

ORPHEE AUX ENFERS

Music by Jacques Offenbach

Libretto by Hector Crémieux & Ludovic Halévy

First Performance: Bouffes-Parisiens, Paris, October 21, 1858

Public Opinion introduces the characters. Eurydice sings of her extramarital affair with Pluto, who appears on earth as the shepherd Aristee. Her husband, Orpheus, bores her with his violin playing; they quarrel, and she leaves for the underworld with Pluto. Public Opinion threatens a scandal if Orpheus does not follow her to Hades, and he reluctantly agrees. On Mount Olympus the gods complain of Jupiter's domination and the monotony of their nectar and ambrosia diet. When Eurydice arrives with Pluto, Jupiter displays obvious interest in her. Orpheus and Public Opinion also arrive and, to Orpheus' dismay, Jupiter orders Pluto to return Eurydice to her husband. In Hades Eurydice is attended by John Styx, a fool on earth, now charged with prison duties. Jupiter comes looking for her, disguised as a fly. Eurydice is intrigued, and they sing a happy duet. Jupiter turns her into a bacchante. Orpheus, distracted by a thunderbolt hurled by Jupiter, looks back on his wife and is delighted to learn that he has lost his right to her. The opera concludes with general rejoicing and a can-can.