François-André Danican
PHILIDOR
Les Femmes Vengées
Debono • Beaudin • Staskiewicz
Thompson • Figueroa • Dobson
Opera Lafayette • Ryan Brown
François-André Danican
PHILIDOR
(1726-1795)

Les Femmes Vengées (1775)
An opéra-comique in one act

Libretto by Michel-Jean Sedaine (1719-1797)
Edition: Opera Lafayette

Opera Lafayette thanks Catherine Hubbard and the Bibliothèque municipale de Rouen for their assistance in obtaining copies of the 18th-century parts.

Madame Riss ......................... Claire Debono, Soprano
Madame la Présidente ............. Pascale Beaudin, Soprano
Madame Lek ......................... Blandine Staskiewicz, Mezzo-soprano
Monsieur Riss ....................... Jeffrey Thompson, Tenor
Monsieur le Président ............. Antonio Figueroa, Tenor
Monsieur Lek ....................... Alex Dobson, Baritone

Opera Lafayette
Ryan Brown, Conductor and Artistic Director
www.operalafayette.org

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François-André Danican Philidor (1726-1795)

Les Femmes Vengées

In 2014 Opera Lafayette presented Mozart and Da Ponte’s Cosi fan tutte and Philidor and Sedaine’s Les Femmes Vengées together, on the same set and with the same cast. We were inspired to do so perhaps because, during the course of Opera Lafayette’s explorations of 18th-century French opera, we have discovered many different ways in which French opera influenced Mozart.

In Les Femmes Vengées we found a precedent for Cosi which not only calls for similar vocal soloists, but also has a tantalizing mirror image plot. Sedaine’s plot, even though written before Da Ponte’s, seemed as if it might function as a humorous third act to Cosi, taking place after the couples have been married for several years. The three room set for Les Femmes Vengées, so integral to Sedaine’s conception, worked easily for Cosi as well. In order to be able to perform both operas together, as we did in New York and Versailles, Nick O’Clot, our director, made cuts in Cosi, and we performed it in French, with dialogue rather than sung recitative, as would have been done in Paris at the Opéra Comique. We performed the complete music of Les Femmes Vengées, but with some cuts in the spoken word. This recording includes the complete text available on the Naxos website at www.naxos.com/libretti/660355.htm.

Ryan Brown

On 20th March, 1775, the Comédie Italiennepremiered a new opéra-comique, Les Femmes Vengées (The Averaged Women), by François-André Danican Philidor (1726-1795), based on a play in verse by Michel-Jean Sedaine (1719-1797). It was well received, breaking a long spell of lukewarm receptions to Philidor’s stage works since the huge success of Tom Jones in 1766. In fact, it was still being performed three years later, when Mozart visited Paris in search of employment. In view of the structural similarities between Les Femmes Vengées and Mozart’s later opera, Cosi fan tutte (1791), it is not impossible that Mozart was influenced by one of the seven performances that the Comédie Italiennegave of Les Femmes Vengées during his stay in Paris.

Sedaine took the story of Les Femmes Vengées from a tale by Jean de La Fontaine (1621-1696), Les Rêmois, which was published in his third book of tales in 1671. This was the fourth time that Sedaine crafted a libretto from a tale of La Fontaine. He had previously written On ne s’avisae jamais de tout (1761) and Le Faucon (1772) for Monsigny, and Le magnifique (1773) for Grétry (Naxos 8.660305).

Madame Riss, the wife of a successful painter, informs her friends, Madame la Présidente, wife of a prominent local official, and Madame Lek, wife of the Lieutenant to Monsieur le Président, that both of their husbands have been making indecent proposals to her. She urges her friends to keep silent about it, but to come back that evening for dinner, when a trick that she has hatched with her own husband will be played on the philandering husbands. The ladies take leave and Madame Riss prepares herself to receive the straying husbands to dinner, while her own husband is supposed out of town.

Monsieur le Président and Monsieur Lek arrive at the appointed hour and flirt with Madame Riss while she is setting the meal on the table. They are about to enjoy an evening of food and love when Monsieur Riss returns home “unexpectedly”. Madame Riss quickly hides them in an adjoining room and pretends that the table is set for a dinner with her two lady friends.

While Madame Riss goes to fetch her friends, Monsieur Riss rhapsoodizes, for the benefit of the two men in the adjoining room, of his anticipated happiness in seeing the woman he loves to come to dinner. The two men in hiding panic: whose wife could it be?

