

*Scintillating* baroque..



.. Serious **fun**



Director from the Continuo  
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Early Harps & Research

[www.TheHarpConsort.com](http://www.TheHarpConsort.com)

Early Opera &  
Historical Productions



*Action! Action! Action!*

Dear Cast of *La Morte d'Orfeo*,

Welcome to the project! As you will see from the score, Stefano Landi has given us a superb work, with dramatic speeches, exciting arias and wonderful ensembles. Our production will apply the latest research findings in historical performance practice, using highly specific rehearsal methodology to create a performance that speaks directly to the audience, that 'suits the action to the word', that pulses with the heartbeat of musical tactus and dramatic timing.

This project is radically historical – not only in the music but also for the staging. Perhaps the two most important features (both are typical of the period, but rare today) are that there will be no conductor (every individual is responsible for the rhythm of the whole ensemble); and that the music and action will be aesthetically unified in every possible detail, according to the poetic text.

Our priorities are Text, Rhythm and Action. Our job is to tell the story clearly and passionately to the audience: they are the privileged guests, the gods who descend to share with us in Orfeo's birthday-party.

### **How to prepare – Text & Rhythm**

Print out your own score. Scores will not be available at rehearsal – you need to study in advance! By downloading the score, you agree to use this material only for this project, and to contact me in advance if you wish to request any other use in the future.

As for any professional-level project, you need to learn your material (solos and ensembles) in advance of the first rehearsal. There will not be time for note-learning at rehearsals.

Learn the text first, checking the meaning of every single word, and sorting out Good and Bad (accented and un-accented) syllables. Give each word the vocal colour that it needs. Then link the text to Landi's rhythms, at MM = 60 (one beat per second). Finally, add the music. Period sources say that you do not add ornaments in the reciting style.

In C-time, use minim/half-note = 60. In 3-time, use dotted semibreve/dotted whole-note = 60 (i.e. three minims to the beat). In principle, this is the Tactus for the whole opera.

I recommend spending 15 minutes speaking text for every 5 minutes you spend singing!

Please don't learn from CD, not even the recording that I co-directed with Tragicomedia. We've all learnt a lot since 1987! Do practise with the second-hand of your watch, a metronome, or (more historically) a one-second pendulum.

## **How to Prepare – Word & Action**

Prepare for Historical Action by improving your proprioception and balance, and by practising gesture. Walk around bare-foot and get used to feeling your feet on the floor; do routine daily tasks like cleaning your teeth standing on one leg; wave your right hand as you sing and talk.

If your friends will agree, practice the art of passionate, persuasive story-telling by telling them your part of the story, in speech (not singing), in your own language and/or in Italian. Speak your speeches as if you were telling a bed-time story to children – use all the colours in your speaking voice.

## **How we will rehearse**

Day by day, music rehearsals will work on Text and Rhythm, Stage rehearsals will work on Text and Action, run-thru rehearsals will unite the whole story and practice telling it for an Audience. Be ready for lots of spoken work, a lot of concentration on the meaning of the text, and great attention to details of rhythm.

We will practice historical posture, movement and gesture. As we tell Landi's emotionally powerful story, we will use period concepts of the Four Humours and of Pneuma, the mystic breath, to 'move the Passions' of the audience. The dramatic mood shifts all the time, from dark tragedy to hilarious comedy, from lamenting or anger to joy or peace.

Be ready for the tough schedule of an intensive production and also for the physical demand of being on your feet, in a relaxed-and-ready posture, all day. This aspect of a stage production is like intensive sports-training.

## **Principles**

Xavier (Co-Director of music), Katerina (Assistant Producer) and I share the intention to work from fundamental principles. The idea is not to make you rehearse our personal interpretation of this piece, but rather to study the underlying concepts. Those concepts guide each performer to an individual approach, that co-ordinates happily with every other performer. It's 'opera as chamber-music', and not "Director's Cut".

Our aim is to offer you the chance to acquire understanding and learn skills that you can apply to the whole repertoire. The principles that we establish in the first two days will guide the whole production. What we practise in Act I will apply also to Acts II III etc. We hope that your study in this project will benefit you for the whole of your future career.

## **Performance**

Meanwhile, we have a fine cast, excellent staff, and one of the finest works of the period. Our performance will be a milestone in the history of Early Music in Russia, and it may even be the first staged performance in modern times worldwide – do you know of any other?

I'm confident that both we and the audience should have a lot of fun getting to know Stefano Landi. I look forward to seeing you soon in St Petersburg,

All best wishes from Madrid,

Andrew

You can read more about Text, Rhythm and Historical Action from The Harp Consort's website: [www.TheHarpConsort.com](http://www.TheHarpConsort.com)

You can get a preview of the rehearsal style from Katerina's film about our production of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* for the Royal Danish Academy of Music:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efAAEZ4jf6o>

For further reading I recommend these key primary sources:

Cavalieri	Preface to <i>Anima e Corpo</i> 1600
Peri	Preface to <i>Euridice</i> 1600
Caccini	Preface to <i>Le Nuove Musiche</i> 1601/2
Shakespeare	Hamlet's instructions to the Players c1600
Monteverdi	Preface to <i>Combattimento</i> 1624
Anon	<i>Il Corago</i> (c1630)