



Reflections on the First Twenty Years from the Artistic Director

The musical renaissance of the period instrument movement, a primary avenue for performing musicians searching for new ways to explore music of the past, was already well underway when Opera Lafayette was founded in 1995 as The Violins of Lafayette. Even so, performances of the works of many great composers, such as Lully, Rameau, and Gluck, were still extremely rare in the United States, and many of their contemporaries, fine composers whose works captured the imagination of listeners two to three hundred years ago, were mostly unknown even in Europe. Whole traditions of music from the 17th and 18th century were largely absent from the concert stage in America, and many of the public's impressions of baroque opera were based only on the occasional performance of a Handel opera, or perhaps a work by Monteverdi, Purcell, or Vivaldi, presented by companies not used to performing such works. Although the operas of Mozart were regularly presented, as well as Beethoven's *Fidelio* and other familiar operas from the 19th century, the works which would reveal their provenance were largely an aural mystery.

In our formative years, the performing life of early music was (and to a large extent still is) an extension of the freelance scene, funded on a small scale without guaranteed ongoing support from large established institutions. Most musicians who organized performances of this music were of necessity also entrepreneurs, and patrons whose generosity funded these performances often had strong connections to the artists. Performances of orchestral and operatic repertoire, being expensive, were rare, and because ensembles could get together only a few weeks a year, performers had little time to hone a common approach to sound and phrasing.

Opera Lafayette has responded to this musical moment in America in a variety of creative ways. Regarding the discovery and presentation of new repertoire, we have been lucky to be a stone's throw from the extensive collections of the Library of Congress, to have generous colleagues in Europe who have made scores available to us, and to have the assistance of several distinguished musicologists and experts in the field, including Sylvie Bouissou, Nizam Kettaneh, Elise Kirk, Raphaëlle Legrand, Patricia Ranum, Lois Rosow, Charles Russell and Thomas Soury. With their help, we have introduced multiple works from the traditions of the tragédie lyrique, the opéra ballet, the pastorale, the dramma giocoso, and the opéra comique. Some of these works were modern premieres of works that were popular in their day; others were part of the more familiar canon, even if only seldom performed in the United States.

We have sought to bring the visual elements of these works to life through dance, an art which is so integral to the French operatic tradition that we have championed. Our felicitous collaboration with Catherine Turocy and the New York Baroque Dance Company emboldened us to seek out collaborations with Anuradha Nehru's Kalanidhi Dance troupe, which embodies the classical Indian Kuchipudi tradition, and Seán Curran's eponymous modern American dance

company. Our 20th season centerpiece, the modern staged premiere of Rameau's opera-ballet *Les Fêtes de l'Hymen et de l'Amour*, united all three dance companies with brilliant vocal artists and musicians, many of whom were veterans of previous company productions, to stunning visual and aural effect.

We have been especially lucky with our orchestra, the musical heart of Opera Lafayette, as we have been able to capitalize on our backgrounds as chamber music colleagues, including my own as violinist with the Four Nations Ensemble. This has enabled us to achieve in sporadic weeks of rehearsal much of what normally would take years of regular rehearsals to build. Similarly, we have built relationships with singers who share our passion for using the broadest possible expressive palette to color the meaning of words in music.

The fruition of ambitious artistic aspirations is always difficult, but certainly more so in challenging economic times. The last twenty years have taken us from the Corcoran's Salon Doré to the Kennedy Center, various venues in New York City, and twice to the Opéra Royal of Versailles. We have produced ten acclaimed CDs on the Naxos label. We have expanded our seasons to include fully-staged operas, repeat performances of the same works in some venues, and full-season offerings in New York as well as Washington. This would not have been possible without extraordinary colleagues on stage and behind the scenes, our tireless Board of Directors and New York Advisory Board, and dedicated donors and volunteers. More recently, our nascent Young Professionals group is bringing fresh energy and vision to the Opera Lafayette family.

Going forward, we will be contemplating exciting new artistic, musicological and educational collaborations and opportunities, and, of course, always searching for music that will intrigue and delight. We thank our friends for helping us reach this 20th anniversary milestone and promise that we will continue to walk through whatever doors open for us with a welcoming and adventurous spirit.

