

LULLY & MOLIÈRE



THE BALLET OF THE TWO JEAN-BAPTISTE
RIVALRIES AT THE COURT OF LOUIS XIV



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Happy birthday, Molière! Le Poème Harmonique and Vincent Dumestre are celebrating the life and work of one of France's most distinguished playwrights to coincide with the four hundredth anniversary of his birth in 2022. An opportunity to explore the "soundtrack" of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, and *La Pastorale comique*, the programme centres on pieces written specially for his plays, but rarely performed. When Jean-Baptiste met Jean-Baptiste!

Following the death of his chief minister, Mazarin, in 1661, the newly married Sun King took control of his kingdom. The same year, Molière, who lived in Paris, and the composer Lully, who was based in Florence, presented *Les Fâcheux*, their first *comédie-ballet*, at Vaux-le-Vicomte, the chateau built for the king's superintendent of finances, Nicolas Fouquet. Over the course of the next decade, a period we associate with fun and festivities, their inventiveness was played out in multiple ways. A genre of French drama which combines a spoken play with interludes of music and dance, these works brought to life a cosmopolitan and whimsical world of Neapolitan rascals around Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, and fake Turks with their famous march who confer on Monsieur Jourdain the title of the new mamamouchi. Although often used to accompany crazily carnivalesque scenes featuring singers and theatre dancers, interspersed with chaconnes and passepieds, the music performed in their productions could also usher in pastoral serenity, as in *George Dandin*, with its paradisiacal *airs de*

bergers, and the meandering love affair of *Psyché*, which pours out into an Italian lament. Having gained royal favour, the duo expanded their orchestra, bringing together ensembles of up to five or six voices.

The idyll, alas, succumbed to jealousy and ambition. Envious of the profits made and unevenly shared out by Molière, now based in the theatre in the Palais Royal, Lully took advantage of the tuberculosis that struck down his former associate in 1672 to obtain exclusive control over a new kind of production: the opera. Lully pursued the French lyrical arts adventure begun with his playwright friend, and when Molière finally returned to the stage the number of musicians was no longer his to decide. Their creative partnership was well and truly over. Molière died on stage during a performance of the *Malade imaginaire* set to music by Charpentier. Driving the final nail into the coffin, Lully then took over the Palais Royal from its orphan troupe.

Of this creative partnership, destined to be torn apart, the programme focuses on the golden decade, brought to life by the full orchestra of Le Poème Harmonique and a six-strong cast of singers, among the most beautiful voices performing on French Baroque scene today. Ambassador of Molière and Lully since the triumph of Le Poème Harmonique's co-production of *Bourgeois gentilhomme* in 2005, and specialist in the tender and amusing madrigals that brightened 17th-century evenings, Vincent Dumestre celebrates the most illustrious duo in French history.

INDICATIVE PROGRAM

Comédies-ballets' extracts	40 people on tour
<i>Monsieur de Pourceaugnac</i>	5 soloists
<i>Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme</i>	31 instrumentalists
<i>La Pastorale Comique</i>	1 conductor
...	1 technician
	1 production
	1 admin
	Harpsichord and kettledrum to be supplied + tuning

Indicative cast

Ana Quintans, soprano
Cyril Auvity, haute-contre
Marc Mauillon, barytenor
Igor Bouin, baryton, reciting
Virgile Ancely, basse

Le Poème Harmonique orchestra
Vincent Dumestre, direction