Madame Riss returns with her two lady friends and the clever revenge unfolds. Monsieur Riss is left alone, in turn, with each of the wives, pretending to seduce them, while the husbands, locked in the adjoining room, listen, unable to speak out for fear of betraying their infidelities. Of course the wives pretend to fall in love with Monsieur Riss, much to the consternation of their locked-up husbands.

Finally, Monsieur Riss leaves to accompany the two ladies back to their homes. Thinking that they are finally alone with Madame Riss, the two men emerge from the adjoining room, throw themselves at her feet and demand that she help them avenge themselves on their wayward wives. But, as they do so, Monsieur Riss returns with the two ladies, who confront their husbands over their attempted infidelities.

Property chastised, the men admit their errors and their wives forgive them. All six agree that love and marriage are much more pleasant when husband and wife do not put each other to the test.

On this amusing plot, Philidor has created a light-hearted sparkling score with many ensembles (three duets, three trios, one quartet and one sextet).

After an overture in one movement (Allegro) [1], depicting with its march like theme, followed by a series of repeated notes, the triumph of the women and their laughter at their husbands’ defeat, Madame Riss, as leader of the revenge scheme, is presented in two succeeding ariettes. In the first, Femmes charmantes [2], she exposes how best to get even with deceitful men by using kindness and flattery, rather than sharpness and ill-temper. Then, having welcomed her lady friends, she bemoans, in her second ariette, Ah, pauvres femmes [3], the plight of women in the hands of unappreciative men. Both ariettes are in da capo form, the middle sections being in contrasting keys and meters.

A trio for the three women follows, Consoléz-vous [4], in which the individual women’s reactions to the news are very well contrasted: while Madame la Présidente is utterly dismayed, Madame Lek is outraged and Madame Riss tries vainly to console them. In the end, Madame Riss pushes her friends out the door, because she is expecting the arrival of their husbands.

A third ariette of Madame Riss follows, Un petit coup d’œil [5], while she coquettishly looks at herself in the mirror to make certain that she is irresistibly seductive. Her ariette is interrupted by the husbands’ knocking on the door. She proceeds with the repeat of the first part of her ariette to keep them waiting and further heighten their impatience.

The effusive duet of the two husbands, Ah, quel plaisir [6], is interrupted by the “unexpected” return of Monsieur Riss, leading to a quick trio during which Madame Riss hides the two husbands in an adjoining room.

Left alone while Madame Riss has left to fetch her lady friends, Monsieur Riss sings an anriette urging the god of lovers to make the woman reciprocate his love, Dieu des amants [7].

Madame Riss returns with her two friends. Under the pretext of going to the cellar to fetch some wine, with the help of Madame la Présidente, she leaves Monsieur Riss alone with Madame Lek. Monsieur Riss declares his love to Madame Lek, who defends herself weakly. She escapes to the garden followed by Monsieur Riss.

Having witnessed the amorous advances of Monsieur Riss, Monsieur Lek bursts forth in a lamenting duet, Où courrez-vous [8], while Monsieur le Président, who tries to calm him down, finally convinces him to follow the course of their amorous enterprise.

But Monsieur Riss and Madame Lek return from their walk in the garden. In the quartet that follows, Quoi? Vous pleurez [9], Monsieur Riss becomes more insistent and Madame Lek puts up a weaker defence, while the two locked-up husbands comment on the action diversely.

Meanwhile, Madame Riss and Madame la Présidente return. As they sit, enjoying their dinner, Madame Riss sings an anriette, comparing herself to Paris, who had to choose between three goddesses, but more favourably, since Madame Riss is actually loved by three women, Quand Pâris sur le Mont [10].

Monsieur Riss invites Madame Lek to sing something to entertain the company. She sings a romance, Si jamais je fais un amit [11], in praise of discretion in love. Monsieur Riss follows it with another verse, agreeing with Madame Riss that one cherishes love when it is accompanied by mystery.

Now it is the turn of Madame la Présidente to sing,
and she embarks on a show-stopping virtuoso aria, *De la coquette volage*.

An argument is about to start between Madame Lek and Madame la Présidente, which Monsieur Riss defuses by requesting from his wife more wine. This time Madame Lek accompanies Madame Riss to the cellar, leaving Monsieur Riss alone with Madame la Présidente. The latter declares her love to Monsieur Riss, much to the confusion of her husband, locked in the adjoining room. Monsieur Riss tries to escape to the garden, followed by Madame la Présidente.

In the following duet, *Oui, dans ma fureur*, Monsieur le Président pours forth his indignation and anger, while Monsieur Lek tries to restrain him using the very same musical motif and words that Monsieur le Président used to calm him down in their previous duet. Returning from the cellar, Madame Lek and Madame la Présidente feign to have an argument and decide to leave. Monsieur Riss offers to accompany them to their homes.

