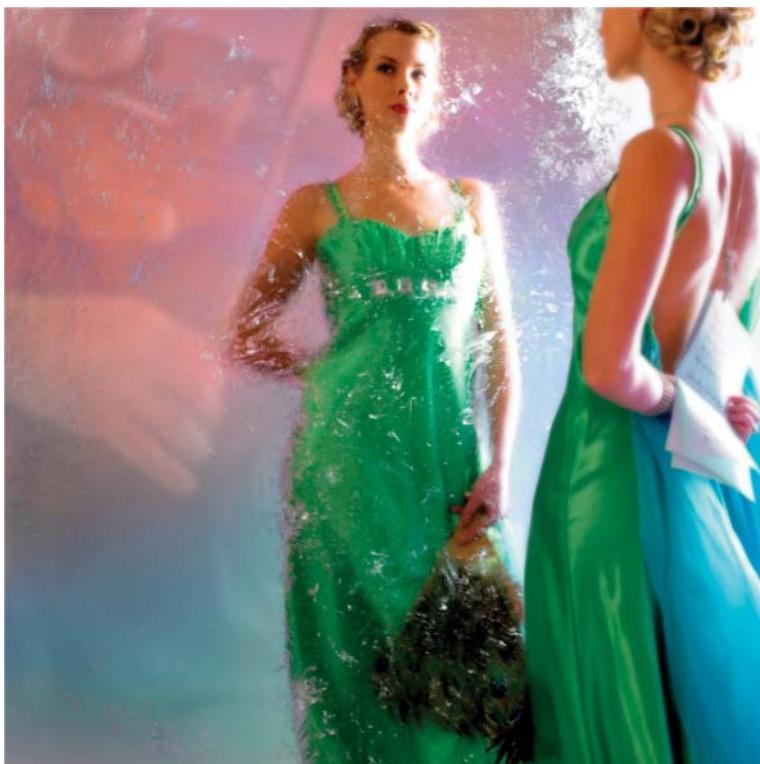




Capriccio

A CONVERSATION PIECE
FOR MUSIC



Libretto by Clemens Krauss and Richard Strauss
Music by Richard Strauss

First Performance October 28, 1942, National Theatre, Munich

**Synopsis and English Libretto
for Pacific Opera Victoria's
Production of *Capriccio***

February 25, March 2, 4, 6, 2010, 8 pm
February 27, 3 pm
Royal Theatre, Victoria, BC

English Libretto based on Surtitled Text created for POV by Teresa Turgeon

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CAPRICCIO: A CONVERSATION PIECE FOR MUSIC

by Clemens Krauss and Richard Strauss

Music by Richard Strauss

Strauss originally set Capriccio in a luxurious chateau near Paris at the time when Gluck began his reform of opera, about 1775. Marie Antoinette had just become Queen of France; the French Revolution was yet to come.

Pacific Opera Victoria's production is set in the elegant 18th century family home of the Count and Countess, but in the late 1930s – the time in which the opera was written.

Synopsis

Scene 1

The Count and his sister, the Countess Madeleine, are hosting a house party at which a group of artists will rehearse the entertainment for the Countess's approaching birthday. As the opera opens, the Countess is listening raptly to a charming string sextet by the composer Flamand, while the theatre director La Roche sleeps. Flamand and the poet Olivier watch the Countess intently and adoringly – and quickly realize that they are both in love with her. They agree they are friendly rivals in both love and art – words against music.

La Roche wakes up, observing contentedly that he sleeps best to gentle music. Flamand and Olivier are irritated that their destiny lies in such hands as his, but La Roche counters that without his staging, their works are nothing but paper. The discussion turns to the operas of Gluck, whom Flamand and Olivier admire, but La Roche holds forth on the merits of the Italian composer Piccinni.

(The score here quotes the overture from Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide*, whose 1774 premiere sparked often violent conflict between "Gluckists" and "Piccinnists". Gluck wanted to restore the balance of music and words in opera, making the drama of the work more important than the virtuoso singers who dominated Italian opera with their extravagant ornamentation and brilliant embellishments.)

La Roche complains that Gluck's orchestra drowns out the singers – he hankers for the good old days of Italian opera. While Flamand and Olivier scorn the idea of catering to the masses, La Roche calls for human characters that will appeal to the man in the street – a musical comedy, beautiful arias, lots of spectacle, pretty girls. Talk turns to the charming actress Clairon, an old flame of Olivier's.

Noticing that the Countess is still under the spell of Flamand's music, La Roche adds that it's a pity he slept through it himself. All three speak admiringly of her beauty and charm. *And a widow* adds La Roche meaningfully, before whisking them off to get ready to rehearse Olivier's new play.

Scene 2

The Count and Countess enter. Unlike her brother, Madeleine has been carried away by Flamand's music. She comments on the music of Couperin – pretty but shallow –

and of Rameau – superb, but spoiled for her by the bad manners of the man (meanwhile the orchestra quotes snippets from these composers). The Count tells her she needs to distinguish the man from his music and suggests that her response to Flamand's composition is coloured by her attraction to him. She counters that his praise for Olivier's play has a lot to do with his interest in the actress Clairon.

The Count then points out that Madeleine has two admirers and asks which she will choose. *Perhaps neither*, she responds, *for choosing either means I must lose one.*

Scene 3

The others return, and La Roche reviews the programme for the birthday celebrations: Flamand's piece, followed by Olivier's play, in which the Count and Clairon will act the parts of the lovers, and finally, a spectacular production by La Roche's company, featuring fantastic tableaux, a magnificent ballet, and singers with astonishing voices and high trills, performing real Italian opera. But La Roche refuses to reveal any more details.

Scene 4

The famous actress Clairon arrives, and everyone is aflutter with admiration. Clairon and the Count read a love scene from Olivier's play. Unaccompanied by the orchestra, their dialogue is entirely words – pure poetry, with no music. It culminates in a love sonnet (*Kein Andres, das mir so im Herzen loht*). Clairon compliments the Count on his reading of the lines, and off they go to the small theatre in the next room to work with La Roche on staging the play. La Roche forbids Olivier to attend the rehearsal, telling him to trust in the director's genius.

Olivier tells the Countess that the Count's reading of the love sonnet was addressed to the wrong person. He then recites the verses directly and passionately to her. As he is speaking, Flamand begins to improvise a little melody on the harpsichord and then, inspired, rushes off to set the words to music.

Scene 5

When the horrified Olivier tries to stop Flamand from meddling with his precious verse, the Countess tells him to wait and see. She then teases him, asking if he has no prose

to deliver now that the two of them are alone. He expresses his ardent devotion, but she has half an eye on Flamand who is happily spinning poetry into song. Olivier entreats her to choose between music and poetry and crown the victor, just as Flamand rushes in, flourishing the completed manuscript.

Scene 6

Flamand sings the sonnet to his own harpsichord accompaniment.

*Nothing else flames so in my heart,
no, Lady, nothing is there on earth's whole face,
nothing else that I could sigh for as for you,
in vain would Venus herself come down to grant my will.*

*What joy, what pain your gentle eye bestows;
and if a glance should heighten all that pain...
the next restore my fondest hope and bliss entire;
two glances signify then life ... or death.*

*And, though I lived five hundred thousand years,
save you, miraculous fair, there could not be
another creature hold sway over me.*

*Through fresh veins I must needs let flow my blood;
my own with you are filled to overflowing
and new love then could find not room nor pause.*

The Countess is deeply moved; she feels that the music and the words seem always to have been waiting for one another; the two together transcend either alone.

Meanwhile Olivier mutters furiously that Flamand has stolen his poem: *The rhymes destroyed, the sentences dismembered... Who can hear the slightest sense in the text? ... This lucky man climbs my words like a ladder to victory! ... Is it now his poem, or still my own?*

The Countess declares that the sonnet now belongs to her, and Flamand agrees enthusiastically. The Countess tells the sulking poet, *No matter how you may resent it, dear friend, you are both inseparably united in this sonnet of mine!*

Things are not about to get any better for the poet, for now La Roche comes to discuss some brilliant cuts he intends to make to Olivier's play. Joking about the proposed amputation, the two depart, leaving Flamand alone with the Countess.

Scene 7

Now it is Flamand's turn to declare his fervent love to Madeleine and ask her to make a choice. She vacillates: *Everything is such a tangle – Words are singing, music speaks!*

Flamand tenderly recalls how he first came to love Madeleine one afternoon in her library when she, unaware of his presence, read for a while as he watched, enchanted. As dusk fell, she left, and he picked up the volume she had left open and in the twilight read the lines by Pascal: *In Love, silence is better than speech. There is something of*

eloquence in silence that is stronger than words and more persuasive.

Madeleine asks why Flamand, a musician, is resorting to words. He retorts that his music does not yet seem to have touched her heart. She finally agrees to give him her answer the next morning at eleven, in the library where he first found love; overcome with excitement, he rushes off. The Countess contemplates her dilemma. As the rehearsal in the next room winds up, she calls the major-domo to serve chocolate.

Scene 8

The Count enters, exuberantly reporting on Clairon's charm and revelling in her praise for his acting. Madeleine warns him that he has been captivated by the actress's flattery. She then tells her brother that both the poet and the musician have declared their love for her. The Count tells her that in a choice between words and music, he'd stay with the words.

Scene 9

The others enter, and Clairon graciously praises the Count's spirit and compliments him on his imperturbability: *Our prompter had fallen asleep... and the Count went on reading with bravura, not even once forgetting a line.*

As they all savour their chocolate, La Roche brings in a pair of dancers to perform three short dances – a Passepied, a Gigue, and a Gavotte – in the style of Couperin and Rameau.

During the Passepied, La Roche chats with the Count, expounding on the beauty and grace of the young ballerina, his newest discovery, whom he is grooming for a great future, both on stage and off.

As the Gigue begins, Olivier approaches Clairon, but she is interested in neither his flattery nor his attempts to make peace; it is clear they had a love affair that ended badly. As Clairon walks away from the poet, the observant La Roche notes that Olivier is unlikely to play an impressive role in her memoirs (the real-life Hyppolyte Clairon, a leading actress-courtesan of the Comédie Française did indeed publish her memoirs in 1799).

Only for the Gavotte do the dancers have the attention of the entire company. They finish amid general applause and fulsome compliments from the Count: *Your performance charmed and delighted me. Just as our thoughts free the mind from the body and lift us into a higher world, so does dance overcome the force of gravity. The body seems to hover, accompanied by moving music.*

The Count then points out to Flamand that here his music is merely a delicious accompaniment. Flamand defends his art vigorously: *If it were not for Music, no one on earth would ever dream of moving a muscle.* Olivier chimes in, saying that music and dance are constrained by rhythm and that only poetry offers true freedom and clarity of thought.

Flamand insists that music is replete with meaning – *In a single chord you experience a world!*

La Roche weighs in on behalf of theatre as the supreme art. The Countess agrees: *The theatre unveils for us the secrets of reality. In its magic mirror we discover ourselves.*

The debate continues.

