

Thaïs **Sensuality, spirituality and a fatal attraction**

September 18, 2008

IN BRIEF

Pacific Opera Victoria presents Jules Massenet's *Thaïs* October 16, 18, 21, 23 and 25, 2008 at the Royal Theatre, 805 Broughton Street in Victoria. Performed in French with English surtitles. Running time is approximately three hours with two intermissions. All performances begin at 8 pm. Priced between \$25 and \$110, tickets are available from the Royal and McPherson Box Office at (250) 386-6121, or on-line at www.rmts.bc.ca.

Student RUSH tickets for those presenting valid student identification are available at the door of the theatre, 45 minutes prior to each performance, subject to availability. RUSH tickets are \$15, inclusive of all box office charges.

IN FULL

Jules Massenet is arguably the best of the romantic French opera composers, penning rich and glorious scores that are immediately familiar. After *Manon* and *Werther*, *Thaïs* is one of Massenet's most performed operas, considered by many to be a jewel from the golden age of French Grand Opera. *Thaïs* is now enjoying a new place at the top of the repertoire with high profile productions at Covent Garden, Lyric Opera of Chicago and The Met. Pacific Opera Victoria joins this illustrious company with its own production of *Thaïs* October 16, 18, 21, 23 and 25 at The Royal Theatre in Victoria.

Based on a novel by Anatole France, *Thaïs* (pronounced tah-EES), contrasts the devout with the decadent and illuminates the search for meaning, love and everlasting life. The courtesan *Thaïs* lives a life of luxury and eroticism, until she is confronted by Athanaël, a monk obsessed with saving her soul. *Thaïs* eventually repents, choosing spiritual love and everlasting life, but Athanaël discovers too late that his feelings for her are sensual rather than spiritual. Through Massenet's voluptuous music, his compelling characters and the tragic inevitability of the story, he compassionately but relentlessly lays bare the bond between religious and erotic passion.

Award-winning Maestro Timothy Vernon conducts this company premiere and the renowned director-designer team of Renaud Doucet and André Barbe (POV's *The Tempest*) return to re-create the sumptuous production of *Thaïs* which they devised for Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and l'Opéra de Montréal. POV is building Mr. Barbe's stunning sets on a scale to fit Victoria's intimate Royal Theatre – and introducing a brilliant cast of singers who will be performing their roles in this opera for the first time.

Monica Whicher, (POV's *The Rape of Lucretia*) returns to lend her pure voice and lustrous tone to the role of *Thaïs*. Aaron St. Clair Nicholson (POV'S *Carmen*), returns to POV after his recent Met debut to portray the doomed monk Athanaël. They are joined by Chad Louwerse (POV's *Madama Butterfly*) as Palémon, Luc Robert (POV's *Rigoletto*) as Nicias, and Rebecca Hass, (POV's *Daphne*) as Albine. Julie Daoust, Mireille Lebel and Charlene Santoni make their company and role debuts as Crobyle, Myrtales and La Charmeuse.

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For more information, please contact Pacific Opera Victoria at (250) 385-0222 or visit www.pov.bc.ca.