Monsieur le Président and Monsieur Lek throw themselves at the feet of Madame Riss, asking her to revenge herself on her husband by giving herself up to their amorous entreaties (Trio: *Ah, Madame, à vos pieds*). They are discovered by Monsieur Riss returning with Madame la Présidente and Madame Lek, and in a tumultuous ensemble each party accuses the other of infidelity. The men try to pretend it was all in jest, but Monsieur Riss does not take it so lightly and forces the men to apologize to their wives, who all first refuse to forgive their husbands, before finally relenting. In the final vaudeville, *Ne donnons jamais à nos femmes*, all agree that to make married life more agreeable it is best not to look too closely at it. To round out the score, Philidor brings back a subsidiary motif first heard in the overture, under the words of the refrain, *Mais pour rendre agréable la vie*. A final chorus closes the work.

Claire Debono

Maltese soprano Claire Debono graduated with a Master of Music from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. Her operatic roles include Anne Trulove in *The Rake’s Progress* for Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, Brussels, the European and New York tour of *Idomeneo* (Ilia) with Les Arts Florissants, including performances at the Lincoln Centre, Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, the Peralada Festival, and the Teatro Filarmonico di Verona, and Hanako (*Hanjo*) and Despina (*Così fan tutte*) for Opéra de Lyon. Concert performances include a tour of Europe and New York with William Christie’s Le Jardin des Voix and concert performances of *Don Giovanni* (Zerlina) for Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie on its tour of Japan.

Pascale Beaudin

Canadian soprano Pascale Beaudin began her career at the Opéra de Montréal, in the roles of Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*) and Oscar (*Un ballo in maschera*). She has sung with opera companies in Canada and in France, with a parallel career in the concert hall. She has received grants from the Jacqueline Desmarais Foundation, the Canada Arts Council, the Conseil des arts et lettres du Québec, and the Jeunesses Musicales du Canada, and was granted the Excellence Prize by her colleagues and mentors at the Atelier Lyrique de L’Opéra de Montréal. Her discography includes a five-disc release of the complete works for voice and piano by Francis Poulenc.
French mezzo-soprano Blandine Staskiewicz began studies at the Conservatoire Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris (CNSMDP) in 1997 under Peggy Bouvier, after receiving her degree and the Premier Prix de Chant at the Conservatoire National de Région de Rennes. There she received the Prix de Chant in 2001, completing her studies in 2003. In 2001 she won the Voix d’Or competition and the Concours International de Chant Baroque de Chimay in Belgium. She has appeared in numerous concert and oratorio performances at some of Europe’s most renowned festivals and concert venues, and toured Europe as a soloist with the Jardin des Voix and Les Arts Florissants, directed by William Christie.

Jeffrey Thompson

Soon after completing his studies at the Cincinnati Conservatory, American tenor Jeffrey Thompson was awarded first prize in the Concours International de Chant Baroque de Chimay in Belgium by a jury led by William Christie. In 2002 he participated in the first edition of Le Jardin des Voix with William Christie’s Les Arts Florissants, in a tour of baroque works at some of Europe’s most prestigious theatres, followed by a series of concerts with Les Arts Florissants, including Handel’s Aix and Galatea and Hercules, motets of Etienne Moulinié at the Palace of Versailles, La Pythionisse in Charpentier’s David et Jonathas, and La Messe des Morts, recorded for Virgin Classics. Other recordings include Grétry’s Le magnifique (Naxos 8.660305) with Opera Lafayette.

Antonio Figueroa

Canadian tenor Antonio Figueroa has won a number of awards and prizes, including the Silverman prize for his interpretation of Belmonte (Die Entführung aus dem Serail) at the International Vocal Art Institute (Ivai) in Tel-Aviv. Other roles have included Fenton (Falstaff) in Montreal, Ferdinand in Thomas Adès’s The Tempest at Festival Opéra de Québec and Pâris (La Belle Hélène) at the Théâtre du Capitole, Toulouse. In concert he has appeared with Les Violons du Roy (Charpentier), the Montreal Symphony (Messiaen), the Oratorio Society of New York (Bach’s Mass in B minor), and the San Antonio Symphony (Messiah).