Olivier: *Poetry is the mother of all arts.*

Flamand: *Music is the root from which everything springs ... The cry of pain preceded language.*

Olivier: *The real depth of the Tragic can only be expressed when a poet puts it into words.*

The Countess reminds them that it is possible to create a musical tragedy, at which the Count suddenly cries, *Stop! One more step and we stand before the abyss! We're already face to face with an opera!*

Olivier complains that composers and poets obstruct one another dreadfully and waste untold effort in bringing an opera into the world. The Count adds, *An opera is an absurd thing. Orders are sung; affairs of state are discussed in duets; people dance on graves and suicide takes place melodically.*

Clairon chimes in that she wouldn't mind people dying with an aria on their lips, except that she finds the words so much worse than the music. The Countess brings forward Gluck as an example of someone who makes the words and the music equal. At this, the Count launches into a complaint about the unspeakable boredom of recitatives. La Roche pontificates on the deafening noise of the orchestra, which drowns out the singers, forcing them to shriek. He waxes nostalgic on the subject of song and the beauty of the human voice, mourning the great tradition of Italian song: *Bel Canto is slowly dying!*

To illustrate the magnificence of *Bel Canto*, La Roche brings in two singers to perform an ornamental little duet from an Italian opera with a text by Metastasio. The words are a sorrowful lovers' farewell, *Farewell, my life, farewell, do not weep for my fate ... Farewell, light of my eyes.*

The Countess observes that the text doesn't seem to suit the music. Flamand and Olivier agree that it takes a certain art to use a cheerful tune to express great sorrow.

The Count and Clairon have a flirtatious interchange, with Clairon agreeing to let the Count escort her back to Paris to read lines with her.

The Countess persuades La Roche to reveal to the group a few details of the grandiose production he is preparing for her birthday celebration. There are two parts, he tells them. First, a depiction of the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus. La Roche explains the story to his befuddled audience: after Zeus and Metis conceived the child, Zeus swallowed the mother, and the daughter grew inside him until she emerged, fully armed, from his head.

Carried away with amusement, his listeners join in an octet (*The Laughing Ensemble*) and mock the notion of trying to depict this preposterous story on stage. Clairon calls it a bizarre depiction of the joys of fatherhood. The Count, convinced that theatre people are nuts, cracks up at the image of Athena riding in full armour out of Zeus' head to celebrate his sister's birthday. The Italian soprano rhapsodizes about the cake, while the tenor worries they won't be paid for the gig and then berates the soprano for drinking too much.

Flamand imitates the orchestration for the moment when the goddess, with shield and spear, slips out from the head of her father: *Drums and Cymbals! Tschin! Tschin! Boom! Boom!* Olivier anticipates the wonders of La Roche's directorial abilities as Hephaestus swings his hammer to break open Zeus' head so the baby goddess can be born. *His skull throbs! He's relieved!*

The Countess is enchanted by La Roche's intensity and his wild imagination, and a little touched by his seriousness and naïveté. La Roche castigates the younger generation for their irreverence and ignorance in making fun of mythology. *Nothing is sacred! ... No understanding of my inspiration! ... Present-day youth has no respect!*

Seeing that La Roche is offended, the Countess soothes him, explaining that although they are impressed by his brilliant idea, they can't imagine how on earth it could be staged – *We're just amateurs.* But she's sure he'll pull it off with his great skill as a director.

And what is the subject of the second part of your spectacle? she asks. *The Fall of Carthage*, responds La Roche grandly, and this breathtaking production will pull out all the stops – *the town in flames, a sea of fire ... four thousand candles ... a galley of my own construction, pitching and tossing! Lightning and thunderbolts in the middle of the stage...the sails in flames – a burning wreck! Tidal wave in the harbour! The palace falls in ruins...*

Flamand and Olivier scoff at what is sure to come next – *At the end, a gorgeous ballet in the ruins!* Tempers start to flare as a second octet, *The Quarrelling Ensemble*, begins, and everyone again weighs in with an opinion.

Flamand and Olivier are appalled: *The scenery is playing the leading role! ... Words or Music? Ha! The question is Flight Machines versus Trap-Doors! ... Why even have an orchestra when the thunder machine will do so much better? ... On top of all this they will sing Italian! Trills! Runs! Cadenzas!* They declare they will have nothing to do with the production.

As Flamand and Olivier are ganging up on La Roche, the Countess expresses her dismay at their brutality and her distress for La Roche. The Count watches with avid glee: *Ha! The noble arts are at loggerheads...their apostles are squabbling among themselves. They show their teeth and start to brawl! ... La Roche in a fix! An exquisite sight! Ha! ... How will he get out of it?*

Clairon, however, is confident that La Roche can take care of himself and that he will shortly strike back.

The tenor gives up all hope of collecting his fee, then joins in as the tipsy soprano sings a reprise of their duet, this time bidding a tender, heartbroken farewell to their money.

La Roche then launches into a monumental tirade, scolding both poet and composer for arrogantly judging him while they themselves have done nothing for the theatre. He tells them their little poems and chamber pieces, while nice enough in their way, have neither the dramatic structure nor the human passion essential for great theatre. He agrees that public taste has become vulgar and brainless, but tells them, *You despise these goings on and yet you tolerate them. You share the guilt because of your silence.*

La Roche goes on to glorify his role in preserving culture, and tradition: *I serve the eternal laws of the theatre. I preserve ... the art of our fathers ... I reverently preserve the old, hoping patiently for the fruitful new, expecting the works of genius of our time! Where are the masterpieces that touch the heart of the people, that reflect their souls? Where are they? I cannot find them, hard though I search.*

He challenges Flamand and Olivier to either come up with a theatrical masterpiece of their own or stop criticizing him. *I want to people my stage with human beings! People who resemble us and speak in our language! Let their sorrows move us deeply and let their joys fill our hearts with gladness!*

He finishes in top form: *On my tombstone you will read the inscription: Here lies La Roche, the unforgettable, the immortal Theatre Director. The Friend of Comedy, the patron of Tragic Art. A father of the stage, guardian angel of artists. The gods loved him, and mankind admired him! Amen.*

This bombastic, but deeply felt manifesto is greeted with stormy applause and Clairon's witty *La Roche, you are monumental!* The soprano bursts into tipsy sobs and is led away by the irritated tenor.

The Countess picks up on La Roche's challenge and commands Flamand and Olivier to work together in harmony to create a glorious new work. They latch eagerly onto the idea as the Count moans that now he'll be the victim of an opera.

Talk now turns to practical matters. La Roche starts giving advice. To Flamand: *Give the aria its due! Always consider the singers – keep the orchestra quiet!* To Olivier: *Don't put the Primadonna's scene at the beginning. Make the verses comprehensible and repeat them often so there's a chance they'll be understood.*

Then comes the question of a subject for the opera. Olivier suggests *Ariadne auf Naxos*, but Flamand dismisses it as having been done too often before (to an orchestral quotation from Strauss's own opera by the same name). Flamand then proposes *Daphne*, but Olivier objects that

staging the heroine's transformation into a tree would pose a problem (as it had in Strauss's 1938 opera *Daphne*, until Clemens Krauss came up with the solution.)

Ironically, the Count, who doesn't want an opera at all, comes up with the topic: an opera exactly as La Roche wants, depicting the conflicts and events of the very day they have been living. La Roche is a little hesitant (Will it be too indiscreet? It would be a challenge to stage). However, everyone is intrigued, and Flamand and Olivier are eager to begin. As the guests prepare to leave, the Countess bids them adieu and exits.

Scene 10

The Count and Clairon depart for Paris, and La Roche ushers out the singers, assuring them their money will be ready the next day. As Flamand and Olivier prepare to depart, still jousting over whether the words or the music will have pride of place, La Roche admonishes them not to forget his big scene – the high point of the piece – in which he will direct everyone in a rehearsal. And, above all, they must take care to give him a really great exit.

La Roche then leaves with Flamand and Olivier.

Scene 11

Eight servants enter. As they tidy up, they comment on the goings on – the soprano's appetite for cake, the shouting about theatre (it's all Greek to one; another explains that the director wants to make some theatre reforms before he's dead; a third suggests they may soon let servants have roles in opera). All agree that the Count is looking for a tender adventure and the Countess is in love but doesn't know with whom – *and to make up her mind she lets them write her an opera.*

Their opinions on opera are much like the Count's: *They have it sung so you don't understand the words. And that is very necessary, or else you would rack your brains about the muddled content.*

They mention their favourite entertainments – tightrope dancers, marionettes, that ghastly play about Coriolanus, who stabs his own daughter! As the servants wonder about putting on an amusing show for the Countess's birthday, the major-domo gives them the good news that as soon as they serve supper they'll be free for the evening. They go off happily.

Scene 12

The prompter, Monsieur Taupe (his name is French for mole), emerges unexpectedly from the small theatre where he had been left asleep and forgotten.

He tells the major-domo about the life of a prompter: *I am the invisible ruler of a magical world ... Only when I sit in my prompt box does the great wheel of the theatre begin to turn. The deep thoughts of our poets – I whisper them to myself in a quiet voice, and everything comes to life. Reality is mirrored in front of me ... My own whispering*

lulls me to sleep. If I sleep I become an event. The actors stop speaking, the audience wakes up!

The major-domo, politely amused, offers M. Taupe something to eat and promises to arrange a ride back to Paris for him.

Scene 13

It is evening and the moon has risen. The Countess enters. The major-domo tells her that Olivier will meet her to discuss the ending of the opera – the next morning at eleven, in the library. She is alarmed, realizing that Flamand will be disappointed to find Olivier in the library instead of her.

And as for me, she wonders, I'm supposed to determine the opera's ending ... Is it the words that move my heart or the music that speaks more strongly?

She sings the sonnet, interrupting herself partway through: *It's fruitless to try to separate them. Words and music are fused into one ... One art redeemed by the other!*

Regarding herself in a mirror, she asks herself what to do. *In choosing the one, you will lose the other. Doesn't one always lose when one wins?*

Again she asks the Madeleine in the mirror, *Do you want to be consumed between two fires? You mirrored image of Madeleine in love – can you advise me, can you help me find the ending, the ending for their opera? Is there one that is not trivial?*

The major-domo announces that supper is served; Madeleine smiles at the mirror and walks into the dining room, humming the sonnet.

