GIOACHINO ROSSINI

AURELIANO IN PALMIRA

Juan Francisco Gatell
Silvia Dalla Benetta
Marina Viotti
Ana Victória Pitts

Camerata Bach Choir, Poznań
Virtuosi Brunensis

José Miguel Pérez-Sierra
Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868)

Aureliano in Palmira

Opera seria in two acts (1813)

Libretto by Felice Romani (1788–1865)

Aureliano ................................................................................................... Juan Francisco Gatell, Tenor
Zenobia ........................................................................................................ Silvia Dalla Benetta, Soprano
Arsace .......................................................................................................... Marina Viotti, Mezzo-soprano
Publia ......................................................................................................... Ana Victória Pitts, Mezzo-soprano
Oraspe ........................................................................................................ Xiang Xu, Tenor
Licinio .......................................................................................................... Zhiyuan Chen, Bass
High Priest .................................................................................................. Baurzhan Anderzhanov, Bass

Camerata Bach Choir, Poznań • Chorus-master: Ania Michalak
Virtuosi Brunensis (Karel Mitáš, Artistic Director)

José Miguel Pérez-Sierra
Music Assistant and Fortepiano: Fabio Maggio

Recorded: 12, 14 and 22 July 2017 at the Trinkhalle, Bad Wildbad, Germany for the XXIX ROSSINI IN WILDBAD Festival (Artistic director: Jochen Schönleber)

A co-production of Rossini in Wildbad (Artistic Director: Jochen Schönleber) with SWR

Executive producer: Jochen Schönleber


1 Sinfonia Andante maestoso – Allegro con brio
   No. 1, Introduzione
2 Sposa del grande Osiride (Coro, Gran sacerdote, Zenobia, Arsace, Oraspe)
   Recitativo
3 Secondino gli dei (Gran sacerdote)
   No. 2, Aria
4 Stava, dirà la terra (Gran sacerdote)
   No. 3, Marcia, Coro e Cavatina
5 Marcia
6 Voi eterno, oh grande Augusto (Coro)
   Cavatina
7 Romani, a voi soltanto – Cara patria! (Aureliano, Coro)
   Recitativo
8 Ola, Venga, e si ascolti (Aureliano, Arsace)
   No. 4, Duettino
9 Pensà che festi a Roma (Aureliano, Arsace)
   Recitativo
10 Giorno di gloria è questo (Aureliano, Publia, Oraspe)
   No. 5, Coro
11 Venga Zenobia, oh Cesare (Coro)
   Recitativo
12 Cesare, a te mi guida (Zenobia, Publia, Aureliano, Oraspe)
   No. 6, Coro, Recitativo e Aria
   Coro
13 Cedi, cedi: a lui l’arrendi… (Coro)
   Recitativo
14 Ah! no: voi lo sperate invano (Zenobia, Publia, Aureliano)
   Aria
15 Là pugnai; la sorte arrise (Zenobia, Coro)
   Recitativo
16 Chi mai creduto avria (Aureliano, Publia)
   No. 7, Finale I
   Atto II
   No. 8, Introduzione
   Del cielo, ah! miseri! (Coro)
   Recitativo
   Tutto è perduto (Zenobia, Aureliano)
   No. 9, Recitativo, Duettino e Quartetto
   Recitativo
   Se udir volessi, ingrata (Aureliano)
   Duetto
   Se libertà l’è cara (Aureliano, Zenobia)
   Quartetto
   Coro Augusto (Licinio, Publia, Aureliano, Zenobia)
   No. 10, Coro, Scena, Aria, Scena e Rondò
   Coro
   L’Asia in faville è volta (Coro)
   Scena
   Dolci silvestri orrori (Arsace)
   Aria
   Perché mai le luci aprimmo (Arsace)
   Recitativo
   Qual lieto suono!… (Arsace, Un pastore, Coro)
   Scena
   Ah! non posso (Arsace, Oraspe, Coro)
   Rondò
   Non lasciarmi in tal momento (Arsace, Coro)
   Recitativo
   La sicurezza tua (Publia, Aureliano, Licinio, Zenobia)
The opera ‘Aureliano in Palmira’ was written by Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868) in Palermo.