Ryan Brown, Conductor and Artistic Director

Opera Lafayette Discography (Naxos label)

2005 Gluck's *Orphée et Euridice*

2006 Sacchini's *Œdipe à Colone*

2007 Rameau's *Operatic Arias*

2008 Lully's *Armide*

2009 Rebel and Francœur's *Zélindor, roi des Sylphes*

2010 Monsigny's *Le Déserteur*

2011 Philidor's *Sancho Pança*

2012 Grétry's *Le Magnifique*

2013 Monsigny's *Le Roi et le fermier*

2014 David's *Lalla Roukh*

*2015 Philidor's *Les Femmes Vengées* (*planned autumn 2015 release date)

HIGHLIGHTS OF OPERA LAFAYETTE SEASONS

(As The Violins of Lafayette: 1995-2001)

1995-1996: Company debut at the Corcoran's Salon Doré; four concerts over first season featured chamber music by some of France's greatest 18th-century composers, notably Rameau and Couperin.

1996-1997: Rebel's *Les Élémens* and *La Muse de l'Opéra*, a cantata by Clérambault (1749); musical tributes to Lully (by Rebel) and Austrian monarch Ferdinand III (by Schmelzer), at the Corcoran

1997-1998: The company debut of celebrated French haute-contre tenor Jean-Paul Fouchécourt in Charpentier's *Actéon*.

1998-1999: Catherine Turocy and the New York Baroque Dance Company debut with the company in Rameau's *Pygmalion* (1748) at Corcoran, Grand Foyer

1999-2000: One Theme; Two Operas: *Acis and Galettea* through Lully and Handel

2000-2001: France, Austria and Peking: 18th Century Cosmopolitanism

(Rechristened Opera Lafayette)

2001-2002: Opera Lafayette Performs Gluck's *Orphée et Euridice* at The University of Maryland ; Charpentier's *Les Arts Florissants* (1685-6)/*Le Malade Imaginaire* (1672) at Gaston Hall, Georgetown University

2002-2003: Greek Tragedy through French Sensibilities: Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733) at the University of Maryland

2003-2004: François Loup delights in Haydn's *Il Mondo della Luna* (1777) at the University of Maryland

2004-2005: Marking the First Ten Years: Lully's *Acis et Galatée* (1686), followed by the modern American premiere of Sacchini's *Œdipe à Colone* (1786); Naxos releases Opera Lafayette's CD of Gluck's *Orphée et Euridice*

2005-2006: Fouchécourt's Valentine to Rameau; Mozart's Intense *Idomeneo*

2006-2007: The *Armide* Project (Lully's 1686 and Gluck's 1777 versions); The Artistry of François Loup; Naxos releases Opera Lafayette's CD of Sacchini's *Œdipe à Colone*

2007-2008: *Zélindor, roi des Sylphes* (1745) by Francœur and Rebel (the modern world premiere and the company's New York debut); Don Giovanni through the Ages (works by Albertini, Gazzaniga, Melani, Gluck and Mozart); Young Artists Program launched; Naxos releases Opera Lafayette's CD of Rameau's Operatic Arias

2008-2009: *Le Déserteur* (Monsigny/Sedaine) marks the company's Kennedy Center Terrace Theater debut; an homage to Handel with *L'Allegro ed Il Pensieroso* (1740); Educational Outreach program initiated; Naxos releases Opera Lafayette's CD of Lully's *Armide*

2009-2010: Fifteenth Anniversary Season: Opera Lafayette debuts in the Kennedy Center Concert Hall with Gluck's *Armide* (1777), reprised at Rose Theater, Frederick P. Rose Hall, Home of Jazz at Lincoln Center, New York City; Charpentier's *Les Arts Florissants* and the modern American premiere of Philidor's *Sancho Pança* (1762) round out the season; Naxos releases Opera Lafayette's CD of Rebel and Francœur's *Zélindor, roi des Sylphes*

2010-2011: *La Muse de l'Opéra* recital with soprano Judith van Wanroij; the modern world premiere of Grétry's *Le Magnifique* (1773), at the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater and Rose Theater, Frederick P. Rose Hall, Home of Jazz at Lincoln Center, New York City; Handel's *Acis and Galatea* (1718); Naxos releases Opera Lafayette's CD of Monsigny's *Le Déserteur*

2011-2012: Duetto/Duo pairs beloved company veterans, Jean-Paul Fouchécourt and Gaële Le Roi; Opera Lafayette debuts internationally at Versailles with the modern world premiere of Monsigny's *Le Roi and le fermier*; Paisiello's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1762); Opera Lafayette Founder, Conductor and Artistic Director Ryan Brown receives La Médaille d'Or du Rayonnement Culturel from La Renaissance Française; Naxos releases Opera Lafayette's CD of Philidor's *Sancho Pança*

2012-2013: Soprano Emmanuelle de Negri in *L'Invitation au Voyage*; modern world premiere of David's *Lalla Roukh* (1862) with Kalanidhi Dance; Charpentier's *Actéon* (1684), semi-staged/directed by modern choreographer Seán Curran; Naxos releases Opera Lafayette's CD of Grétry's *Le Magnifique*

2013-2014: Opera Lafayette revisits Versailles with its French *Così* Project; French harpsichordist Olivier Beaumont collaborates with company artists in chamber works by Rameau, the first of a two-part commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the composer's death; Naxos releases Opera Lafayette's CD of David's *Lalla Roukh*.