Maureen Woodall

Cast and Creative Team

Cast in order of vocal appearance

Flamand, a composer

Olivier, a poet

La Roche, the theatre director

The Countess Madeleine

The Count, her brother

Clairon, an actress

Italian Tenor

Italian Soprano

Servants

The Major-Domo

Monsieur Taupe

Dancers

Maids

Musician/Gamesman

The French Poodle

Conductor

Director

Set and Costume Designer

Lighting Designer

Choreographer

Resident Stage Manager

Assistant Stage Managers

Principal Coach

Associate Conductor

With the Victoria Symphony

Kurt Lehmann

Joshua Hopkins

Brian Bannatyne-Scott

Erin Wall

James Westman

Norine Burgess

Michael Colvin

Virginia Hatfield

Christopher Hinz, Andrew Snyder, Andrew Buckley, Delwynne Windell

Sam Marcaccini, Steven De Vries, Paul Winkelmanns, Andy Erasmus

Doug MacNaughton

Patrick Raftery

Andrea Bayne, Paul Destrooper

Ashley Green, Tamara Rusque

Frank Morin

Intrigues Predominant Legend, aka Marshall

Timothy Vernon

Robert McQueen

Christina Poddubiuk

Alan Brodie

Paul Destrooper

Jackie Adamthwaite

Steve Barker, Kate Wallace

Robert Holliston

Giuseppe Pietraroia

The Sonnet

In 1939, as Richard Strauss and Clemens Krauss were working on *Capriccio*, they cast about for an authentic French love sonnet to represent the cause of words in the words-vs-music debate within the opera. Hans Swarowsky, who was working for Krauss as a dramaturge, was charged with finding an appropriate 18th century poem. When his research revealed that love sonnets had gone out of fashion at that time, Swarowsky suggested a sonnet from the *Continuation des Amours* of the 16th century poet Pierre de Ronsard.

Swarowsky translated Ronsard's poem into elegant and lyrical German, and the delighted Strauss immediately set it to music, first as a Lied for voice and piano, then, with some changes, as the pivotal sonnet whose iterations form the core of the opera.

Below are the original sonnet by Pierre de Ronsard, in Middle French (note that many of the spellings differ from modern French), followed by Swarowsky's German translation for *Capriccio*, and a translation of the sonnet into English.

Continuation des Amours (1555)

Sonetz en vers de dix à onze syllables

By Pierre de Ronsard

Je ne saurois aimer autre que vous,
Non, Dame, non, je ne saurois le faire:
Autre que vous ne me sauroit complaire,
Et fust Venus descendue entre nous.

Vos yeus me sont si gracieus et dous,
Que d'un seul clin ils me peuvent defaire,
D'un autre clin tout soudain me refaire,
Me faisant vivre ou mourir en deux cous.

Quand je serois cinq cens mille ans en vie,
Autre que vous, ma mignonne m'amie,
Ne me feroit amoureux devenir.

Il me faudroit refaire d'autres venes,
Les miennes sont de vostre amour si plenes,
Qu'un autre amour n'y sauroit plus tenir.

Sonnet from Capriccio

Translated into German by Hans Swarowsky

Kein andres, das mir so im Herzen loht,
Nein, Schöne, nichts auf dieser ganzen Erde,
Kein andres, das ich so wie dich begehrte,
Und käm' von Venus mir ein Angebot.

Dein Auge beut mir himmlisch-süsse Not,
Und wenn ein Aufschlag alle Qual vermehrte,
Ein andrer Wonne mir und Lust gewährte
Zwei Schläge sind dann Leben oder Tod.

Und trüg' ich's fünfmalhunderttausend Jahre,
Erhielte ausser dir, du Wunderbare,
Kein andres Wesen über mich Gewalt.

Durch neue Adern müsst' mein Blut ich giessen,
In meinen, voll von dir zum Überfließen,
Fänd' neue Liebe weder Raum noch Halt.

English Translation

Nothing else flames so in my heart,
no, Lady, nothing is there on earth's whole face,
nothing else that I could sigh for as for you,
in vain would Venus herself come down to grant my will.

What joy, what pain your gentle eye bestows;
and if a glance should heighten all that pain...
the next restore my fondest hope and bliss entire;
two glances signify then life... or death.

And, though I lived five hundred thousand years,
save you, miraculous fair, there could not be
another creature hold sway over me.

Through fresh veins I must needs let flow my blood;
my own with you are filled to overflowing
and new love then could find not room nor pause.

Libretto

This English version of the Capriccio libretto is based on the draft text for the surtitles for POV's production.
The German libretto may be accessed on the internet at <http://www.opera-guide.ch/libretto.php?id=363&uilang=de&lang=de>

*The garden salon of a rococo chateau near Paris.
Early afternoon. As the curtain rises and during the beginning of the first scene, the Andante of a string sextet is heard coming from the salon at left. It is a composition by Flamand which is being performed for the Countess. The door to the salon is open. Olivier and Flamand stand near it. They listen attentively and watch the Countess. Near the centre of the stage, La Roche sits in an armchair. He is asleep.*

FLAMAND
Enchanting, today as always!

OLIVIER
You, too?

FLAMAND
Keeping her eyes closed, how profoundly she listens.

OLIVIER *pointing to the sleeping director*
He, too?

FLAMAND
Be quiet, scoffer!

OLIVIER
But they're radiantly open when she hears my verses and I must say I prefer that.

FLAMAND
You too?

OLIVIER
I do not deny it.

FLAMAND
That means that we are...

OLIVIER
loving enemies.

FLAMAND
friendly rivals...

OLIVIER
words or music?

FLAMAND
Hers is the decision!

OLIVIER *always softly, but emphatically*

First the words ... then the music!

FLAMAND *vehemently*
First the music ... then the words!

OLIVIER
Tune and words...

FLAMAND
... are brother and sister.

OLIVIER
Bold comparison!

The Sextet comes to an end. The theatre director wakes up.

DIRECTOR
The best sleep of all is sleeping to music.

OLIVIER *pointing to the director*
And such a creature controls our destiny.

DIRECTOR
Why argue? Without me your finest words are dead paper!

FLAMAND
With you, composers and poets are slaves held in bondage!

DIRECTOR
My beautiful scenery?

FLAMAND
Boring backdrops.

DIRECTOR
My painter works for the Royal Opera!

FLAMAND
In that case, Chevalier Gluck has my pity.

DIRECTOR
He drowns our classic "Iphigenie" with his academic music.

FLAMAND
The prophetic successor to the mighty Corneille!

DIRECTOR
Not a single tune to remember, the words are lost in the orchestra's uproar!

FLAMAND

His great harmonies move us –

OLIVIER

Each breath is pure drama –

DIRECTOR

Endless rehearsals for many months.
And then it is a failure, our wonderful play.

FLAMAND

The public is split into enemy factions...

OLIVIER

Artistic excitement...

DIRECTOR *mockingly*

Discussions and problems! Leave me in peace!

FLAMAND

The theatre is overflowing...

OLIVIER

and sold out, week after week...

DIRECTOR

Foibles of fashion! The cream of society, they sit in their boxes, bored, they gossip and yawn. They notice only the magnificent scenery and wait impatiently for their beloved tenor with his famous High C. It is just like the old days when we were playing Lully and Rameau. Nothing surpasses the great Italian Opera!

OLIVIER *derisively*

With its silly text?

DIRECTOR

With its wonderful music! Deeply moved by the magic arias, the audience admires the gifted singers. The Opera buffa – in particular – Maestro Piccinni knows his craft – both rich and poor can understand it, it entertains and delights the man in the street.

FLAMAND

Mere entertainment is not our goal!

OLIVIER

What miserable judgement!

FLAMAND

An expert like you!

DIRECTOR

Last night I met old man Goldoni.
He sat alone and was in an ugly mood.

“Your operas are awful,” he said to me,
“just to watch them would be divine,
but to listen is infernal!
In vain one expects arias
and they all sound like recitatives!”

FLAMAND

Who cares for the judgement of Venetians?

DIRECTOR

He writes for the people.

FLAMAND *ironically*

“Gondola! Gondola!”

OLIVIER

His stage is peopled with grocers and fish-mongers.

DIRECTOR

And what about us? The days of the Druids, the legends of old, inspire our poets; to Turkey and Persia and the biblical prophets they go for their themes. But what of the public? People are left cold and they just stay away. The public is clamouring for real human beings of flesh and blood – not mere phantoms!

FLAMAND *disdainfully*

You play for the masses.

OLIVIER

Your company prefers meaningless farces.

DIRECTOR

We play only good things! An Opera buffa that bubbles with gaiety or a bright witty Vaudeville. Always a wealth of feminine beauty...

OLIVIER

...to beguile the old rakes in the audience!

DIRECTOR

Yet a certain leading lady had a place in your heart!

FLAMAND

Beautiful Clairon! He knows how charming!

OLIVIER

That is past – all past...

DIRECTOR

Your tender relations have suffered somewhat?

OLIVIER

Just the same I admire her genius on stage.

DIRECTOR

Soon our dear Count will admire her in person.
I have asked her to come today for rehearsal.

FLAMAND

He'll act with her, will he?

DIRECTOR

He wants to attempt it,
ironically, to Olivier
supported by the great power of your verses.
But, look! The Countess is rising –
to Flamand
your music has moved her, as you can see.
Was it really so great? Pity! I slept all the way through it.

FLAMAND *raptly watching the Countess*
Her dreamy eyes...

OLIVIER *equally intent*

An enchanting smile plays on her lips...

DIRECTOR *softly*

A remarkable woman.

OLIVIER

Such wit and charm...

FLAMAND

Young ... radiantly beautiful!

DIRECTOR

and widowed...

They are coming! Now quick to the theatre; we must set
the stage and get everything ready. Now my work begins. I
know my stage – that is where I am at home. Through my
directing I solve every problem. Dramatic expression,
meaningful gesture... basic principle!

All three exit into the theatre room

SCENE 2

The Count and Countess enter

COUNTESS

The stream of music carried me far out over a magic
horizon!

COUNT

The sound of a violin bewitches the ear, my mind stays
cold.

COUNTESS

Will your critical attitude not once remain silent?

COUNT

You love music. What do you think of Flamand?

COUNTESS *ignoring the question*

The music of Couperin pleases me but there is too little
depth to his gay little tunes.

Rameau is superb – I often sing to myself:
“*Fra le pupille di vaghe belle...*”.

But he was a person with terrible manners.
And that is the reason I rather dislike him.
My enjoyment is spoiled.

COUNT

You must distinguish the man from his music.

COUNTESS

I want to...

COUNT

But you cannot; as I have noticed.

COUNTESS

All the while I listened, I kept my eyes closed.

COUNT

From under your lashes – no glance for the writer?

COUNTESS

Oh yes ... I was pleased with what I saw. I find it
pleasant...

COUNT

When harmony reigns between nature and art.

COUNTESS

Let me enjoy it, the wondrous experience.
What I never thought of came forth in music.
Sombre feelings soared away, let them stay silent
though the heart identifies them.

COUNT

What the music cannot say will be told by the poet:
Olivier's play is a marvel!

COUNTESS

Such outrageous praise, my skeptical brother?
The guest you are waiting for, the famous actress; she
interests you, do not deny it!

COUNT

You, too, must admit, Clairon is splendid.
Her greatness remains unsurpassed.
To act beside her scares me a little,
for this time our two roles are reversed.
This time it is the patron who is aiming to please.

COUNTESS

Where the actor falls, let the “Count” be successful,
and the poet’s words take you straight to your goal.