The contract had not survived. In the summer of 1813, Rossini, like an angel, was sure it would be a success, at the latest and staying on into January of the following year. He travelled from Bologna to Milan, arriving there by 4 October. David, but he fell ill before the first performance. Rossini particularly good. The tenor, in particular, had to be replaced; 4 December was to report that he had finished work. Rossini himself did not work on any further productions, under Napoleon I, and there were hardly any performances abroad. Rossini himself did not work on any further productions, and performances in the wake of the Rossini revival have been relatively infrequent.

Felice Romani (1788–1865) took the subject of this, his first libretto for La Scala, from Roman history. His representation of the historical backdrop is largely accurate, but this is not true of the plot itself. Queen Zenobia of Palmyra loves the Persian prince Arsace, who is the only character who has no historical prototype. Her troops are defeated in battle several times by the Lover Arsace and Zenobia alone are given three duets of substantial length. Arsace’s Gran scena and Tancredi’s monologue are the most famous. These few examples also suffice to show that Rossini deploys accompagnato recitativo to a far greater extent than in his earlier operas. This innovation is also usually associated with Naples and explained in terms of theatrical practice there. This, to a certain extent, correct. All the operas were for Naples feature orchestral recitatives, while all those written at the same time outside Naples retain recitativo secco. Nevertheless, Aureliano is the opera that makes most extensive use of orchestral recitatives while basically retaining the secco form.

No. 11, Recitativo e Aria
Recitativo
È desto il destino (Publia)
No. 13, Aria: Non mi lagni, che il mio bene (Publia)
Recitativo
Scacciar mi è forza affine (Aureliano, Publia, Licinio)
No. 14, Coro: Nel tuo core unita sia (Coro)
Recitativo
I prigionieri a me (Aureliano, Publia, Zenobia, Arsace)
No. 15, Finale II
Coppa un eterno oblio (Aureliano, Coro, Publia, Licinio, Oraspe, Zenobia, Arsace)

All things considered, Rossini got a libretto that was completely aligned with the way he was developing and very well suited to his ideas. He probably had some say in the shaping of the text. It would be possible to find fault with the happy ending or arioso, which feels as though it has been bolted on and which goes against both historical fact and the inner logic of the drama. But tragic finales were still by no means customary in Italy at that time, and having just seen the tragic ending he himself had composed for a revival of Tancredi in Ferrara founder, Rossini certainly would not have been inclined to repeat the experience immediately. Setting aside the musical qualities of the final scene, this does not diminish the quality of the opera, which is perhaps a little less dramatic and more lyrical as a result.

The rest of the musical setting also follows this open structure, allowing for frequent changes of mood. Besides the big ensemble scenes such as the impressive Finale II, the numerous duets which are a fundamental characteristic of Rossini’s non-Neapolitan opera serie – are central to the opera. The lovers Arsace and Zenobia alone are given three duets of haunting beauty. Admittedly, two of these female duets (Arsace is the only part Rossini wrote for a castrato and is therefore generally sung by an alto) form part of larger ensembles. In addition, Aureliano is given a duet with Arsace and one with Zenobia. Arsace’s Gran scena and the shepherds’ chorus mentioned earlier are among the other musical high points of the opera. Musically speaking, the latter anticipates the famous prayer from Mose. The chorus is remarkable textually as well: the shepherds praise their woods with growing intensity as places of freedom (‘stanzee di libertà’).

Within a few days, the first-night fiasco had become less important. The work was given 14 times at La Scala that season – considerably more than the usual three performances which, in Milanese terms, meant an opera had been a flop. In addition to that run, Aureliano was given regularly until 1833, receiving its final 19th-century performance in 1835. It was staged in at least 50 towns, though with two striking idiosyncrasies: Italian performances of the opera were concentrated in northern and central Italy (the area that had constituted the Kingdom of Italy under Napoleon I), and there were hardly any performances abroad. Rossini himself did not work on any further productions, and performances in the wake of the Rossini revival have been relatively infrequent.

