

Actéon H 481

Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704)

Libretto

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The scene is in the vale of Gargaphy

Hunting sounds after the overture

Scene one

Acteon, Chorus of Hunters

Chorus of Hunters

Let us go, march, run, hasten our steps.

How fiery the sun beats down upon our fields;

Let not the arduous way to the highest peaks

In so fair a view cause us to tarry.

Acteon

Goddess who grants me breath,

Amiable Queen of the forests,

The bear we pursue devastates your empire;

And it is to sacrifice it to your divine favour

That the hunt draws us hither.

Lead our steps, guide our arrows,
Goddess who grants me breath,
Amiable Queen of the forests.

[Two Hunters]

Your prayers are heard and in the soft murmur
That issues from this wood, heaven reassures you,
Let us follow this good augury.
Let us go, march, run, hasten our steps.

Air

Scene Two

Diana, Arethuze, Daphne, Hyalis

Chorus of Nymphs of Diane

Diana

Nymphs, let us retire to this charming glade.
The crystal of its pure waters,
The sweet song of the small birds,
The cool shade beneath this green foliage,
Will cause us to forget our arduous labours.
This brook, far from the noise of the world,
Offers its waves;
Let us refresh ourselves in its silvery stream;
No mortal will dare
To surprise us here,
Let us not fear to admire our beauty.

Chorus of Nymphs

Delightful spring,

How sweet is your lot,
Our amiable Queen
Entrusts herself to you.
Such favour
Must make the Idapse
And the Tagus envious.

Daphne and Hyalis
Far from this place, every profane heart!
Lovers, flee from this fair spot,
Your sighs and the name of Love
Would trouble Diana's bath.

Minuet

Daphne and Hyalis
In peace our hearts in these retreats
Enjoy true contentment.
Beware, importunate lovers,
Not to disturb this perfect sweetness.

Minuet

Arethuze's Chanson

Arethuze
Ah! How safe we are from languour
When we do not feel the flame
That Love, that tyrant of hearts,
Enkindles in weak souls.
Ah! How safe we are from languour
When we disdain his ardour.

[Chorus of Nymphs]

Ah! How safe we are from languour
When we disdain his ardour.

Arethuze

The joys he promises are only show;
Let us not beguile
With these deceiving hues
Our too credulous hopes.
Ah! How safe we are from languour
When we disdain his ardour.

[Chorus of Nymphs]

Ah! How safe we are from languour
When we disdain his ardour.

Arethuze

To entice us into his chains
He covers his traps with flowers;
Nymphs, arm yourselves with contempt
And you will render his ruses vain.
Ah! How safe we are from languour
When we do not feel the flame
That Love, that tyrant of hearts,
Enkindles in weak souls.
Ah! How safe we are from languour
When we disdain his ardour.

[Chorus of Nymphs]

Ah! How safe we are from languour
When we disdain his ardour.

ritornelle for the song of Arthuze
gavotte en rondeau

Scene Three

Acteon, Diana, Arethuze, Daphne, Hyalis
Chorus of Nymphs

Acteon

Friends, the shortening shadows
Show upon the flowery plains
That the sun has run half his course,
Labour has rendered me in need of rest.
Leave me to dream alone in this solitary spot
And do not disturb me until the end of the day.
Agreeable vale, peaceful solitude,
With what pleasure beneath your cypresses
A lover, breathing your cool air,
Would tell you the tale of his woes;
But fear neither complaints nor woes from me.
I know love only by hearsay,
And everything it tells me makes love hateful.
Ah! If he were to attack me, this pernicious god,
He would see his projects go up in smoke.
Freedom, my heart, freedom.
Only by the pleasures of the hunt,
Let Love do what he may,
Be always tempted.
Freedom, my heart, freedom.

After a moment of silence

But what object comes into my sight?
It is Diana and her sisters, of that there can be no doubt.
Let me approach without a sound, this hidden path
Will offer me a propitious place to listen to them.

Diana
Nymphs, what noise was that I heard from yonder bush?

Acteon
Heavens! I am discovered!

[Chorus of Nymphs]
O! Perfidious mortal,
How dare you with criminal intent
Come to surprise us here!

Acteon
What shall I do, great gods? What counsel shall I seek?
Flee, flee!

Diana
In vain do you attempt to flee,
Rash hunter; to punish your crime
My divine arm, strengthened by the fury that inspires me,
Will strike you whether you be near or far.

Acteon
Goddess of hunters, hear my defence.

Diana
Speak, let us see with what hue,
What shade of innocence
You can paint your rashness.

Acteon

Chance and ill fortune
Are my only offence.

Diana

Most presumptuous hunter,
What insolence!
Do you think that you can hide the blackness of your crime
From the eyes of my divinity?
Let this water splashed on you by my hand
Teach others like you not to offend me!

Chorus of Nymphs

Now boast, profane one,
Of having surprised Diana
And her sisters bathing;
Go, content yourself,
If you can,
By telling it to the Thebans.

Here big silence

Scene Four

Acteon alone

Acteon

My heart, once so intrepid,
What fear takes hold of you?
What do I see in this liquid mirror?
My face all wrinkled over,
A horrible fur enwraps me;

Almost nothing remains of my former shape;
My voice no more than incoherent sounds.
Ah! In this the shape in which I see myself,
You gods who shaped me of the noble blood of kings,
Spare me the shame, take away my sight.

Plainte

Scene Five

Chorus oh Hunters Acteon changed into a Deer

Hunting sounds

Chorus

Never has a band of hunters
In the course of a single day
Had greater fortune,
Never has a band of hunters
Received in one day more favours from heaven.
Acteon, cease your dreaming,
Come to admire the fury
Of your hounds setting upon this stag at bay.
What! Do you not hear our voices?
How much you miss, great prince, by dreaming in the glade;
Believe us, you will envy us our pleasures,
And in the course of a lifetime
So sweet a spectacle does not happen twice.

Scene Six

Junon Chorus of Hunters

Junon

Hunters, do not call upon him who can no longer hear you.

Acteon, this venerated Theban hero,
In the skin of this stag, torn to pieces before your eyes,
devoured by his hounds,
Has descended to the dead.
Thus shall perish all odious mortals
Whose great insolence
Offends the gods,
The supreme powers.

[Chorus of Hunters]
Alas, goddess, alas!
Guilty of what crime
Was this amiable hero
To deserve the horror of so cruel a death?

Junon
His misfortune is my work,
And Diana, in avenging the outrage
To her charms,
But lent her hand to my jealous rage.
Hear, Jupiter, faithless spouse,
Let your charming Europa in heaven take my place,
Without fearing my jealous ire,
But even if my blows do not reach her heart,
Acteon was of her blood, and I vow to his race
Implacable hatred, eternal wrath.

She flies away

[Chorus of Hunters]

Alas, is it possible

That in the springtide of his life this invincible hero

Has had the course of his beautiful days

be unmoved?

What heart would not be moved by this misfortune?

Let us make our cries up to the highest skies,

That the rocks resound,

That the waves foam upon the seas,

That the North winds roar,

And penetrate into hell.

Acteon is no more,

And on the dark banks

The model of sovereigns,

The rising sun of the Thebans,

Is lost among the shades.