COUNT

Don’t mock, sister! You have a pair of admirers!
Words against music – which conquers your heart?

COUNTESS

Must I decide? I prefer just to listen.

COUNT

Your Ladyship, Your Ladyship, where does this road lead?

COUNTESS

The road that you take leads to more adventure!

COUNT

Now benevolent glances for this one – later a promising
smile for the other.

COUNTESS

My heart hears an echo of passionate music.

COUNT

The poet’s more ardent!

COUNTESS

Look after yourself.

COUNT

I live only for the moment.

COUNTESS

Who knows the future?

COUNT

What will your choice be?

COUNTESS

I can’t help wondering. Perhaps I’ll choose neither, for
choosing either means I must lose one.

COUNT

Cheerfully lost, cheerfully won,
life’s greatest treasure – highest reward!

COUNTESS

Carefully win, lovingly clasp
life’s highest treasure – fairest prize!

COUNT

Blithely decide ... Gladly acknowledge...
lightly possess ... inwardly yield...

COUNTESS

joy of the moment ... moment of happiness...
joy of life! wisdom of life!

SCENE 3

La Roche, Flamand and Olivier enter.

DIRECTOR

The stage is all ready, we can start the rehearsal.
We have prepared a special programme for her Ladyship’s
birthday celebration. We shall be pitting our talents against
each other: there is the magnificent Sinfonia by our
youthful Flamand...

COUNT *pointing to the poet*

Then his drama, in which I will be acting the part of the
lover.

COUNTESS

As dreamer or hero I would like to know!

DIRECTOR

And lastly ... an opus from my own studio.

FLAMAND

Probably one of your dramatized proverbs again with
interpolated ariettas full of jokes!

DIRECTOR

No! Not at all!

A grandiose “*azione teatrale*” to be given by my entire
company. A pageant of homage!
I am not divulging either contents or title...

OLIVIER *ironically*

A terrible secret!

DIRECTOR

Most exalted tableaux; a lovely ballet! And singers of true
Italian opera will be performing this time. Voices,
Madame, you will be astonished! Their pearly runs ... their
high trills! The Tenor’s high tone is radiantly clear!

FLAMAND

Music merely a pretext!

DIRECTOR

So speaks the voice of envy. The success decides!

OLIVIER

Inane verses!...

DIRECTOR

Who listens to words when the music speaks?

At this moment the touring car carrying the celebrated actress Clairon pulls up in the driveway.

COUNT *looking out through the glass doors*
She's coming! I hasten to welcome her!

SCENE 4

OLIVIER *to La Roche*
So she really has come. You have finally won!

COUNTESS *looking out*
The illustrious tragedienne in travelling clothes.

DIRECTOR *to Olivier*
As I told you, no one ever dares to refuse me.

FLAMAND
If she could also sing, then no one at all could resist her.

OLIVIER *to La Roche*
How can I ever thank you?

The Count enters with Clairon and introduces her to the Countess.

COUNT
Melpomene's priestess, the divine Clairon!

COUNTESS *courteously*
How often I have been charmed by your wonderful talent!

DIRECTOR *heroically*
Andromache, Phaedra, Medea, Roxane!

CLAIRON *to La Roche*
You spoil my entrance, my dear La Roche.
To the Countess
I fear now, Madame, that after that lavish preamble you will find my conversation disappointing.

COUNTESS *very politely*
Do not underestimate the charm we find in you while you are conversing without the restrictions of metric form. Your spontaneous delivery surely will make you successful in the drawing room.

CLAIRON
On stage, within our world of make-believe, if reality comes too close, there is a danger that the wings of art will be set on fire.
To Olivier
And is your drama at last completed, Olivier? At the very spot where it becomes thrilling my part breaks off. Is it only a matter of gallantry or is it shyness that you keep the love-scene such a terrible secret?

OLIVIER *with a glance at the Countess*
It is entirely a matter of being inspired, most gracious Clairon. This very morning a beautiful sonnet came to me.

COUNT
His work is finished, here is the manuscript.

CLAIRON
Let us hear what the latest masterpiece of our young poet is like, my dear Count and let us at the same time have a proof of your theatrical talent.

COUNT
I am so eager for the author to be heard that I will not leave you any longer in doubt regarding the limits of my talent!

Clairon and the Count recite from the play by the poet. They read their parts. Clairon begins.

CLAIRON
You leave.
So quickly can the sweet red rose of your affection wither?
Is it so easy to retreat along the path
that brought you hither?
This eye, that once beheld in me
its font of deepest satisfaction,
now greets with sparkling zest and glee,
the promise of a new distraction.

COUNT
I leave.
But since I must depart to break the enemy's resistance,
Let every fibre of my heart span
the abyss of time and distance
then may this body travel far –
this arm may rise in fierce endeavour:
my soul will tarry where you are –
at peace, and adorable for ever!

CLAIRON
The world, so rich in interest will jade for you this quiet life...

COUNT
O goddess, only at your breast is true repose from stress and strife.

CLAIRON
Your eagerness for what is new
(I cannot fail to see it clearly)
will quickly strip the brilliant hue from treasures
you now cherish clearly.

COUNT
All wishes, all ambitions dwindle; no flicker of desire can flare beside the roaring blaze you kindle in me.

CLAIRON

And let me see how you'll swear to that!

COUNT

Nothing else flames so in my heart,
no, Lady, nothing is there on earth's whole face,
nothing else that I could sigh for as for you,
in vain would Venus herself come down to grant my will.

What joy, what pain your gentle eye bestows;
and if a glance should heighten all that pain...
the next restore my fondest hope and bliss entire;
two glances signify then life... or death.

And, though I lived five hundred thousand years,
save you, miraculous fair, there could not be
another creature hold sway over me.

*CLAIRON interrupting the Count, who has become quite
passionate*

Bravo! Bravo! You are really not a novice.
I've made up my mind to it; your great talent shall
establish close theatrical relations between us.

*She takes the manuscript and hands it ceremoniously to La
Roche.*

Here, take the drama – it is yours for the staging!
Determine our entrance, judge our gestures!
Begin the rehearsal and act as our mentor!

DIRECTOR expansively, responding to her tone
The theatre is brightly lit. Follow me, my friends!
To the poet, who wants to follow.

You stay! My native tact forbids me to let the author be
present when a child of his fantasy is receiving my
finishing touch. Wait and trust!

CLAIRON

The muses have kissed him!

DIRECTOR

Unrestrained and free from shackles
let my genius flourish in its realm!

CLAIRON

My dearest La Roche, you are a genius!

*La Roche exits into the theatre; Clairon follows on the arm
of the Count.*

COUNTESS looking after the Count

There goes my dear brother into the arms of adventure.

FLAMAND

He read his lines fairly naturally
and with conviction.

COUNTESS to the poet

The hero of your newest masterpiece expresses his feelings
for his fair one in truly exhausting terms.

OLIVIER

The Count's reading was an improvisation addressed to
the wrong person. Allow me to correct the misuse!
He turns to the Countess and recites the sonnet.
Nothing else flames so in my heart,
no, Lady, nothing is there on earth's whole face,
nothing else that I could sigh for as for you,
in vain would Venus herself come down to grant my will.

COUNTESS

A deplorable practice, deliberately interchanging
the person you are addressing!

OLIVER continues without a break in his expression

What joy, what pain your gentle eye bestows;
and if a glance should heighten all that pain...
the next restore my fondest hope and bliss entire;
two glances signify then life ... or death.

Were yet my span prolonged beyond all measure
no other being's favour would I treasure,
no other passion could my heart embrace.

*Flamand goes to the harpsichord and begins to improvise
a melody to the following words.*

And, though I lived five hundred thousand years,
save you, miraculous fair, there could not be
another creature hold sway over me.

Through fresh veins I must needs let flow my blood;
my own with you are filled to overflowing
and new love then could find not room nor pause.

COUNTESS

A beautiful poem! Like a heavenly cloud afloat on the air.
But how unkindly treated by you!
You give it out to all the world, then you say that I only
am the one to hear it.
Ah! One should not declare one's passion so freely and
openly! Do you not agree, Flamand?

FLAMAND

He has written lines that are bright with enchantment.
I can already hear them as music in my inner ear.
He rushes off to the salon.

OLIVIER calling after Flamand

What on earth are you up to?

COUNTESS

Let him do as he pleases.
You can see that music, too,
is a matter of inspiration.

OLIVIER *wants to run after the composer*
My sonnet, my beautiful sonnet!

COUNTESS

Don't disturb him now!
Can he do so much harm?

OLIVIER

Heavens, I fear that he will set me to music!

COUNTESS

Is that so bad? Let us wait and hear.

OLIVIER

Wanton destruction!
He will disfigure my verses!

COUNTESS

Perhaps he will give them nobler existence.

OLIVIER

My beautiful poem will drown in his music!

COUNTESS

So deeply concerned for your verse?
In this moment when we are alone?
Is there no prose you wish to deliver?

OLIVIER

My muse is silent. You know I'm on fire!

COUNTESS

That means I am in danger! Don't come too near!
A little patience would be heartily welcome now.

OLIVIER

Always patience ... never fulfillment!

COUNTESS

Hope is divine, fulfillment but earthly.

OLIVIER

Dare I hope, then? Need I not fear?

COUNTESS

Every fire needs constant fanning, lest it should die.
Love is a fire.
Where no hope is, where no fear is,
true love must perish.

OLIVIER

You torture me, Madeleine!
Your radiant eyes make me slave to one single desire:
that all my devotion and all my poems
may win your heart forever!

COUNTESS

He, too, wants to conquer; look at him composing –
his pen has wings!

OLIVIER

Does music's language speak to your heart?

COUNTESS

It awakens mysterious dreams – ineffable ...
a sea of awareness – entrancing beauty!

OLIVIER

The inner clarity of an acute mind...
do you really think so little of that?

COUNTESS

The words of the poet speak to my heart but do not tell me
all that is deep and secret.

OLIVIER

A vague reply.
Why not confess it: a slender physique...
a smooth face, waken the senses;
admit you prefer them to intellect and wit!

COUNTESS

What a trite bit of wisdom! But you forget that here
handsome appearance is combined with talent.

OLIVIER

A correct observation. Won't you take pity?

COUNTESS

On you? On him?
Or both at once?

OLIVIER

Then crown the victor!

FLAMAND

*who has heard the last words, rushes in with a sheet of
music in his hand.*

Here I am!

sits at the harpsichord

COUNTESS

We're listening...

SCENE 6

FLAMAND *sings and plays the sonnet he has just composed*

THE SONNET

Nothing else flames so in my heart,
no, Lady, nothing is there on earth's whole face,
nothing else that I could sigh for as for you,
in vain would Venus herself come down to grant my will.

What joy, what pain your gentle eye bestows;
and if a glance should heighten all that pain...
the next restore my fondest hope and bliss entire;
two glances signify then life ... or death.

And, though I lived five hundred thousand years,
save you, miraculous fair, there could not be
another creature hold sway over me.

