

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier
University



Laurier stages love-conquers-all operas *Egisto* and *Cythère Assiégée* *Rare performances contrast evolution of Baroque music, dance and costumes*

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WATERLOO (Ont.) – Wilfrid Laurier University is combining Baroque dance, elaborate costumes and period music in a unique presentation of two love-conquers-all, Baroque-era operas on March 1, 2 and 3. The faculty of music will mount three performances of *Egisto* by Francesco Cavalli, libretto by Giovanni Faustini, and *Cythère Assiégée* by Christoph Willibald Gluck, libretto by Charles-Simon Favart.

“It will be a unique evening of opera quite unlike anything ever staged here,” says Michael Purves-Smith, co-director and faculty of music professor. “This is probably the first time that anyone has tried to present two such operas side-by-side, at the same time, making every effort to capture their original performance styles.”

The exciting project draws on the talents of some 60 students from Laurier’s opera program and the WLU Baroque Ensemble, as well as alumni and faculty members. One of North America’s premiere Baroque dance specialists, Edgar Tumak, is realizing the dance component and period stage gesture.

Egisto was composed in 1642 and *Cythère* in 1759, and the century gap adds to the challenge, as there were significant developments in all aspects of opera: costume, staging, orchestra, acting, dancing, and musical structure. Two distinct orchestral ensembles reflect this evolution. So do the costumes – some from the Stratford Festival and others created at WLU for this production.

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Egisto and *Cythère* are comic tales set by two leading composers of their times. Dedicated to the lighter side of love, both operas present battles-of-the-sexes set in Classical Greece.

Egisto, one of Cavalli's first operas, was an immediate success and the Venetian composer's work remained popular until the late 17th century. It has rarely been performed since. Laurier's production is only the third performance of *Egisto* in North America. Purves-Smith adapted the score, cutting the work to one-third the original length.

"Audiences of Cavalli's time cherished the poetic values of the recitative portions of the original work, certainly more so than audiences after his generation," explains Purves-Smith. "Although my edition cuts much of that poetry, I've taken care to preserve the original narrative line."

Cythère, which Purves-Smith believes hasn't been performed in any form in more than 250 years, was also a hit. One of Gluck's personal favourites, it began as vaudeville in the original French form, featuring throughout the melodies of popular French songs, but with new lyrics to fit the story. Gluck then reset almost half the text to his own, newly composed music, retaining the popular tunes for the rest.

As a result, audiences will hear different words to such familiar tunes as "Sur le pont d'Avignon", combined with Gluck compositions highly reminiscent of the style of Mozart or Haydn.

The Friday and Saturday performances begin at 8:00 p.m., while Sunday's matinee starts at 3:00 p.m. All performances are in the Theatre Auditorium of Laurier's John Aird Centre. Tickets are \$15 for adults, and \$10 for seniors and students. To reserve tickets, please call (519) 884-0710 ext. 3554.