2014-2015: The modern staged premiere of Rameau's opera-ballet *Les Fêtes de l'Hymen et de l'Amour* (1748); *Un clin d'oeil au passé*, a concert featuring Dominique Labelle in works of Bach and Handel; the modern premiere of Grétry's *L'Épreuve Villageoise*. Planned release by Naxos of Opera Lafayette's CD of Philidor's *Les Femmes Vengées* in autumn 2015.

SYNOPSIS OF OPERA LAFAYETTE SEASONS

1995-1996: An Extraordinary Setting, An Extraordinary Debut

The debut of The Violins of Lafayette in the Salon Doré of the Corcoran Gallery of Art on October 29, 1995, was a perfect pairing of ambience and musical sensibility. The four concerts of the first season featured chamber music by some of France's greatest 18th-century composers, notably Rameau and Couperin. The music illuminated the symbols in the trophy panels of the Salon, originally created for the 18th-century hôtel de Clermont in Paris's aristocratic Faubourg Saint-Germain. The exploration of 17th and 18th-century French musical culture -- often with the virtuosic support of the Four Nations Ensemble, with whom Ryan Brown was a founding violinist -- remains the intellectual and musical hallmark of Opera Lafayette.

"...elegant and vigorous musicians ... convinced as history and charmed the ear." (Mark Adamo, *The Washington Post*, December 12, 1995)

1996-1997: An Elemental Season

The theme of the second season was inspired by the Corcoran's Gobelin tapestries depicting the elements (air, earth, fire, and water) and featured an expanded ensemble performing the music to *Le Cahos* (Chaos) from Rebel's ballet *Les Éléments*, in addition to the cantata *La Muse de l'Opéra* by Clérambault, sung by soprano Amanda Balestrieri. The Violins of Lafayette also performed in the George Washington Room, whose life-size equestrian painting of George Washington by Rembrandt Peale was the background for one concert of sumptuous musical tributes to the composer Lully (by Rebel) and the Austrian monarch Ferdinand III (by Schmelzer).

"Opera Lafayette Has Arrived The ensemble's artistic director, violinist Ryan Brown, has become ringleader and star of Washington's newest baroque music scene. Through his own high standards he has injected a vitality and intellectual focus into performances." (Pierre Ruhe, *The Washington Post*, October 10, 1996)

1997-1998: The Start of a Wonderful Friendship: Jean-Paul Fouchécourt

The third season of The Violins of Lafayette at the Corcoran, featuring music by Handel, Porpora, Corrette, and Charpentier, was notable for the first of many appearances with the company of the celebrated French haute-contre tenor Jean-Paul Fouchécourt in Charpentier's *Actéon*. *Actéon*, a one-act *opéra de chasse*, was also the Violins of Lafayette's first concert performance of an opera, and inspired the direction of the ensemble's future development.

"Intricate symmetry... crackling energy... bold imagination ... elegance and purity ... enchanting effect ... astonishing ... sublime." (*The Washington Post*, May 20, 1997)

1998-1999: A Graceful Partnership Begins: The Dance of Catherine Turocy

The fourth season marked an important new chapter in the company's growth with its first semi-staged pairing of opera and dance and the growth of the ensemble to a full orchestra and chorus. Jean-Paul Fouchécourt returned to sing the title role in Rameau's *Pygmalion*, an *Acte de Ballet*.

Renowned baroque dance authority Catherine Turocy, Artistic Director of the New York Baroque Dance Company, choreographed and danced the role of the artist's beloved creation come to life. The statues of the Corcoran's Grand Foyer provided a ready-made and evocative set for the performance. Turocy's brilliant recreations of 18th-century dance have remained one of the signature distinctions of Opera Lafayette's performances.