Through fresh veins I must needs let flow my blood;
my own with you are filled to overflowing
and new love then could find not room nor pause.

TRIO

Flamand stays at the harpsichord, going over his composition; repeating words of the sonnet throughout.

COUNTESS

The poet's words, how brilliantly clear!
Yet, what was hidden from one, the other perfected.
Where lies the source?
Was it through the words that he found his melody?
Has music been expectantly waiting,
to lovingly embrace the words.
Is language the womb of song?
Or does music gather its lifeblood from words?
One lives in the other and seeks the other.
In music, emotions are yearning for language...
In words lies a craving for sound and music.

OLIVIER *simultaneously*

I knew it, he wrecks my verse.
The precious balance is wholly lost.
The rhymes are destroyed,
the sentences dismembered, arbitrarily dissected
into short and long-held musical noises!
They call them "phrases", the honored musicians!
Who can hear the slightest sense in the text?
The flattering music is bound to triumph.
Lucky man! – My words are like a ladder – the more easily
to reach his victory.

COUNTESS *to the poet*

How lovely the words are, how new is their meaning!
How heartfelt their expression and impetuous their urge!
Well, Olivier, you are silent... so thoughtful?
Are you displeased by the judgment I offer?

OLIVIER

I am wondering if the sonnet is now by him, or by me?
Is it now his poem, or still my own?

COUNTESS

If you permit me, it shall now be mine!
A charming souvenir of this day.

FLAMAND

In all eternity yours, only yours!
And it seems your poetry shines far more brightly!

OLIVIER

You steal my words to flatter the ear.

COUNTESS

Fine thoughts in noble melody,
I cannot think of a better alliance!
To the poet
No matter how you may resent it, dear friend:
To both
you are inseparably united in this sonnet of mine!

DIRECTOR *hurries in*

Forgive me, Madame, I have to abduct him.
We must have the author immediately
at rehearsal ... we need permission to cut his verses.
To the poet
An inspired cut by my expert hand
will give your play a stupendous effect!

OLIVIER

The surgeon La Roche ... now I am in danger!

DIRECTOR *exiting*

The child of your muse has a fine physique, only one arm
is too long.

OLIVIER *exits laughing*

I know your suggestion: you cut off a bit and the hand is
gone!

SCENE 7

FLAMAND *alone with the Countess*

I have revealed my emotions!
Blinded by your beauty,
I stand here at your side
and await my fate.

COUNTESS

You both confuse me, I doubt, I waver...

FLAMAND

Decide, decide now: music ... or poetry?
Flamand, Olivier ... who wins the prize?

COUNTESS

Already the spell of your noble music
had triumphed over the earth-bound words,
when your musical art lifted the words to new glory...
your arts are so closely entwined!

FLAMAND

You are the cause of this terrible tangle!

COUNTESS

All is confusion;
words are singing, music speaks...

FLAMAND

to say I love you!
Sweetest feeling, born suddenly that afternoon,
as you entered your library – you did not see me...
you took a slender volume in your lovely hands.
I sat concealed in an alcove, silent,
did not dare to breathe nor move.
Side by side, you went on reading
and I sat gazing ...
twilight began to fall...
Enchanted ... I drank in your image and closed my eyelids.
Music rustled within me, unreleased;
an ecstasy of emotion.
When I opened my eyes sometime later
you had vanished.

Only the book you had been reading was still there,
in its place...lying open, as you had left it.
I picked it up and read in the twilight:
“In love silence is better than speech.
There is something of eloquence in silence
that is stronger than words
and has more persuasiveness.” *
*[*Pascal*]

Long I lingered,
and still felt the ghosts of your contemplation ...
then came the darkness...

I was alone. Since that hour I am another man.
I draw no breath but in love for you!

COUNTESS *after a short pause*

And you do not take the book's advice to heart.
Why do you shelter behind words?
You borrow from your friend, exchange your callings.

FLAMAND

You heard my declaration of love
but the melodies have still not persuaded your heart.

COUNTESS

You expressed with eloquence all your emotions.

FLAMAND

Then, was I right to dare a confession?

COUNTESS

“The joy of love that we dare not declare has thorns,
but also has its sweetness” *
*[*Pascal*]

FLAMAND

You are quoting the book to hold me off.
An answer I beg,
devastating me or forever bringing me rapture!
Grant me a sign, just one word...

COUNTESS

Not now Flamand, not here!

FLAMAND

When!? Where!?

COUNTESS

Up there, in the room where love came to find you...

FLAMAND

In the library, this evening!

COUNTESS

No, no, tomorrow morning...

FLAMAND

Early morning?

COUNTESS

Midday at eleven.

FLAMAND

Madeleine!

He presses a rapturous kiss on her hand and rushes off.

The Countess remains alone. She is visibly moved. She looks after Flamand and sits thoughtfully in an armchair. The rehearsal continues in the theatre next door. Clairon is heard reciting, the Count answers. Interruptions by the director. The Prompter is called upon. He has fallen asleep. Merriment. Everything is more or less indistinct. The laughter in the theatre rouses the Countess from her thoughtful mood. She rises and rings for the major-domo.

COUNTESS

We shall have chocolate served in here.

The major-domo exits.

SCENE 8

COUNT *entering in high spirits*

It's wonderful to meet her! She is charming, enchanting!

COUNTESS *mockingly*

"I live for the moment!"

COUNT

She praised my diction and said that my acting showed great promise.

COUNTESS

Her frank admiration has made you her captive.
Very sweet to the ear are the words of a flatterer.
Inclining toward love, we soon believe we love those who admire us, and whom we admire, too.

COUNT

A clear mind perceives
and considers the value of all things.

COUNTESS

Don't purchase too dearly, my clever brother!

COUNT

You really think I would lose my head in a game of hearts?

COUNTESS

When one is in love, the heart plays the judge!

COUNT

It would be madness to resist
where Soul and Beauty so divinely rule?

COUNTESS

Bow down, then, to beauty, you are sure of its worth.
My situation is more serious!
Imagine: both have already declared their violent passion for me.

COUNT

It is getting lively! What made them start it?

COUNTESS

The homage of the poet.

COUNT

The sonnet from the play?

COUNTESS

He recited it for me...

COUNT

It moved your heart?

COUNTESS

Not much.

COUNT

So it left you cold?

COUNTESS

No longer, hear me out, since he...

COUNT

Who? Flamand?

COUNTESS

since he set it to music.

COUNT

What? Has he set the sonnet to music?

COUNTESS

To the horror of the poet.

COUNT

And what says Olivier?

COUNTESS

He seemed disgruntled, then he began pondering.
He was visibly moved, amazed anyway.

COUNT *in a gallant, courtly tone*

And the two, together...

COUNTESS *adopting the same tone*

...are storming my heart!

COUNT

What will be the outcome?

COUNTESS

Perhaps ... it might become ... an opera!

COUNT

An opera? Charming! My sister as Muse!

COUNTESS

Don't you start to mock me!
I would like to see you, dear brother, make a choice.

COUNT

Words or music? I stay with the words.

COUNTESS

Good luck with Clairon!

COUNT *with a gallant bow*

Venus and Minerva in one person!

SCENE 9

Clairon, La Roche and Olivier enter cheerfully from the theatre in high spirits; soon after, Flamand enters.

DIRECTOR

We return to the world of the salons...

OLIVIER

The rehearsal is over.

DIRECTOR

we return to this century...

CLAIRON

...we are changing back from a group of mythological figures into humans who play their roles according to the laws of the salons.

COUNT *to Clairon*

Roles we do not always find grateful!

CLAIRON

Does that not depend very much on cues?

COUNTESS

Were you satisfied with your partner's acting?

CLAIRON

He showed much spirit and a flair for the stage.
Think of it! our prompter had fallen asleep...

DIRECTOR

A sorry comment on your drama!

OLIVIER

Your prompter always sleeps!

CLAIRON

...and the Count went on reading with bravura,
not even once forgetting a line.
What a rare case of imperturbability.

COUNT *to Clairon*

May we hope that you will remain
and spend the evening with us?

CLAIRON

Unfortunately, I must go back to Paris.
Tomorrow there is a soirée in the Palais Luxembourg.
We are playing "Tancred" by Monsieur Voltaire.
I still have a great many lines to study.
As you have seen, prompters can sometimes fall asleep.

COUNTESS *to Clairon*

Before you go, a little refreshment.

DIRECTOR

We were nearly in a bewildering ocean of verse.
But I think a cup of chocolate will soon revive us.
And now, permit me, Your Ladyship,
while we enjoy your hospitality and sip this chocolate,
I offer a little change for eye and ear.

At a signal from La Roche, two dancers enter from the theatre. A dancer... and two Italian singers!

COUNTESS

I am sure we shall enjoy ourselves.

The dancers begins a graceful dance. Throughout the dance, the servants unobtrusively serve refreshments.

DANCE 1: PASSEPIED

DIRECTOR *enthusiastically to the Count who is watching the ballerina with great interest*

What do you say? The personification of grace!
My newest discovery! A little dancer from Picardie.
I found her with a Vicomte...

He whispers the name discreetly into the Count's ear, who kept her rather well hidden.

The Count watches the dancer with new interest through his lorgnette.

At the right moment,

I artfully managed to abduct her.

She will now be perfecting her technique
at my ballet school.

Oh! She is unusually talented!

I predict for her a brilliant future
very close to the King!

She will dance tomorrow for the Prince de Conti
in his famous palace.

Notice what splendid control of the body!

And such youth! A dream!

DANCE 2: GIGUE

The following conversation is carried on so that the others cannot hear it. Everyone attentively watches the dance performance.

OLIVIER *sitting by Clairon*

How am I to thank you for having come?
You speak my poems so movingly!

CLAIRON

I am quite determined to give you no more cause for admiration. Keep your compliments to yourself!

OLIVIER

Are you determined that you and I be enemies all our lifetime?

CLAIRON

A profitable talk with you seems to be impossible.

OLIVIER

On the other hand, it appears that very soon the Count and you will converse with gusto.

CLAIRON

A Miracle Bird! a Philosopher!
He spouts worldly wisdom to mask his youth.
I have always mistrusted masked men.

OLIVIER

Your magic personality will captivate him too.

CLAIRON

Since you can predict the future with so much skill, you must also realize that everything is over between us.

OLIVIER

What a very wonderful time it was!

CLAIRON *energetically*

Which has ended in one mighty crash.
The curtain has fallen!

She leaves him and sits by the Count.

DIRECTOR *who has noticed the disagreement, turns to the poet.* Well, I don't believe when she's published her memoirs she'll give you a great hero's role to play.

DANCE 3: GAVOTTE

COUNT *to the ballerina*

Your performance charmed and delighted me.
Just as thoughts may free the mind from the body and lift us into a higher world,
so dance overcomes the force of gravity.
The body seems to hover, accompanied by moving music.
The dancer curtsies and exits, accompanied by La Roche, who comes back immediately.
And now, my dear Flamand, you must admit that here your art is not sovereign, but only, after all, an exquisite accompaniment.