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Eugène de Beauharnais ruled on his behalf as his vice-regent. Even though the Battle of Leipzig had already been lost, this was still the political reality in northern Italy when the opera was premiered, and there is much to suggest that Rossini set a text that was designed to glorify Napoleon and his vice-regent. The change in political circumstances may have contributed to the opera’s lack of success on its opening night, though Milan was not occupied by Austrian troops until the spring of 1814, and even after that, hopes of an independent kingdom of Italy continued to be cherished in many circles. It is therefore no accident that the opera was performed relatively frequently in the territories of the Regno d’Italia and its former provincial capitals. There is much to suggest that there was a political element at work in the opera’s dissemination.

This is probably also the reason Rossini did not ever perform the work again, instead using many of its melodies in other works, in particular Elisabetta regina d’Inghilterra and il barbaro di Siviglia – material from the introduction and the fast section of Arsace’s aria as well as the overture, whose music is woven into many passages of Aureliano. The standard explanation that the composer wanted to salvage valuable parts of his failed operas won’t wash in this case. From the outset, Aureliano was not really a flop. Furthermore, the borrowings took place so quickly that Rossini would not yet have been in a position to judge how successful it was likely to be. The innovative nature of the work may offer one explanation. In it, Rossini tried out a lot of new things and was not satisfied until he had found a version that he was convinced was effective. There are really hardly any direct borrowings. Apart from some small alterations, the overture remained intact. But when it was transformed from a choral setting into Almaviva’s entracte aria in the introduction to il barbiere, the introduction to Arsace’s aria was reworked almost as thoroughly as his cavatina when it became Rosina’s aria in the same opera.

Political developments offer a more convincing explanation. By 1815 at the latest, Napoleon and his supporters had lost all positions of power in Italy. The Bourbons were ruling in Naples. So Rossini may have thought it was not advisable to perform an operatic tribute to Napoleon and his vice-regent. On the other hand, he did not want his divine music to be wasted, so he needed to remodel it: it became Elisabetta regina d’Inghilterra. Was it chance, Rossini’s intention or an irony that the new opera was a tribute to the Bourbons?

Burden-Rüddiger Kern
Translation: Sue Baxter

Synopsis

Act One
A large temple dedicated to Isis, with a statue of the deity. The inhabitants of the city of Palmyra enter and speak to the people, encouraging them. They hope that their love for each other will move Isis to clemency. The commander of the army, Oraspe, reports that the Roman Emperor Aureliano and his army are already at the gates of Palmyra. Arsace decides to lead an attempted break-out while Zenobia stays in the city. The High Priest hopes that the gods will aid the prince, even if it is written in the stars that Palmyra will be conquered by Rome. Arsace will always be remembered, even though people will come to realise that not even a hero can defy destiny.

A vast battlefield, in total disarray after a bloody battle. Riding in a triumphal chariot, the Emperor Aureliano enters to the strains of a march. The Roman soldiers hail him as conqueror of the peoples of the Euphrates. Aureliano thanks his soldiers for winning him the victory and entitles them to spare the vanquished; he wishes clemency to testify to his greatness as well. His soldiers repeat his maxim that whether in peace or in war, Rome will always triumph. Aureliano has the captive Arsace brought in and reproaches him with having become an enemy of Rome because love has blinded him. He invites the Persian to renounce the proud Zenobia and remember his oath of allegiance. Arsace reminds the Emperor that the alliance was forced on him and that he will always love Zenobia. Aureliano threatens retribution if Arsace scorns his clemency. The tribute Licinio reflects with satisfaction that in view of Arsace’s defeat, Zenobia too will soon have to capitulate.

