

May 16, 2019 – Gioachino Rossini's *Il Viaggio a Reims*

This week's WCPE Opera House is an encore broadcast--hosted by the late **Al Ruocchio** (1937-2007)--of Gioachino Rossini's 1825 *Il Viaggio a Reims* (A Journey to Rheims). Part of the official tributes to Charles X of France on his coronation in that same year, but unlike most such creations – which tend to dreary platitudes of the Oscar speech variety – this *pièce d'occasion* has a cheeky personality and delicious music from Rossini at the top of his game. (He recycled much of the music into *Le Comte Ory*.) It used to be said that all *Il Trovatore* requires is four of the greatest singers in the world. *Il Viaggio a Reims* ups that number to 10.

Its “plot” concerns a group of international bigwigs who are waiting for their carriages at a spa near Rheims, where they are to be taken to attend the coronation. The carriages don't show up, and the group puts on its own celebration. At the opera's end--the final 20 minutes--each character acknowledges his own heritage (the Englishman sings “God save the King”, the Spaniard sings to a Flamenco rhythm, and so forth) as their flags descend from the stage's heights. The occasional love intrigue pops up (a Russian general and a Spanish admiral both fall for a Polish widow); a countess is desolate about losing her hatbox; there is a braggart German musicologist; a Roman Poetess recites, accompanied by a harp, which drives the Englishman to a rapturous aria; and in one of Rossini's most magnificent moments, the 10 principal singers and four secondary ones join in a huge, 10-minute ensemble.

The large cast includes the spa's hostess Madame Cortese (soprano **Katia Ricciarelli**), the fashionable widow Contessa di Folleville (soprano **Lella Cuberli**), the Roman poetess Corinna (soprano **Cecilia Gasdia**), the Polish widow Marchesa Melibea (contralto **Lucia Valentini-Terrani**), the Russian General Conte di Libenskof (tenor **Francisco Araiza**), the young French officer Chevalier Belfiore (tenor **Eduardo Giménez**), the English colonel Lord Sidney (bass **Samuel Ramey**), the Spanish admiral Don Alvaro (baritone **Leo Nucci**), the German musicologist Barone di Trombonok (bass **Enzo Dara**), the scholarly Don Profondo (bass **Ruggero Raimondi**), the spa's physician Don Prudenzio (bass **Giorgio Surjan**), the chamber maid Modestina (mezzo-soprano **Bernadette Manca Di Nissa**), the Contessa's cousin Don Luigino (tenor **Oslavio Di Credico**), the hotel housekeeper Maddalena (mezzo-soprano **Raquel Pierotti**), the *maître d'hotel* Antonio (baritone **Luigi De Corato**), the courier Zefirino (tenor **Ernesto Gavazzi**), the valet Gelsomino (tenor **William Matteuzzi**), and the young Greek girl Delia (soprano **Antonella Bandelli**).

Claudio Abbado conducts the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and the Prague Philharmonic Chorus in this 1984 Pesaro Rossini Festival recording.

From a Teatro alla Scala performance, **Ottavio Dantone** conducts the Act II finale “A tal colpo inaspettato,” the ensemble featuring 14 soloists, including **Annick Massis**, **Patrizia Ciofi**, **Carmela Remigio**, **Dmitry Korchak**, **Juan Francisco Gatell**, **Fabio Maria Capitanucci**, **Alastair Miles**, **Bruno Praticò**, and **Nicola Ulivieri**:
<https://youtu.be/oIPFYAelOPs>.

Next Thursday, May 23rd, please join me for John Harbison's 1999 operatic adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's iconic American novel, *The Great Gatsby*. **Jerry Hadley** is Jay Gatsby and **Dawn Upshaw** is Daisy Buchanan. Heard in other principal roles are **Mark Baker** (Tom Buchanan), **Dwayne Croft** (Nick Caraway), **Susan Graham** (Jordan Baker), **Lorraine Hunt Lieberson** (Myrtle Wilson), and **Richard Paul Fink** (George Wilson). **James Levine** conducts the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus in this 2000 performance.

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, and we're streamed online at <http://www.theclassicalstation.org>, or you can listen on WCPE's Android or iPhone apps.

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W. Robert Chapman, Host of the WCPE Opera House