FLAMAND

An enchanting error! If it were not for the Music, no one on earth would ever dream of moving a muscle.

OLIVIER

Dance and music are under the spell of rhythm, its slaves since the beginning of time.

FLAMAND

Your verse's metre is a stronger constraint.

OLIVIER

The poet's thought has free play in it!
Who draws the line between content and form?

FLAMAND

In earthly form an inexpressible-exalted "Music!"
It ascends in spheres which you cannot penetrate with the mind.

OLIVIER

Not in incomprehensible sounds,
but in the clearest language can I form my thoughts.
This is what your music can never achieve.

FLAMAND

My thought is melody,
declaring deeper things, the inexpressible!
In one chord you experience a world!

DIRECTOR

They are fighting, each one claims more importance for his art. Wasted effort!
In my realm of the stage they are all servants.

COUNT

Again we arrive at the argument, always a topic for wide discussion.

FLAMAND

Music is a sublime art!
Only reluctantly does she serve the trickery of the theatre.

COUNTESS

Not trickery! The theatre unveils for us the secrets of reality. In its magic mirror we discover ourselves. Theatre moves us because it is the affecting symbol of life.

DIRECTOR

It is ruled by the Goddess: Imagination. All the arts serve her: poetry, painting, sculpture and music. What would become of your language, and what of your music without declamation and song? Without representation through the actor, his magic personality, without his costume? Eh! without his makeup?

CLAIRON

Indeed! Quite right!

DIRECTOR

You overvalue your labours!

OLIVIER

The poetic spirit is the mirror of the world.
Poetry is the mother of all arts!

FLAMAND

Music is the root from which everything springs.
The sounds of nature sing all other arts to sleep in their cradles!

OLIVIER

Human speech is the only soil from which they sprout.

FLAMAND

The cry of pain preceded language!

OLIVIER

But in language only can sorrow be defined.
The real depth of the Tragic can only be expressed when a poet puts it into words. Music has not the power to ever reveal it!

COUNTESS

That is what you say now, in the moment when a genius proves that it is possible to write a musical tragedy?

COUNT

Stop! One more step and we stand before the abyss!
We are already face to face with an "opera".

COUNTESS

A beautiful sight I venture to say.

CLAIRON

Something peculiar, this hybrid of music and language!

COUNT *interjecting*

And recitatives!

OLIVIER

The composer and poet, each dreadfully hampered by the other, waste unspeakable labour in giving birth to opera.

COUNT

An opera is an absurd thing.
Orders are sung, all affairs of state are discussed in duets.
They dance on graves and suicide takes place melodically.

CLAIRON

I could get used to the idea that in an opera one dies while singing an aria.
But why are the words they sing always worse than the music?
They owe their power of expression wholly to music.

COUNTESS

It is different with Gluck.
He guides the poets, he knows the sorrows of human feeling and awakens our hearts' mysterious powers.

OLIVIER

Yet he too, treats the words as a stepchild of music.

FLAMAND

Only with him music is freed from her servitude!
Words and music, equally important, they sing together.

COUNT

I wish the recitatives were abolished!
Who can bear the unspeakable boredom they produce?

OLIVIER

On they drag, for ever and ever.

COUNT

They have neither the sweetness of melody nor the stimulus of powerful speech.

FLAMAND

You are finding fault with the old-style operas of former days. The "*accompagnato*" of our masters has the power of a classical monologue. The richness of orchestration makes it the great climax in all of his tragedies.

CLAIRON

And the aria? Is it to vanish?

DIRECTOR

The fundamental defect in every opera is the deafening noise of the orchestra. Its roaring and raging swallows the voices. The singers are simply forced into yelling.

COUNT

If the libretto is good or bad, it's unimportant.
Not one word can be understood.

DIRECTOR

What happened to song, the gift of the Gods?
The human voice, the primeval instrument, is subjugated to slavery! Farewell to the great tradition set by the Italian art of singing! *Bel canto* is slowly dying!

CLAIRON

A theatrical death!

OLIVIER

His prophetic oration seems to me somewhat excessive.

COUNTESS *ironically*

Before its life is extinguished, dear La Roche, let us hear your singers! At least when we hear them sing we will have some idea of Italian *bel canto*'s vitality.

At a sign from La Roche, the Italian soprano and the Italian tenor enter.

FLAMAND *ironically*

Give us an example of your "subservient" art!

DIRECTOR

You will hear a duet out of an Italian opera which has a text by Metastasio.

COUNTESS

It will put a soothing finish to our discussion.

The singers begin their duet. The Count gallantly brings Clairon another cup of chocolate and sits by her.

DUET OF THE ITALIAN SINGERS

TENOR

Farewell, my life, farewell, do not weep at my fate;
I am not wretched; you are faithful and I know it.

SOPRANO

If I die without you at my side, idol of my heart
If Fate takes you from me, idol of my heart
with your fine, beloved name on my lips, I shall die.

Farewell, light of my eyes!

You are faithful and I know it.

COUNTESS

A very cheerful "Addio"!

Don't you think so too, Flamand?

The words do not seem to suit the music very well.

COUNT

Bravo! Bravo! In a lovely *cantilena*,
no one cares if the words make any sense or not.

FLAMAND

All the same, it is still an art to use so cheerful a tune to express a terrible sorrow.

OLIVIER

Such an art has one advantage: though the subject may be gruesome, we feel agreeably consoled.

TENOR

When you are faithful to me, what more should I desire?

SOPRANO

When my beloved is lost, what can I hope for?

TENOR

A tender contentment such as I feel...

SOPRANO

A barbaric agony such as I feel...

BOTH

Gods, who has ever felt this before?

Farewell, my life! Farewell!

Friendly applause from all sides. The Countess invites the singers to have some refreshments. The Count and Clairon remain seated.

COUNT

May I take you back to Paris, Clairon, and spend a little more time in your company?

CLAIRON

I must work on my role for tomorrow. Would you read cues for me?

COUNT

I will be your servant in all things!

CLAIRON

You should not say that.

COUNT

Why should I not say it?

CLAIRON

Because I am certain that you seldom say just what you are thinking.

COUNT

So you guess my thoughts?

CLAIRON

Do you believe that is difficult?

COUNT

Your cues are not always easily answered.

CLAIRON

If you think no harm will come to your philosophy,
certainly you may escort me.

COUNT

You make me happy!

CLAIRON

You have a cultured mind. I have no doubt that you can
phrase many such platitudes politely.

COUNTESS *to La Roche*

Will your Neapolitans also take part
in my birthday celebrations?

DIRECTOR

Indeed, indeed, however they are only one small detail in
my great and elaborate plan.

OLIVIER

We have waited in vain for days for the unveiling of your
magnificent programme.

FLAMAND

We are thirsty for information of its splendid features.

COUNTESS

Won't you finally reveal to us your great programme!

DIRECTOR

The Homage-Play, the stupendous "*azione teatrale*"
played by my whole ensemble, has two parts.
The first is an allegory, an exalted living tableau:
"The Birth of Pallas Athena."
From the head of Zeus she issues forth!

COUNT

How's that?

DIRECTOR

So it is told in the legend:
after he and Metis conceive the child,
he devours the mother...

COUNT

What? He swallowed her?

FLAMAND and OLIVIER

Swallowed?

COUNTESS and CLAIRON

Swallowed?

OLIVIER

He devoured her like a pike, his delicate sweetheart...

CLAIRON

For love?

COUNT

How tender!

COUNTESS

For love?

COUNT

For hunger!

FLAMAND

From fear of Juno!

DIRECTOR *carries on*

In him grows the daughter.

OLIVIER

His lover hidden from the jealous wife!

CLAIRON

A very funny way to hide an indiscretion.

DIRECTOR

the child of his spirit steps suddenly from the head of the
God!

OLIVIER

And Zeus?

DIRECTOR

In shining armor, welcomed by the chorus!

OLIVIER

He feels well with such a delivery?

DIRECTOR

The earth starts to quake...

FLAMAND

A torturing headache seems unavoidable!

DIRECTOR

...the sun stands still!

CLAIRON

And the mother? What happens to her?

DIRECTOR

Drums and cymbals...

FLAMAND

She disappears without a trace.

DIRECTOR

...depict the agitation of the universe.

OLIVIER

She lies in his stomach.

COUNT

An amusing idea!

OCTET PART 1

LAUGHING ENSEMBLE

COUNTESS

They laugh at him and he means it so seriously.
His dignity is charming! He is really touching,
the old man in his youthful enthusiasm.
His imagination blossoms in strangest fashion.
His naiveté is completely enchanting!

CLAIRON

He is always a daring innovator!
He puts Zeus in a disagreeable predicament.
A singular manifestation of paternal joy!
Bizarre thought! A poetic idea!

COUNT

These theatre people are complete idiots!
They live in the moonshine of their ideas!
She comes out of his head in full armour!
Queer idea for my sister's birthday surprise!

ITALIAN TENOR

He will lose his temper.

ITALIAN SOPRANO

This cake is wonderful! Have some, Gaetano!

ITALIAN TENOR

We'll not get our money today.

ITALIAN SOPRANO

I told you to demand it before we came here!

ITALIAN TENOR

He was never alone; how could I?

ITALIAN SOPRANO

This delectable cake melts in your mouth! Take some!

ITALIAN TENOR

She eats and drinks ... and drinks and eats!

ITALIAN SOPRANO

Don't shout at me! ... Sicilian oranges with no pits!
A real pleasure!

ITALIAN TENOR *bellowing at her*

Don't drink so much Spanish wine!

FLAMAND

Before our eyes, from his mighty head she slips! Ha! Ha!
In full armour with shield and spear!!
With drums and cymbals ! Tschin! Tschin! Boom Boom!
"The sun stands still"!

OLIVIER

I can see the miracle of his directing:
Hephaistos appears, the mighty smith!
He swings his hammer with shattering impact!
He splits the skull of Zeus so this child of the God, fully
armed, can get out.
Light of the world! The fruit of his passion!
His skull throbs... he's relieved!
Choruses cheer the divine delivery.

DIRECTOR

I believe those two are laughing at me!
Superficial snobs, they treat my mythology as a joke
Present-day youth has no respect...
Nothing is sacred! No understanding of my inspiration!
Pack of atheists! They are heading for a hopeless future!
Laughing in their ignorance!
Present-day youth has no respect!

COUNTESS

I feel he has been offended by our laughter.
He seems resentful, I must appease him.
turns to La Roche
We are astonished by your imagination.
We doubt whether your daring plan can be realized on the
stage. Do not take our pessimism too seriously.
Be gentle with us – we are merely amateurs.
Your great skill on the stage will teach us better!
And what is the subject of the second part of your
spectacle?