Inside Aureliano’s magnificent pavilion, Publia, the daughter of the former Emperor,Valerian,whom Aureliano has released, nurtures a secret passion for Arsace and hopes that he will forsake Zenobia. Oraspe arrives, requesting an audience for Zenobia; Aureliano assures him that she will be able to both enter his camp and leave again without being molested. The Roman soldiers and Palmyran prisoners hope Zenobia will capitulate. She enters the victor’s camp to ransom Arsace with priceless treasures. Aureliano angrily refuses, whereupon Zenobia threatens to use force to free her lover. The Palmyran prisoners entreat her to back down, bringing an end to their sufferings. She refuses to relent and demands to at least be allowed to see Arsace. Aureliano grants her request, but warns her that she will ultimately be defeated if she continues to wage war. Zenobia retorts that she does not know what it is to be afraid. Mindful of her earlier victory, she still believes that she can triumph over Rome and exhorts those of her compatriots who have been taken prisoner to have courage. Aureliano is as impressed by Zenobia’s steadfastness as by her beauty and wishes she would give up the fight. Publia hopes that Aureliano will be able to win Zenobia’s love, and that Arsace might then bestow his affection on her.

Inside an old castle. In his dungeon, Arsace is musing on his fate when he suddenly hears Zenobia’s voice. Together they bemoan their sad predicament. Aureliano appears and again offers Arsace his freedom, if he will renounce Zenobia. The couple indignantly refuse, counting on their love, while Aureliano, who is entranced by Zenobia’s beauty, restrains his anger. Both sides’ followers urge their leaders to launch a decisive battle for the city. Zenobia takes her leave of Arsace, and while she sets out to return within its walls, both Romans and Palmyrans eagerly look forward to their own side’s victory.

Act Two
Within the city of Palmyra. The famous entrance hall of the royal palace in Palmyra. The entrance hall of the palace, as previously. Aureliano has released, nurtures a secret passion for Arsace and hopes that he will forsake Zenobia. Oraspe arrives, requesting a pleasant, hilly landscape on the banks of the Euphrates.

Shepherds and shepherdesses praise their woods as a place of freedom. The fugitive Arsace contemplates the wildness and solitude of nature. He dreams of being able to spend the rest of his life here with his beloved. He envies the shepherds’ unclouded existence. The shepherds recognise Arsace and invite him to stay with them. Arsace replies that love and honour require that he go back to Zenobia. Suddenly, Oraspe appears, accompanied by Palmyran and Persian warriors, and reports that Zenobia has been taken captive. Arsace takes heart and assumes his place at the head of the troops to free his beloved and her country.

The entrance hall of the royal palace in Palmyra. A victorious Aureliano feels at ease in the royal palace in Palmyra, even though Publia warns him about Arsace. Aureliano is about to make a final attempt to get Zenobia to change her mind, when Licinio announces that Arsace is marching on the city at the head of fresh troops. Aureliano calls for a counteroffensive. He swears to have his revenge. Zenobia’s tears again move him, but in the end, at the urging of his troops, he sets off to lead the counteroffensive. Publia worries about Arsace. A distraught Zenobia wanders about the palace. Oraspe finds her and persuades her to flee while the battle is raging.

A remote corner of the palace. It is night and the moon is shining. In a remote corner of the palace, Arsace laments that, once again, victory has been denied him. Oraspe and Zenobia stumble across him. The couple abandon themselves to the happiness of being reunited, which makes up for their sufferings. They decide to escape the advancing Aureliano by dying together. But the Emperor and his soldiers manage to disarm Arsace in time. The lovers swallow back their tears as they face renewed separation. Aureliano is impressed by their fortitude and regrets that they are not Roman citizens.

The entrance hall of the palace, as previously. Publia is prepared to give up her love for Arsace if this means his life will be spared. She would rather see him in the arms of another woman than see him die. Publia appeals to the clemency of the Emperor, who is now set on revenge. The Palmyran high officials also beg the Emperor to have mercy. Aureliano has summoned the two prisoners. He resolves not to sully his name with extreme harshness after all and forgives everyone, restoring Zenobia’s and Arsace’s kingdoms, as long as they swear
allegiance to Rome. Impressed by his magnanimity, both pledge him their undying loyalty.

Aureliano resolves to forget seeing Asia’s fortunes restored.