"... the stylistically acute semi-staging of Rameau's *Pygmalion* by The Violins of Lafayette, at the Corcoran Gallery on Sunday, was a particular treat Brown's *Pygmalion* was notable for the spirit of dance infusing the violins, the rude good humor of the cellos, ethereal playing from paired flutes and the way bursts of percussion were so bracingly launched." (Joe Banno, *The Washington Post*, March 9, 1999)

During this season the ensemble also presented a concert devoted to the music of Henry Purcell. Jim Petosa, Artistic Director of the Olney Theater, read Dryden to accompany excerpts from Purcell's *King Arthur*, Congreve's *The Double Dealer* and other Restoration comedies by the playwright, and Shakespeare to accompany excerpts from *The Fairy Queen*.

1999-2000: One Theme; Two Operas: *Acis and Galatea* through Lully and Handel

The Violins of Lafayette made its first appearance in the ballroom of La Maison Française at the Embassy of France performing Lully's *Acis et Galatée*. Jean-Paul Fouchécourt as Acis, Ann Monoyios as Galatée and Bernard Deletré as Polyphème, with the dance of Catherine Turocy, starred in the semi-staged Washington premiere of Lully's 1686 operatic *pastorale héroïque*. The Embassy has remained a generous supporter of Opera Lafayette.

"Lully, whose *Acis et Galatée* was performed brilliantly by The Violins of Lafayette on Sunday evening at the French Embassy, lived and breathed ... [The] Violins of Lafayette made Lully's work more real, more convincing, more direct than any opera seen this season." (Philip Kennicott, *The Washington Post*, March 14, 2000)

Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, a different setting of the same pastoral story, set to poetry of Alexander Pope and John Gay, was presented at the Corcoran, with Nils Brown as Acis, Ann Monoyios as Galatea, Peter Becker as Polyphemus, and Tony Boutté as Damon.

"Artistic Director Ryan Brown led his forces in a performance that was lively, supple. And intensely musical ... all gave dramatic accounts that never let anyone forget that Handel was first and foremost a composer for the theater." (John Pitcher, *The Washington Post*, May 9, 2000)

2000-2001: France, Austria and Peking: 18th- Century Cosmopolitanism

In a program at the Corcoran, the Violins of Lafayette explored the humor, vitality and sophistication of the 18th-century in a program with music by Mozart, Gluck, and Rameau. At the Austrian Embassy, the ensemble teamed up with Ars Antiqua and the Choir of St. Ignatius Loyola of New York to bring the polychoral music of Biber to life from the stage and balconies of the Embassy's interior atrium. And in an unusual exploration of two extraordinarily refined court societies, The Four Nations Ensemble performed music by Couperin on a double bill with

the Chinese ensemble Music from China performing traditional Chinese music on traditional Chinese instruments.

“The sound of Ryan Brown’s crack period-instrument ensemble, the Violins of Lafayette, is diaphanous but threaded through with brightly lit sonic filaments that beguile the ear and make listening to just about anything a pleasure.” (Ronald Broun, *The Washington Post*, October 31, 2000)

The musicians of The Four Nations Ensemble had by this time become, and have remained, treasured members of Opera Lafayette’s artistic family. Harpsichordist Andrew Appel, the ensemble’s artistic director, and cellist Loretta O’Sullivan have become Opera Lafayette’s continuo section. Claire Jolivet, a former Four Nations musician, became Opera Lafayette’s concertmaster when Ryan Brown put down his violin and turned to full-time conducting for Gluck’s *Orphée et Euridice* in January 2002.

2001-2002: A Rechristened Opera Lafayette Performs Gluck’s Orphée at the University of Maryland

In 2001, The Violins of Lafayette was rechristened Opera Lafayette, reflecting the company’s increasing concentration on opera in semi-staged performances that united musical, vocal and choreography to present richly nuanced realizations of the 18th century repertoire.

Jean-Paul Fouchécourt, Catherine Dubosc, Suzie LeBlanc, and Catherine Turocy’s New York Baroque Dance Company joined conductor Ryan Brown and the Opera Lafayette Orchestra to perform Gluck’s dramatic pastorate, the 18th-century classic *Orphée et Euridice* for the opening season of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, University of Maryland, the first of several successful appearances at that venue.

“Orphée et Euridice: Poetry and Emotion. Opera Lafayette, Sublime at U-Md’s Smith Center this Orphée was absolutely gorgeous ... both delicate and emotionally harrowing -- and [Brown’s] forces played with just the right mix of grace and urgency.” (Tim Page, *The Washington Post*, January 14, 2002)

“Opera Concert Offers Delightful Music History Lesson This Orphée was one of the most carefully considered, elegantly realized music history lessons I’ve experienced yet. And the Smith Center, packed with an appreciative crowd, was an acoustically ideal place to experience it ... the performance proved irresistible.” (Tim Smith, *The Baltimore Sun*, January 15, 2002)

Earlier in the season, a chamber ensemble joined with Didier Rousselet and Monica Neagoy of Le Neon Theatre to stage musical scenes by Charpentier for Molière’s *Le Malade Imaginaire* in a double bill with the composer’s *Les Arts Florissants* at Georgetown University’s Gaston Hall.