DIRECTOR

It is heroic and highly dramatic: "The Fall of Carthage."
The backdrops and scenery are splendidly done;
machinery and people in vivid commotion.
The town in flames – a sea of fire – breathtaking!
Transparent scenery ...
cut-glass columns of Bohemian glass,
lit from behind in flaming red!
Mirrors of fire – glass prisms!
Four thousand candles – a hundred flambeaus!
Pitch-rings, torches of all sizes!
A galley of my own construction, pitching and tossing!

Lightning and thunderbolts in the middle of the stage...
the sails in flames - a burning wreck!
Tidal wave in the harbour! The palace falls in ruins...

FLAMAND

Enough! Enough! We know what is coming!

OLIVIER

At the end, a gorgeous ballet in the ruins!

OCTET PART 2

QUARRELLING ENSEMBLE

DIRECTOR

But listen! It will end quite differently!

FLAMAND

Old-fashioned rubbish!

OLIVIER

Machine-made conjuring!

FLAMAND

Triumphal marches!

OLIVIER

Water-music!

FLAMAND

Senseless processions!

OLIVIER

Boring pomp!

FLAMAND

Apotheosis! Floods! Supers and torches!

OLIVIER

Old rubbish!

COUNTESS

My attempted rescue is an utter failure.

An unenviable situation! Who will it be?

Their arguments are overwhelming! How unfair!

These two are really going too far! They are getting cruel!

Now the quarrel is serious...

He seems lost! But why are they so violently antagonistic?

I am afraid the quarrel will have an unpleasant end.

COUNT

Now it becomes serious!

A lively dispute! An exquisite sight!

They pound on him as if they had him in a mortar....

The noble arts get in each other's hair...

their apostles squabble among themselves...

they show their teeth and start to brawl.

What ridiculous importance they put on trifles!

They tear him in tatters

because he wanted to entertain us

with a spectacular ballet!

La Roche in a fix! An exquisite sight!

He is aghast and cannot speak a word!

Now where is his much-vaunted repartee?

How will he get out of it?

FLAMAND

A spectacle where scenery plays the principal parts!

Your entertainment is like a ghost from another age!

There was not a word said about music!

OLIVIER

A play without actors!

He saves the cost of a poet ... what need of lines?

FLAMAND and OLIVIER

Words or music? What a question!

"Flying Machines or trap-doors" it should be called!

Empty, insipid theatre of an antiquated epoch!

Senselessly harmful and ridiculous!

OLIVIER

Transparent scenery?

FLAMAND

Why have an orchestra?

The thunder-machine gives better service!

OLIVIER

Where does singing come in?

FLAMAND

On top of all this they will sing Italian!

Trills... runs! Cadenzas! Cadenzas!

FLAMAND and OLIVIER

"Veto!" "Veto!"

We will have nothing more to do with your arts!

Your days are over! Passé! Passé!

CLAIRON

Don't worry! A fight between men always ends with one

victor! When they've talked themselves to a standstill,

he will be ready with his answer.

Calm yourself, he is not shy. I know him!

His power of resistance is not easily broken!

His power of persuasion has laid many low.

He does not need your protection.

He can look after himself. Do not deceive yourself!

He will take terrible revenge! He summons his strength,
then he will strike home.

Look, now he is ready! His plan is complete!

DIRECTOR

Give me a chance to speak! You are mistaken!
You judge too soon! I have not yet finished!
Why these reproaches? You're mistaken:
Why this abuse? Ridiculous cholera!
Let me explain to you! Let me finish before you judge!
I beg you... but...

ITALIAN TENOR

There goes our advance for today!!

ITALIAN SOPRANO *tipsily starts to sing the melody of the duet*

Farewell beloved payment...
do not bemoan our fate!

ITALIAN TENOR *Joining in the parody*

I am ready to die! disgraced as I am!

ITALIAN SOPRANO and TENOR

If we lose our advance
what have we to hope for?
When we are without money,
what can I possibly do?
A sad grief
Gods, who has ever suffered that before?
Farewell my beloved payment,
in vain have we hoped!

DIRECTOR

Hola! You ignorant fools!
You mock and abuse my splendid theatre?
What gives you the right to speak with such arrogance and
insult me, the real expert?
You, who have never yet done a thing for the theatre?!
To Olivier. Your verse is lovely – when Clairon recites it!
But the sparse action of your dramas – their dramatic
construction?
Weak indeed unless I am there to produce them!
To Flamand. Your little ensembles for stringed
instruments: graceful chamber music!
They delight the salon.
I slept, unfortunately, through today's.
These trifling little romances you do quite nicely, but
music that speaks of human passion, which the stage
demands, you have so far not achieved!

No, no, your veto does not make me tremble!
What do you youngsters know of my troubles?
Look at the tawdry farces, in which our capital takes such
pleasure. The grimace is their symbol – the parody their
element, their content profligate insolence!
Obscene, clumsy and boorish are their jokes!
The masks are discarded
but you see gargoyles instead of human faces!

You despise these lewd doings and yet you suffer them.
You share the guilt because of your silence.

Don't march your phalanx against me!
I serve the eternal laws of the theatre.
I preserve the good, that belongs to us,
the art of our fathers I hold aloft.
I reverently preserve the old, hoping patiently for the
fruitful new, expecting the works of genius of our time!

Where are the masterpieces that touch the heart of the
people, that reflect their souls? Where are they?
I cannot find them, hard though I search.

Only cold-blooded scholars stare at me:
they ridicule tradition yet bring nothing new!
In their dramas cardboard heroes strut,
drawing their swords and brandishing tirades
that are too familiar for years.

In opera the same:
grizzled priests and Greek kings from gray antiquity,
Druids, prophets stalk like phantoms from the wings.
I want to people my stage with human beings!
People who resemble us and speak in our language!
Let their sorrows move us deeply
and let their joys fill our hearts with gladness!

Up! Arise and create the works for which I am searching!
I will produce them marvellously,
they will have a brilliant success!
Sharpen your wits, give to the theatre new laws –
modern new topics!
If not, then cease pestering me with your criticism!

Today, at the very peak of my brilliant career,
I dare to speak of myself –
of myself, the discoverer of great talents –
who has trained, developed and inspired them!

Without men of my kind, what would become of our
theatre? Without my audacious daring, and finally –
without my helping hand?
Money at the right moment can dispel the deepest
depression and can bring flagging vigor back to the artist.

One of many examples: the famous Lekain, once a
dispirited extra, now a star at the Palais-Royal, is my
creation and has made his way through me!

Admit your defeat, you fanciers, you dreamers!
Respect the dignity of my stage!
My endeavour is honest;
my merits uncontested!
I fight for the beauty and the noble dignity of the theatre.

With these words in my heart I live my life for the theatre,
and I will live on within the pages of its great history!
“*Sic itur ad astra!*”

On my tombstone you will read the inscription:
“Here lies LA ROCHE, the unforgettable,
the immortal theatre director.
The friend of comedy, the patron of tragic art.
A father of the stage, a guardian-angel of artists.
The Gods loved him, mankind admired him!”

Stormy applause

CLAIRON *goes up to the director and gives him an
enthusiastic kiss on the cheek*
La Roche, you are great! La Roche, you are monumental!

ITALIAN SOPRANO *begins to sob tipsily*

ITALIAN TENOR *irritated*
What’s the matter? He is not dead yet!
Don’t make a scene here!
He leads the loudly weeping soprano out.

COUNTESS
You heard our friend’s warning voice!
Do not fail to heed him.
Set to the task he demands, apply his skill to both your
arts. Create together a work for our festivity!

COUNT *to Clairon*
I shudder at the thought, she is commissioning an opera!

COUNTESS
In angry dispute, you have attacked each other,
tried to disprove each other.
Forsake the aberrations of thought!
Feel with me that all arts have but one homeland:
our heart craves Beauty!
A tender seed has sprouted today –
I see it growing to a mighty tree,
showering its rain of blossoms over us!

CLAIRON *leading the poet and musician solemnly to the
Countess. With theatrical emotion.*
The Goddess Harmony is come among us.
Unite, ye Arts, to honour and receive her!

COUNTESS
To Flamand. To the sweet impulse Apollo has endowed
upon you, may the poet give his noble thoughts!
To Olivier. What the genius of poetry has so splendidly
begun, be glorified through the power of music!
Pointing to La Roche. May it take shape on his stage,
to move hearts with its dignity and grace.

To all three. The happy alliance unites all arts.
They yield lovingly to each other,
joyously preparing the festive play!

OLIVIER
What emerges godlike from the ether?

OLIVIER
What purest melodies enchant our ears?

FLAMAND and OLIVIER
The goddess Harmony is among us!
Let us welcome her with homage; loudly greet her.

CLAIRON
What unexpected fortune guides her footsteps here?
The supreme Goddess deigns to settle your dispute.

DIRECTOR
Who can escape from her power?

FLAMAND and OLIVIER
Enough of this fruitless strife!

DIRECTOR
She shall precede us all and light our way.

CLAIRON
Upon your road may she guide you,
and never leave your close circle of friends.

OLIVIER, FLAMAND, and LA ROCHE
We want to forget what divided us
and, reconciled, return to our ordained work

COUNT
That is more than a reconciliation...that is a conspiracy!
And I am the victim – my fears are justified!

COUNTESS
We will have a new opera, you cannot stop it.
Bear your fate philosophically!

COUNT
What else can I do but endure it!
The unavoidable takes its course,
an opera is about to descend on me!

CLAIRON *to the Count*
Your laments fall on deaf ears.

COUNTESS *to Clairon*
My brother is not very musical.
He is partial to Triumphal Marches and
in opera, regards composers as “word-murderers”.

CLAIRON

Perhaps he is right.

DIRECTOR

Now straight to work, there is no time to be lost.
To Flamand. The aria shall reign! Always consider the singers – keep the orchestra quiet! When you write the great ballet, then let yourself go.

OLIVIER *ironically*

Out come the relics of his rich experience.

DIRECTOR

To Olivier. The Primadonna's scene not in the beginning of the piece. Comprehensible verses, and oft-repeated, then there is a chance that they will be understood.

FLAMAND

Forget your time-honoured rules.
We want to seek new paths!

DIRECTOR

Do not exaggerate your own importance!
In the end your success lies in my hands.
Anyway – we will divide the labour fairly.
You have to begin, decide on the subject!

OLIVIER *to the Countess*

How would you like “Ariadne auf Naxos”?

FLAMAND

Already set too often.

DIRECTOR

The famous opportunity for many, very long mourning-arias

FLAMAND

I would be far more interested in “Daphne”.

OLIVIER

A fascinating tale, but what a problem in the staging:
Daphne's transformation into Apollo's eternal tree...

FLAMAND

The miracle of music can realize it!

COUNTESS

A beautiful subject, it is a particular favorite of mine.

DIRECTOR

Nymphs and shepherds all over again. Gods and Greeks!
You yourselves were against mythology.

COUNT

Commonplace things ... Only the Trojan War is missing!

DIRECTOR

We have enough Egyptians and Jews, Persians and Romans in our operas. Choose a subject that describes conflicts which concern us too.

