John Corigliano

The Ghosts of Versailles

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PRODUCTION NOTE

The basic premise of **The Ghosts of Versailles** is that a group of ghosts is watching an opera. Because of this structure, the opera takes place on three planes of reality:
1) The world of eternity, inhabited by ghosts
2) The world of the stage, populated by dramatic characters
3) The world of history, populated by mortals

Our opera begins in the ghost world, which is the most fantastic and the most contemporary. It enters the stage world when spectral playwright Beaumarchais raises the curtain on *A Figaro for Antonia*, the buffa-within-the-opera that he has written to amuse Marie Antoinette two hundred years after their deaths.

The ghostly characters watching the onstage production are fantasy creatures themselves. If the makeup or costumes of the onstage characters outdo those of the ghosts, or if the sets are too ambiguous or surrealistic, it will be difficult for the audience to distinguish among the worlds. Therefore, the production on the stage-within-a-stage should almost always be more realistic than the ghost world.

The ghost and the stage worlds are distinct until the second scene of Act II, when Beaumarchais enters the opera-within-the-opera and Figaro is summoned by Marie Antoinette to the afterworld. At the point the two worlds blend and we enter a third realm: the historical (or objective) universe of the Paris streets, the Almaviva ballroom, and the Place de la Révolution. The scenic design of this last world should be grand operatic: representational sets, realistic costumes.

The Ghosts of Versailles represents a journey from the most fantastic to the most realistic. In the last scene, however, all three planes are juxtaposed: the historical Marie Antoinette is executed in the Place de la Révolution, the cast of *A Figaro for Antonia* makes their escape to London in a balloon, and the ghosts of the queen and Beaumarchais walk off together into the land of eternal delight — the gardens of Aguas Frescas.

— William H. Hoffman

The Ghosts of Versailles

Libretto . . . . . HL 50481578
Vocal Score . . . . . HL 50482739
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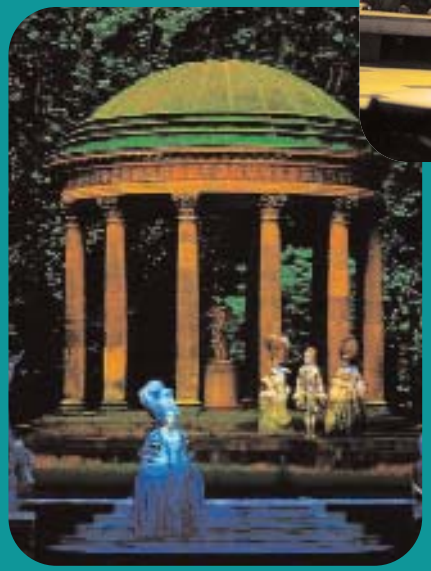
John Corigliano

The Ghosts of Versailles

"may be the most popular full-length opera written in half a century"
— The New York Times



The Ghosts of Versailles

Music by John Corigliano
Libretto by William M. Hoffman

PREMIERES

WORLD
Metropolitan Opera
December 1991

REDUCED VERSION
Opera Theatre of St. Louis
June 2009

PRESS

Stripped of big sets and big names, it's now primarily about human relationships and human truths. As a result, it resonates far longer in the heart.
— Sarah Bryan Miller, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

CAST LIST

PRINCIPALS (14 soloists playing one role only)
- FLORESTINE - High Lyric or Coloratura Soprano
- MARIE ANTOINETTE - Lyric or Lirico-spinto Soprano
- ROSINA - Lyric Soprano
- SUSANNA - Mezzo-soprano (or Mezzo-contralto)
- ALMAVIVA - Lyric Tenor
- LÉON - Lyric Tenor
- PATRICK HONORÉ BÉGEARSS - Dramatic Tenor
- BEAUMARCHAIS - High Lyric Baritone
- FIGARO - Lyric Baritone
- LOUIS XVI - Bass
- GHOST QUARTET - Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass

ASSOCIATE PRINCIPALS (4 soloists playing one main role among other supporting roles)

CHERUBINO - High Lyric Mezzo-soprano
also plays Figaro Pursuer 5/Turkish Embassy Pursuer6/ Revolutionary Woman 5