Reto Müller
Translation: Sue Baxter

**Juan Francisco Gatell**

Juan Francisco Gatell's career has taken him to leading opera houses throughout Europe and the Americas. Recent highlights include his highly acclaimed debut as Tom Rakewell in Stravinsky's The Rake's Progress at La Fenice in Venice, Lucia di Lammermoor at La Scala, Il barbiere di Siviglia at the Royal Opera House Muscat in Oman, in Buenos Aires and in Vienna, Falstaff in Los Angeles, Masometto Il in Rome, Don Giovanni in Washington, Così fan tutte in Madrid and Brussels, Don Pasquale in Toulouse, Romeo et Juliette at the Salzburg Festival and I Capuleti e i Montecchi in Paris. He has collaborated with leading conductors and directors and has a number of recordings to his credit. [http://www.juanfranciscogatell.com](http://www.juanfranciscogatell.com)

**Silvia Dalla Benetta**

The soprano Silvia Dalla Benetta completed her vocal studies with a distinction at the Benedetto Marcello Conservatory in Venice. Success at the 2004 Festival della Lirica in Sanremo led the way to an international career and collaborations with distinguished directors and conductors. In the 2014–15 season she made her coloratura debut in Nabucco in Malta. She appeared in Catania as Fiorilla and in Nice as Semiramide. In 2016 she sang in Les Huguenots, having appeared the previous autumn in Sassari in Rossini’s Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra and in Lucerne as Norma. [http://www.silviadallabenetta.it](http://www.silviadallabenetta.it)

**Marina Viotti**

Born in Switzerland, Marina Viotti grew up in France, studying literature and philosophy in Lyon before vocal training in Lausanne and her debut in 2011 in Rossini’s Petite messe solennelle. She sang in Ravel’s L’Enfant et les sortilèges during 2014–16 and took the role of Mrs Britten in Britten’s The Turn of the Screw. A winner of various competitions, she sang the newspaper vendor in Poulenc’s Les Mamelles de Tiresias at Opéra Lausanne and Marthe in Gounod’s Faust. In Bad Wildbad she made her debut as Isabella in L’Italiana in Algeri in 2015 and in the same year won the Academy Bel Canto Prize. [http://www.marinaviotti.com](http://www.marinaviotti.com)

**Ana Victoria Pitts**

Ana Victoria Pitts was born in Belém (Brazil), studying there and at the Conservatory of Music in Rovigo, Italy. She made her professional debut in Belém at the age of 19 as Dido (Dido and Aeneas) and her European debut in 2014 in The Water Babies by Paolo Furlani. Her appearances since have included Der Trommler (Der Kaiser von Atlantis), Hänsel (Hänsel und Gretel), Flora (La traviata), Tisbe (La Cenerentola) and in Mozart’s Requiem, among many others. She made her debut at the Opéra de Lyon in February 2018 as Vecchietta/Duchessa in La bella dormiente nel bosco.

**Xiang Xu**

After earlier training in China, Xiang Xu trained at the Music High School in Karlsruhe, graduating in 2016 and appearing there in Ariadne auf Naxos (Brighella) and as Löffelfeint in Der Sängerkrieg der Heidenhaiser by James Krüss. In 2013 he sang Taminio at the Beijing National Theatre and in 2015 Count Libenskof in Il viaggio a Reims at the Rossini Opera Festival. Successful in a number of competitions in Korea and China, and a Wagner scholarship holder, he sang Juniper in The Bridge of San Luis Rey and Arbace (Idomeneo) in Karlsruhe.

**Zhiyuan Chen**

Zhiyuan Chen studied at the Shanghai Conservatory, making his debut as a bass-baritone in 2013 at the Carmar Music Festival. In 2014 he sang at the Shanghai Comic Opera Festival in Die Fledermaus and appeared as Simone in Giann Schicchi. At the Angelés Opera Festival in 2015 he sang Leporello in Don Giovanni, and in 2016 Agamemnon in La Belle Hélène at the French School in Shanghai. A winner of various international competitions, in 2017 he took the title-role in Don Pasquale at Angelés.