Alexander Dobson

Alexander Dobson is the recipient of numerous awards and prizes, including those of the International Voice Competition of Paris (including the Edward Marshall Association Award for Outstanding Baritone), the Jeunesses Musicales National Competition, the Marilyn Home Competition (Music Academy of the West), and the Jacqueline Desmansa Competition. His roles have included Wozzeck with Théâtre du Nouveau Monde and Orchestre Métropolitain, Silvio (Pagliacci), Belcore (L’elisir d’amore) and Ned Keene (Peter Grimes), all with L’Opéra de Montréal. He made his London début at the Linbury Theatre with the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden in the première of The Midnight Court by Ana Sokolovic.
Opera Lafayette

Opera Lafayette is an American period-instrument ensemble that specializes in French repertoire, rediscovers masterpieces, and creates a recorded legacy of its work. Founded in 1995 in Washington, DC, by Conductor and Artistic Director Ryan Brown, Opera Lafayette has earned critical acclaim and a loyal following for its performances and recordings with international singers renowned for their interpretations of baroque and classical operas. Opera Lafayette's season includes performances at major venues in Washington, DC and New York City. At the invitation of Château de Versailles Spectacles, Opera Lafayette made its international début at the Opéra Royal in February 2012 with the modern world première of Monsigny's *Le Roi et le fermier*. Opera Lafayette recently returned to Versailles for five sold-out performances of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and Philidor's *Les Femmes Vengées* in January and February of 2014. Opera Lafayette's discography on the Naxos label has expanded to ten releases, including Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice* (2005), Sacchini's *Œdipe à Colone* (2006), Rameau's *Armide* (2008), Rebel and Francœur’s *Zélindor, roi des Sylphes* (2009), Monsigny’s *Le Déserteur* (2010), Philidor’s *Sancho Pança* (2011) Grétry’s *Le magnifique* (2012), Monsigny’s *Le Roi et le fermier* and Félicien David’s *Lalla Roukh* (2014).

Ryan Brown

Ryan Brown is the founder, conductor, and artistic director of Opera Lafayette. Through his work with Opera Lafayette, he has gained an international reputation for his interpretations of French opera and for his rôle in the revival of significant works from the 18th and 19th centuries. He was most recently and widely lauded for the modern première and recording of Félicien David’s 1862 *Lalla Roukh*, a seminal work of musical orientalism. His frequent performances of Italian works by Haydn, Mozart, Paisiello and Cimarosa have also met with great acclaim. Ryan Brown was raised in a musical family in California, and performed extensively as a violinist and chamber musician before turning his attentions to conducting. His teachers included Dorothy DeLay and Gustav Meier. In 2014 he returned to the Opéra Royal in Versailles, leading Opera Lafayette in Philidor’s *Les Femmes Vengées* and Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*. In 2015 he conducted Vivaldi’s *Catone in Utica* at the Glimmerglass Festival. Ryan Brown is a recipient of La Médaille d’Or du Rayonnement Culturel from La Renaissance Française.

**Opera Lafayette Orchestra**

**Violin**
- Claire Jolivet, concertmaster
- Alexandra Eddy
- Nina Falk
- Elizabeth Field
- June Huang
- Gesa Kordes
- Leslie Nero
- Christof Richter
- Amelia Roosevelt
- Theresa Salomon
- Leslie Silverfine

**Viola**
- Jessica Troy

**Cello**
- Loretta O’Sullivan*
- Alice Robbins
- NJ Snider**

**Double bass**
- John Feeney

**Flute**
- Colin St. Martin*
- Kathryn Roth

**Oboe**
- Marc Schachman*
- Margaret Owens

**Bassoon**
- Anna Marsh*
- Marc Vallon

**Horn**
- Todd Williams*
- Linda Delfim

**Harpichord**
- Andrew Appel

* principal
** orchestra personnel manager
L to R: Claire Debono, Blandine Staskiewicz and Pascale Beaudin

All performance photographs by Louis Forget
The first performances of Les Femmes Vengées (The Avenged Women) in 1775 restored the fortunes of François-André Danican Philidor, which had been wavering since the great success of Tom Jones a decade earlier. His opéra-comique, which foreshadows the plot of Mozart’s Così fan tutte (Mozart had been in Paris during the first performances of Philidor’s work), offers delicious opportunities for mock-indignation and repartee in its arias and ensembles. This recording presents the complete music. Opera Lafayette and Ryan Brown’s recording of Philidor’s Sancho Pança [8.660274] was hailed as a ‘witty, authentic interpretation’ by the American Record Guide.

A full track and cast list can be found on pages 2 and 3 of the booklet. The French libretto and an English translation can be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/660353.htm. Recorded at Dekelboum Hall, The Clarice, University of Maryland, USA, on 19th and 20th January, 2014.

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