

Join me on this week's WCPE Opera House for Claudio Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* (*The Return of Ulysses to his Homeland*), a story of how constancy and virtue are ultimately rewarded. Set to a libretto by Giacomo Badoaro after books 13-23 of Homer's *Odyssey*, the opera was first performed in Venice in 1640. It marked the 73-year-old Monteverdi's return to the stage after an absence of more than three decades.

Penelope (mezzo-soprano **Bernarda Fink**) laments her husband's prolonged absence at the siege of Troy. Ulisse (tenor **Christoph Prégardien**), however, has been abandoned on a seashore but doesn't recognize it as Ithaca, his own homeland. Minerva (mezzo-soprano **Lorraine Hunt**) offers to assist him in his return to the palace, which is overrun with suitors for Penelope's hand, by giving him an impenetrable disguise.

The old swineherd Eumete (tenor **Martyn Hill**) compares the troubles of a princely life with the happiness of a countryman. When Ulisse hears him sadly recall that his master has deserted Ithaca, Eumete comes forward and tells the old man that Ulisse is sure to return. Eumete becomes Ulisse's guide, and next recognizes Ulisse's son Telemaco (soprano **Christina Högman**), who has just landed in Ithaca. Telemaco orders Eumete to inform Penelope of his return and of the stranger's news concerning Ulisse; when they are alone, Ulisse reveals his true identity and they warmly embrace. Penelope, meanwhile, refuses each of the suitors who, when they hear of Ulisse's possible return, determine to delay no further in compelling her to select one of them.

Antinoo (bass **David Thomas**), one of the suitors, ridicules the old beggar (Ulisse in disguise), but Ulisse easily defeats Iro (tenor **Guy de Mey**), the suitors' boasting jester, in a wrestling match. Penelope compliments him before she reluctantly agrees to marry the man who can draw Ulisse's bow. The "beggar" asks to take part, although agreeing not to claim the prize. He succeeds and shoots each of his rivals. Iro miserably resolves to kill himself since his masters are dead. Neither the arguments of Telemaco and Eumete nor Ulisse's appearance without disguise can convince Penelope that the "beggar" is her long-absent husband. It is the evidence of Ericlea (contralto **Jocelyne Taillon**), Ulisse's nurse, that finally resolves her doubts. The opera ends in a great love duet as husband and wife are reunited.

**René Jacobs** conducts the Concerto Vocale in this 1992 Harmonia Mundi France recording.

From a June 2017 Teatro la Fenice performance, conducted by **Sir John Eliot Gardiner**, this excerpt includes mezzo-soprano **Lucile Richardot**, bass **Gianluca Burrato**, countertenor **Michal Czerniawski**, tenor **Gareth Treseder**, and soprano **Anna Dennis**: <https://youtu.be/8tsMaZ4jVwo>.

This Saturday, February 9th, at 12:30 p.m. be sure to listen to the Metropolitan Opera's productions of Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* and Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*. Soprano **Sonya Yoncheva** is the blind princess, Iolanta, who discovers love for the first time, opposite tenor **Matthew Polenzani** as the dashing knight Vaudémont. Canadian

baritone **Gerald Finley** is the menacing Bluebeard, and soprano **Angela Denoke** is his initially unsuspecting new wife. **Henrik Nánási** conducts.

Next Thursday, February 14, celebrate Valentine's Day with Jacques Offenbach's comical version of the Orpheus and Euridice story: *Orphée aux Enfers* (*Orpheus in the Underworld*), with tenor **Yann Beuron** and soprano **Natalie Dessay** as the classical Greek lovers attempting to escape Hell. **Marc Minkowski** conducts this 1998 recording.

The WCPE Opera House is heard every Thursday evening at 7 o'clock in the Eastern time zone on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We're streamed online at <http://www.theclassicalstation.org>, or you can listen on our Android or iPhone apps.

*Bob Chapman*

**W. Robert Chapman, Host of the Opera House**