furies, infernal spirits, heroes and heroines from Elysium.

The chorus mourns Euridice; their laments are interrupted by Orfeo, who invokes the name of his dead wife. He begs to be left alone and, accusing the gods of having stolen Euridice from him, vows to search for her even in death.

Amor suddenly appears and tells Orfeo that the gods will allow him to pass into the underworld and bring Euridice back. But there is one condition - he must not look at her until they have returned to earth, nor may he tell her of this prohibition. Otherwise, he will lose her again - and forever. Although Orfeo foresees the possible consequences, he resolutely accepts.

A chorus of shades, guarding the entrance to Hell, blocks Orfeo's passage, challenging his right as a mortal to dare to attempt to pass into the realm of death. They are finally moved by the expression of the depth of his despair and love, and the gates open before him.

Orfeo enters the Elysian Fields and, although ravished by the serenity and radiance, desperately searches for Euridice. When she is finally restored to him, they begin the journey back to earth. Euridice is at first amazed at her rescue from death but soon becomes deeply disturbed by Orfeo's apparent indifference to her. Her angry, sorrowful accusations prove too much to bear, and Orfeo turns to look at her. She dies and sinks back into the earth. Orfeo cries out in despair, cursing malevolent fate, and tries to take his own life.

Amor intervenes, announcing that Orfeo has suffered enough for love's glory, and restores Euridice to him. They ascend, reunited in life, to the Temple of Love, where the invincible power of Amor is praised by all.