

Le Comte Ory première in 1828 in Paris (Théâtre de l'Académie Royale de Musique)

GIOACHINO ROSSINI (1792-1868)

Libretto adapted from a medieval ballad by Eugène Scribe and C.G.Delestre-Poirson

Running time: 138 minutes

Performed at the Metropolitan Opera House New York in 2011

Raimbaud, friend of Comte Ory	<i>Stéphane Degout</i>	Baritone
Alice, peasant girl	<i>Monica Yunus</i>	Soprano
Comte Ory, a profligate nobleman	<i>Juan Diego Floréz</i>	Tenor
Ragonde, stewardess of Comtesse Adèle	<i>Susanne Resmark</i>	Contralto
Isolier, Comte Ory's page	<i>Joyce DiDonato</i>	Mezzo
Comtesse Adèle	<i>Diana Damrau</i>	Soprano
Conductor	<i>Maurizio Benini</i>	
Stage Director	<i>Bartlett Sher</i>	

Synopsis

This opera is centred on Formoutiers Castle in Touraine during the Crusades (c.1200)

ACT 1 While their men are away crusading, the ladies have taken a vow of chastity and locked themselves in the castle. To court the beautiful Countess Adèle, Comte Ory disguises himself as a hermit while his friend Raimbaud spreads rumours that this HERMIT specialises in affairs of the heart. Ragonde, stewardess of the castle, announces that her mistress wants to consult him. Before this can take place the Ory's page Isolier arrives in search of the count accompanied by Ory's tutor, who's suspicious when he hears about the hermit.

Isolier, not recognising his master, asks the HERMIT for advice about gaining Adèle's love. When he reveals his plan to penetrate the castle as a pilgrim, Ory decides to exploit this idea. Adèle also comes to consult the HERMIT who advises her to distrust Isolier, the page of the notorious Comte Ory, with whom Adèle is already half in love. The tutor recognises the Count and unmasks him. A letter arrives announcing that the Crusade has concluded successfully: Adèle's brother and the knights will be home the next day. The ladies invite the HERMIT to celebrate with them, but he resolves to use the remaining time to devise another plan to conquer Adèle.

[Interval]



ACT 2 Thankful at having escaped Ory's wiles, the women await their men's return inside the castle. A storm and cries of distress are heard outside. Pilgrim women say that they are being threatened by Comte Ory. SOEUR COLETTE – who turns out to be the Count in disguise – thanks Adèle profusely. Left alone, the PILGRIM WOMEN revel. After discovering the cellar Raimbaud provides wine for all, and they sing a lively drinking song.

Isolier arrives and reveals the hoax to Adèle. Taking advantage of the darkness of her bedroom, Adèle then hides behind Isolier. SOEUR COLETTE deceived by the page's voice, makes advances to Isolier whom he mistakes for the Countess. When trumpets announce the return of the Crusaders, Comte Ory and his men are forced to flee.

Rossini's Comte Ory

Three years before *Comte Ory* was première, Rossini had announced his arrival in Paris with *Il viaggio a Reims* (as part of the festivities for the Coronation of Charles X). This was a showpiece for virtuoso bel canto singing, linked together by the flimsiest plot. As the libretto was inextricably linked to the specific event for which it was written, Rossini with his shrewd recycling instinct realised that there was a tried and trusted way to ensure that a large proportion of his music could be circulated more widely. A successful outcome mitigates potential misgivings about the scale of reuse, or with mistaken identity stretched to implausible limits.

The *Comte Ory* plot might suggest a less sophisticated opéra comique genre, but this opera is made up of highly developed and very substantial musical forms, which are linked by ACCOMPANIED recitative (rather than spoken dialogue, or SECCO recitative). The opera is scored for a large orchestra and sparkles with Gallic wit, grace and charm, without any hint of the buffoonish characters particularly linked to Italian opera buffa.



Eugène Scribe and Delestre-Poirson originally created a one act vaudeville first performed in 1816. This essentially became Act 2 of the opera. Act 1 elaborates events that were outlined in a single air in the original vaudeville. To accommodate Rossini's wishes their libretto was further extended, so that music from two extra numbers from *Il viaggio a Reims* could also be incorporated.

Most of the composer's previous music recurs in Act 1. Although different in detail, the situations within the two operas are generally similar emotionally and structurally. The jewels of the score are the pieces Rossini created specifically for *Comte Ory*. The choral songs for the Count and his pilgrim followers are spirited in tone and subtle in their musical realisation. The original ballad tune, already heard twice in the opera, becomes the central episode of the drinking chorus. The Act 2 trio is magical in the nocturnal and insinuating quality of the opening section: its delicate orchestral shading, erotic chromaticism, and the shifting pairings of the voices. Rossini has centred the drama in the sensual and musical shadows, disguises, and illusions of his score.