**Baurzhan Anderzhanov**

Baurzhan Anderzhanov studied at the Kazakh National Academy of Music and the Accademia d’Arte Lirica in Osimo, while appearing as Colline (La Bohème), Sparafucile (Rigoletto), Angelotti (Tosca) and the King (Aida) at the National Opera and Ballet Theatre in Astana, and as Sarastro (Die Zauberflöte) and as Christ in Scarlatti’s Passione secondo Giovanni at the Teatro La Nuova Fenice in Osmo. In 2012 he sang Lord Sidney (Il viaggio a Reims) at the Accademia Rossiniana in Pesaro, and in the Petite messe solennelle under Alberto Zedda at the Opéra Saint-Etienne. Since 2013 he has been a member of the Aalto-Musiktheater in Essen.

**Fabio Maggio**

Fabio Maggio completed his piano studies in 2011 at the Naples Conservatory, participating in distinguished masterclasses. He has collaborated subsequently with leading conductors, including Riccardo Muti, Bruno de Simone, Roberto Misto, Giovanni Verona, Richard Barker, Giovanni Battista Rigon and Michele Enrico. In Spoleto in 2015 he was chorus répétiteur at the Teatro Spentimenterale and worked with leading singers at the Accademia del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and as chorus répétiteur and stage director for Saken’s La scuola de’ gelosi in Jesi.

**José Miguel Pérez-Sierra**

José Miguel Pérez-Sierra began his conducting career as assistant to Gabriele Ferro. He studied with Gianluigi Gelmetti at the Accademia Chigiana and with Colin Metter at the London Royal Academy, and from 2004 to 2009 was assistant to Alberto Zedda. After his debut with the Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia in 2005 he collaborated with the Rossini Opera Festival, conducting il viaggio a Reims in 2006 and in 2011 La scala di seta. He enjoys an international career and for Bad Wildbad he conducted Riccardo e Zoraida in 2013, L’Italiana in Algeri in 2015, and Maxim Mronov’s Omaggio a Rubin in 2016. [www.josemiguelperezsierra.com](http://www.josemiguelperezsierra.com)

Obwohl der Handlungsverlauf, die Kämpfe des römischen Kaisers Aureliano gegen die palmyrische Herrscherin Zenobia, historisch richtig wiedergegeben ist, steht nicht der römische Titelheld im Mittelpunkt der Oper, sondern das palmyrische persische Paar Zenobia/Arsace. Aus ihrer Sicht wird die Geschichte erzählt, Aureliano bildet den Widerpart.

Die Verarbeitung des Stoffes ist in hohem Maße geklärt und ist im Verhältnis zu dem ungleich erfolgreicherer Tancredi Rossinis, die letzte dem Aureliano vorausgehende ernste Oper, als großer Fortschritt anzusehen. Indikator für den innovativen Gehalt schon des Textes ist die Frage der Offenheit oder geschlossenen Form und damit zusammenhängend die Frage nach der Anzahl der Musiknummern. Die nummerns durch Beispielen von Tancredi zeigt, dass zwischen Arie und Ensemblesatz gelegentlich fließend wird.

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Die historische Hintergrund ist weithin richtig wiedergegeben, insbesondere der Handlungsrahmen, die Kämpfe des römischen Staatsoberhaupt war Napoleon. Für ihn regierte als Vizekönig sein Bruder Joseph Bonaparte. Der norditalienische Kriegern waren nicht Frankreich einverleibt, sondern kamen in die östliche Mitteleuropa. Davon beeindruckend ist das Arienbündel, als das sich die Oper der Mozarthzeit darbietet, es ist eine Neuerung, die für Rossini typisch ist. Auch diese Neuerung wird für die Geschichte der Oper nicht selten.

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Die Handlung

Ouvertüre

Erster Akt

Großer Isis-Tempel mit Götzernbild.

Aureliano in Palmira is unique in Rossini’s œuvre for its inclusion of the only role, Arsace, that Rossini wrote for the castrato voice. Its tale of tragic defeat and the ultimate nobility and triumph of love in seemingly impossible circumstances is a refined and highly innovative example of his style. Set amidst turbulent times in the Roman Empire, Aureliano in Palmira is packed with sublime arias, duets of haunting beauty (notably the three given to Arsace and Zenobia) and excellent choruses, Rossini himself considering this work as ‘divine music’. Even after initial success he re-used many of its melodies in later operas, most famously in Il barbiere di Siviglia.