SAMIRA - Mezzo-soprano
also plays Figaro Pursuer 6/Revolutionary Woman 6

WILHELM - Baritone and spoken part
also plays Other Man (Fig. Pursuer 9)/(T.E. Pursuer10)/ Juror 2/Finale Pursuer 10

SULEYMAN PASHA - Basso Profundo
also plays Muscovite 3/Juror 4/Prisoner 1/Finale Pursuer 12

ENSEMBLE (10 soloists playing multiple supporting roles)
4S, 2Mz, 2T, 2B
play Pursuers of Figaro, Turkish duelists, page, dancing and harem girls, "rheita" players, acrobats, revolutionary guards, revolutionary women, courtiers, dancers, prison guards, prisoners, soldiers

ORCHESTRA

FULL ORCHESTRA VERSION
3(2pic).3(ca).3(Ebcl,bcl).3(cbn)/4431/timp.4perc/hp.pf(cel).Kurzweil K-2500 synthesizer/str

REDUCED ORCHESTRA VERSION — premiered by Opera Theatre of St. Louis, June 2009
2(2pic).2(ca).2(Ebcl,bcl).2(cbn)/2220/timp(perc).3perc/hp.pf(cel).Kurzweil K-2500 synthesizer/str (66443 players)

ABOUT THE ORCHESTRA AND CAST
The original production included ensembles onstage:
players = hpd, man, gtr, hp, vn, va, 3vc, 2db; rheita band = ob, 2perc; ball orch = fl, vn, va, vc; marchers = 2hn, [opt 2tpt, perc]
In the full orchestra version, the parts for these players can be distributed and covered by players in the pit or by the synthesizer. These are incorporated into the pit orchestra parts in the reduced orchestra version. Major productions to date, including the premiere, cast more singers than are actually required by the list of major and supporting roles. The opera requires only a minimum of twenty-eight performers to fulfill its casting requirements.

SYNOPSIS

Act One

The ghosts of the court of Louis XVI arrive at the theatre of Versailles. Bored and listless, even the King is uninterested when Beaumarchais arrives and declares his love for the Queen. As Marie Antoinette is too haunted by her execution to reciprocate his love, Beaumarchais announces his intention to change her fate through the plot of his new opera 'A Figaro for Antonia.'

The cast of the opera-within-the-opera is introduced. Following the familiar escapades of the Figaro characters, Almaviva has divorced the Countess after she had a son, Leon, with Cherubino. Leon wants to marry Florestine, Almaviva's illegitimate daughter, but the Count has forbidden the union as retribution for his wife's infidelity and has promised Florestine instead to Bégearss.

Figaro enrages the Count by warning him that his trusted Bégearss is in fact a revolutionary spy. Figaro is fired, but overhears Bégearss and his servant Wilhelm hatching a plot to arrest the Count that evening at the Turkish Embassy when he sells the Queen's necklace to the English Ambassador. Figaro intercepts the plot by infiltrating the party, dressed as a dancing girl. During the outrageous performance of the Turkish singer Samira, Figaro steals the necklace from the Count before the sale can take place, and runs away.

Act Two

Figaro returns only to defy Beaumarchais's intention that he return the necklace to the queen, as he wants to sell it to help the Almavivas escape. To put the story back on course, Beaumarchais enters the opera and shocks Figaro into submission by allowing him to witness the unfair trial of Marie.

The Count, swayed by his wife's wishes, rescinds his offer to Bégearss of his daughter's hand. Even though Figaro gives him the necklace, Bégearss is enraged and sends the Spaniards to the prison where Marie Antoinette lingers.

Beaumarchais and Figaro, the only two to escape, arrive at the prison to try to rescue the Almavivas. They are shortly followed by Bégearss whom Figaro denounces to the revolutionaries, revealing that he has kept the necklace rather than using it to feed the poor. Bégearss is carried off, the Almavivas escape to America and Beaumarchais is left with the keys to the Queen's cell. But the power of his love has made the Queen accept her fate and she refuses to let Beaumarchais alter the course of history. Marie is executed, and the pair is united in Paradise.

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