Set Design for this Rossini Production

Michael Yeargan the Set Designer felt that he wanted the portrayal of this historical tale to look back towards an Italian tradition that had developed before Rossini was born. Hence the 17th Century Teatro Farnese in Parma was one direct inspiration. Drottningholm Palace Theatre is another particularly well-preserved example that was used to perform Italian Opera between 1764 and 1792. It was reconstructed for the King of Sweden, and has survived in its original state with authentic stage machinery etc. The Teatro Olimpico constructed by Palladio in the late 16th Century is a well-known precursor. It's one of the Vicenza settings chosen for Losey's *Don Giovanni* (which featured Kiri te Kanawa and other stars).



TEATRO OLYMPICO, VICENZA



DROTTNINGHOLM



COMTE ORY PREMIÈRE IN PARIS 1828

Gioachino Rossini

Rossini's theatrical works increasingly dominated the European repertoire for three decades from 1812 onwards. His comic operas are considered supreme examples of the buffo style that had become popular in 18th-century Italy; his Italian serious operas were models for generations of composers; his French operas were championed by partisan supporters within the contentious musical world of Paris. He didn't complete any operas after 1829, and his serious operas almost disappeared from public view well before his death in 1868.

[Although Rossini partitioned his Operas into many different types, they can be conveniently divided into two broad – Serious and Comic – categories.]

14 Comic Operas written in Italy and premièred 1810-1821		
20 Serious Operas written in Italy and premièred 1812-1823		
<i>Title</i>	<i>French Première</i>	<i>Genre</i>
Il viaggio a Reims	1825 Théâtre-Italien, Paris	Dramma giocoso
Le siège de Corinthe	1826 Théâtre de l'Académie Royale, Paris	Tragédie-lyrique
Moïse et Pharaon	1826 Théâtre de l'Académie Royale, Paris	Opera in 4 acts
Le Comte Ory	1828 Théâtre de l'Académie Royale, Paris	Opéra comique
Guillaume Tell	1829 Théâtre de l'Académie Royale, Paris	Opera in 4 acts

Rossini's mother was a singer and his father was a horn-player. Before he entered the Bologna Conservatory at the age of 14, he'd composed chamber works, overtures and sacred music, as well as learning to sing and play the cello and piano. By the end of his 21st year, he'd written ten operas for north Italian theatres.

In 1813 *Tancredi* and the madcap *L'Italiana in Algeri* had an explosive effect. Here was a new voice characterised by energy and wit, overflowing with melodic ideas, and sensitive to the most delicate shades of orchestral colour. He introduced a structural clarity that transformed Italian opera: his characteristic forms, which gradually evolved over a period of ten years, were

later developed into a system of formal rules that underpinned 19th-century Italian opera. During the next four years, Rossini composed operas for many Italian theatres. *Il turco in Italia* (1814), *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1816), *La Cenerentola* (1817) and *La gazza ladra* (1817) were performed extensively throughout Europe.



Naples was the composer's centre of activity from 1817 until 1822. Some modern critics consider *Semiramide* (1823) and Rossini's nine serious Neapolitan operas to be his most impressive achievement. These complex works are inventive, orchestrally lavish, and vocally extravagant. Their highly florid vocal style that was written for some of the finest singers of Rossini's day – including the soprano Isabella Colbran, his future wife – made them difficult to stage, particularly after the mid-19th century when vocal techniques changed radically. After Rossini became musical director of the Théâtre-Italien in Paris his operas became the backbone of their repertoire. Operas written for a Parisian audience are itemised above. The artistic growth that Rossini achieved in less than twenty years is extraordinary.

Selected Musical Biography

COMTE ORY: JUAN DIEGO FLÓREZ (born 1973) is a Peruvian operatic tenor, particularly known for his bel canto roles. Flórez's breakthrough and professional debut came in 1996 in Rossini's birthplace of Pesaro. Debuts at La Scala and Wexford followed later the same year. Performing Donizetti in 2007 and 2008, he gave encores at La Scala and New York Met (the first heard at these venues for 74 years and 14 years respectively). Flórez was present at the birth of his son in April 2011, less than one hour before Leandro's father took to the stage for this DVD performance of Comte Ory.

ISOLIER: JOYCE DIDONATO (born 1969) is an American opera singer and recitalist. A coloratura mezzo-soprano, she's performed operas and concert works ranging from Handel and Mozart to the 19th-century Romantic era. Her many appearances have included debuts at La Scala 2000/01, and at the Met 2005/06. Returning to Covent Garden in 2009, she slipped onstage as Rosina, hopped during the first act and then finished the opera on crutches. She completed five subsequent performances in a wheelchair.