COUNT

I know a particularly captivating theme!
Write an opera just as he would like it.
Describe conflicts that concern us.
Portray yourselves! The events of today, as we have lived them – write – and compose them,
compose them as an opera!

OLIVIER

An astonishing idea!

FLAMAND

I cannot deny it.

COUNT

That would be a theme to interest us too!

COUNTESS

A delightful suggestion!

CLAIRON

We are falling from one surprising situation into another!

DIRECTOR

A real problem, to stage something like that.

OLIVIER *thoughtfully*

Little action...

COUNT

Show us that you can create something unusual.

FLAMAND

The music is there.

COUNT

We are the characters of your opera.
We shall all take part in your piece.

COUNTESS

Will this be an amusing opera?

DIRECTOR *interjecting*

I already see myself as a Bass-buffo...

COUNT *answering the Countess*

In any case an opera without “heroes”!

DIRECTOR

Who is the lover?

CLAIRON

I believe there are only a few people who are not.

OLIVIER *to Flamand*

And which of us do you take for the tenor?

COUNT

Don't divulge all of your professional secrets.

CLAIRON

Neatly parried! I congratulate you, dear Count.
You have set that trio a difficult problem.

COUNTESS

Your suggestion is a bit malicious.

OLIVIER

The idea is delightful, what d'you say, La Roche?
You might say that a blind hen...

DIRECTOR

...has laid an egg!

OLIVIER

Why?

DIRECTOR

Why not?

COUNTESS

You seem quite shocked!

DIRECTOR

This is the last suggestion I should have expected!

COUNTESS

Do you find it bad?

DIRECTOR

No, no, but when you think of it, my Lady, I am afraid –
the whole thing will be one great indiscretion!

COUNTESS

It will depend upon your taste to present it gracefully on
the stage.

CLAIRON

Only indiscreet plays are successful!

OLIVIER

I find the idea quite excellent
and I'll immediately draft the scenario.

CLAIRON

It is already late, I have to go to Paris

DIRECTOR

We too must leave.

To Olivier and Flamand. Will you come with me?

COUNTESS *to Clairon*

We have detained you here all too long.

CLAIRON

In your salon the hours pass, yet time never grows old.
My Lady!

COUNTESS

Write me a good part, Olivier!

The Countess exits. Flamand and Olivier follow her to the door.

SCENE 10

DIRECTOR *to the Italian singers*

Wrap yourselves up well so you do not catch cold on the
journey!

The tenor is about to speak.

Yes, yes, your advance – you will have it tomorrow.

COUNTESS *to a servant*

Are the horses harnessed?

SERVANT

At your service. Four horses.

CLAIRON *taking the arm of the Count*

I should have expected at least six.

They exit animatedly.

FLAMAND *to Olivier*

First the words, then the music.

The words take precedence.

OLIVIER

No, the music ... but borne out of the words.

FLAMAND *to himself*

(First the music...)

To Olivier, referring to the Countess. She has decided!

He leaves. La Roche returns.

DIRECTOR

Come, come, do not keep me waiting!

OLIVIER

(Yes... for the word! First the words.)

DIRECTOR

It is time to take leave of this day.
We can still discuss several things
for our opera on the journey.
To Olivier. Don't forget my big scene
when writing your scenario:
how I direct the rehearsal in the theatre.
A Field Marshal of the stage!
It can become the climax of your piece!
And above all things: see that I have good exits in my part!
You know, the effective exits – a decisive moment for the
success – the last impression of a character.

All three exit.

SCENE 11

Eight servants enter and begin to tidy up.

THE SERVANTS

That was a fine noise... and all confused!

1st SERVANT

The Italian woman has a healthy appetite, there's nothing
left of the cake.

2nd SERVANT

What did the Director want with his long speech?

3rd SERVANT

He even spoke Greek!

4th SERVANT

I did not understand a word.

5th SERVANT

It is about reforms in the theatre
that he wants to introduce before he dies.

6th SERVANT

I suppose now they will even want domestics to appear in
their operas.

ALL

The whole world is mad, everyone plays theatre.
They never will fool us, we see behind the scenery.
There things look quite different.
The Count is after tender adventure,
the Countess is in love...and does not know with whom.

1st SERVANT

Perhaps with both.

2nd SERVANT

And to make up her mind she lets them write her an opera.

4th SERVANT

How can you learn from an opera?

5th SERVANT

Muddled stuff!

1st SERVANT

They have it sung so you don't understand the words.

4th SERVANT

And that is very necessary, or else you would rack your
brains about the muddled content.

5th SERVANT

Stop your presumptuous prattle!

3rd SERVANT

I admire the tight-rope dancers and their acts. Their troupe
has the King's warrant. I've seen them in Versailles.

4th SERVANT

I too! Splendid, I tell you! And afterwards that gruesome
piece: Coriolan, who stabs his own daughter.

2nd SERVANT

I like the marionettes better.

3rd SERVANT

Arlecchino is still funnier!

1st SERVANT

Shouldn't we too act something amusing on our
Countess's birthday?

A tale with masks? I know the Brighella of the Italian
troupe, he'll certainly help us.

5th SERVANT

Quiet, the Master's coming.

MAJOR-DOMO *enters*

Finish here quickly, then lay supper!

After that you are free!

SERVANTS

What a pleasure, an evening without guests!

Now to the kitchen, to see what there is. Supper will soon
be served and after that free!

They exit

*It is getting dark. The major-domo busies himself lighting
the chandelier. As he is about to leave, a noise is heard
from the theatre and an anxious voice calling "Director,
Director".*

SCENE 12

MONSIEUR TAUPE

Director...

MAJOR-DOMO

Where do you come from? Who are you?

MONSIEUR TAUPE

Don't be frightened! Where should you know me from?
I rarely move on the earth's surface.

MAJOR-DOMO

What do you mean by that?

MONSIEUR TAUPE

I spend my life under the Earth. Invisible...

MAJOR-DOMO

But for me you are very visible.

MONSIEUR TAUPE

I am the invisible ruler of a magical world.

MAJOR-DOMO

Why do you come out of the dark hall?

MONSIEUR TAUPE

I had fallen asleep. They have forgotten me in there.

MAJOR-DOMO

Won't you finally tell me who you are?

MONSIEUR TAUPE

I am the prompter ... they all call me Monsieur Taupe.

MAJOR-DOMO

I am delighted to meet you, Monsieur Taupe, and to
welcome you to our real world.

MONSIEUR TAUPE *tired*

Only a visit, Sir, and only a short one. Don't make a fuss
about it.

MAJOR-DOMO

You are a strange man, and it seems to me, of some
importance.

MONSIEUR TAUPE

Yes, yes, you are right. Only when I sit in my box
does the great wheel of the theatre begin to turn!

MAJOR-DOMO

You are the one, so to speak, who puts it in motion?

MONSIEUR TAUPE

The deep thoughts of our poets,
I whisper them to myself in a quiet voice
and everything comes to life.
Reality is mirrored in front of me
like uncanny phantoms.
My own whispering lulls me to sleep.
If I sleep, I become an event!
The actors cease to speak – and the audience wakes up!

MAJOR-DOMO

Well said! Well said!

MONSIEUR TAUPE

Only my sleep saves me from oblivion.

MAJOR-DOMO

But this time you have been forgotten.

MONSIEUR TAUPE

How badly they treat me!

MAJOR-DOMO

That is a fate you share with all rulers!

MONSIEUR TAUPE

They left me in the lurch and they have all gone.
How shall I now get back to Paris?

MAJOR-DOMO

It is too far to walk.
Come with me into the pantry, fortify yourself a bit.
In the meantime, I will have a coach made ready.

MONSIEUR TAUPE

You are very kind!

MAJOR-DOMO

Follow me! *Exits*

MONSIEUR TAUPE

Is all this a dream? ... or am I already awake?

He shakes his head, yawns, and follows the major-domo.

FINAL SCENE

The stage remains empty for a time. The room is dark. Moonlight on the terrace. The Countess enters in evening dress. Orchestral interlude. After a while, the Major-Domo enters to light the candles.

COUNTESS

Where is my brother?

MAJOR-DOMO

His Lordship has accompanied Mademoiselle Clairon to Paris. He apologizes that he will not be here this evening.

COUNTESS

Then I shall dine alone.
An enviable disposition! The fleeting attracts him.
What was it he said today? "Blithely decide – carefree possess! Joy of the moment – wisdom of life!"
How simple!
To the Major-Domo Anything else?

MAJOR-DOMO

Monsieur Olivier will pay his respects after breakfast tomorrow, to learn from Her Ladyship how the opera shall end.

COUNTESS

How the opera shall end? When is he coming?

MAJOR-DOMO

He will wait in the library.

COUNTESS

In the library? When?

MAJOR-DOMO

Tomorrow morning at eleven.
Bows and exits

COUNTESS

Tomorrow morning at eleven! It is a disaster.
Since that sonnet they are inseparable.
Flammand will be a little disappointed
to find my Monsieur Olivier in the library instead of me.

And I? The ending of the opera...
I must determine it, I must choose... decide?
Is it the words that move my heart,
or is it the music that speaks more strongly?

She takes the copy of the sonnet, sits at the harp and accompanies herself as she sings the sonnet.
Nothing else flames so in my heart
no, Lady, nothing is there on earth's whole face,
nothing else that I could sigh for as for you,
in vain would Venus herself come down to grant my will.

What joy, what pain your gentle eye bestows;
and if a glance should heighten all that pain...
the next restore my fondest hope and bliss entire;
two glances signify then life ... or death.

She interrupts herself

Fruitless effort to separate the two. Words and Music are fused into one ... bound in a new synthesis. Secret of the hour... one art redeemed by the other!

And, though I lived five hundred thousand years,
save you, miraculous fair, there could not be
another creature hold sway over me.

Through fresh veins I must needs let flow my blood,
my own with you are filled to overflowing,
and new love then could find not room nor pause.

Their love enfolds me, tenderly woven out of verses and sounds. Shall I destroy this fabric?
Am I myself not already woven into it?
Decide for one?
For Flamand, the great spirit with the beautiful eyes –
for Olivier, the powerful mind, the passionate man?

She looks into the mirror.

Now, dear Madeleine, what says your heart?
You are loved, but whom do you love now?
You found it sweet not to know...
you sought to make a pact with love,
and now you yourself are in flames
and cannot save yourself!
In choosing the one you will lose the other!
Does one not always lose, when one wins?
You look back at me ironically?
I want an answer and not your questioning look!
You do not answer?

Do you want to be consumed between two fires?
You mirrored image of Madeleine in love,
can you advise me, can you help me to find the ending...
the ending for their opera?
Is there one that is not trivial?

Major-Domo enters.

MAJOR-DOMO

Your Ladyship, supper is served.

The Countess looks smiling into the mirror and then makes her farewell with a deep, graceful curtsy. Cheerfully humming the melody of the sonnet, she walks slowly past the major-domo into the dining room.

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