“... the music was exquisitely presented deliciously pungent ... the instrumental music infectiously warbled and the singing superbly pitched and characterized The evening’s centerpiece was a splendid performance of Les Arts Florissants (The Flourishing Arts) ...” (Ronald Broun, *The Washington Post*, October 29, 2001)

2002-2003: Greek Tragedy through French Sensibilities

A magnum opus of Jean-Philippe Rameau dominated Opera Lafayette's 2002-2003 season. The company presented Rameau's *tragédie lyrique*, *Hippolyte et Aricie* at the University of Maryland, with Robert Getchell as Hippolyte, Gaële Le Roi as Aricie, Bernard Deletré as Thésée, and Jennifer Lane as Phèdre. This intensely dramatic opera, which retells the ancient Greek tragedy of Phèdre's fatal love for her stepson Hippolyte, marked the composer's debut on the Parisian stage in 1733.

"The bejeweled radiance of Opera Lafayette's presentation of *Hippolyte et Aricie* ... the sustained, luminous beauty of the performance ... the time passed all too quickly. Indeed, I never wanted the afternoon to end." (Tim Page, *The Washington Post*, February 3, 2003)

2003-2004: François Loup Transports Us to the Moon

The great comic bass François Loup took the lead role of Buonafede, the gullible and overprotective father who imagines himself transported to the moon, in Opera Lafayette's semi-staged version of Haydn's delightful *dramma giocoso*, *Il Mondo Della Luna*. Leon Major directed this semi-staged performance.

"... brilliantly realized Haydn is recognized as a towering figure in the history of symphonies and string quartets, but his ability as an opera composer is less well-known. More performances such as this one would help the music seemed tailored made for [François Loup] Brown conducted with a finely tuned sense of style ..." (Joseph McLellan, *The Washington Post*, May 18, 2004)

2004-2005: Marking the First Ten Years with Lully's *Acis et Galatée* and Sacchini's *Œdipe à Colone*

Opera Lafayette reprised Lully's final opera, the gorgeous *pastorale héroïque*, *Acis et Galatée*, at the University of Maryland in a concert staging with Catherine Turocy's New York Baroque Dance Company. The glowing reviews of this rarely performed work praised both the lead singers as well as the smaller roles. The strength of casting in all roles continues to be an Opera Lafayette hallmark, as does the important and expressive role of the chorus, which has a special pride of place in the French tradition.

"'Acis et Galatée' (1686) ... received a rare performance Sunday afternoon at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at Maryland. It was yet another in a distinguished series of concert versions of baroque and classical-era music theater by the team of Opera Lafayette and the New York Baroque Dance Company ... Opera Lafayette emphasizes natural, unforced, almost conversational singing -- straining is a cardinal sin in this music, and there was none of it on Sunday ... Brown assembled a crack cast: Howard Crook (who has recorded the opera for the Archiv label) sang the tenor role of Acis with dapper grace Soprano Gaële Le Roi was a wonderful Galatée -- intensely emotive yet unfailingly sweet-toned, whether pert and pouty or exploring the realms of high tragedy. Bass Bernard Deletré had the largest voice on the stage (as befits the gigantic ogre Poliphème); his singing was toffee-smooth and full of character Smaller roles were also cast from strength and deserve acknowledgment, whether François

Loup's refined Neptune, Robert Petillo's Tircis or Jennifer Ellis's Aminte. Tony Boutté sang three different roles over the course of the afternoon, infusing each of them with life and lyricism. Barbara Hollinshead sang the role of Diane and Miriam Dubrow was both Scylla and a dryad. But Hollinshead and Dubrow made their strongest impressions in the gorgeous final chorus, where both were cast as aquatic creatures known as naiads, and both sang out with wise, haunting, full-throated purity Brown assembled a good, small, eager orchestra; I particularly liked the sense of playful freedom that concertmaster Claire Jolivet brought to her violin solos, which had (no slight intended) just a hint of the barn dance to them. Brown conducted with affection and affinity, taking clear pleasure in bringing this luscious music to life.” (Tim Page, *The Washington Post*, February 22, 2005)

François Loup took the title role in *Oedipe à Colone*, with Nathalie Paulin as his daughter Antigone, in Antonio Sacchini's last complete opera. Although the opera, which follows in the footsteps of Gluck, enthralled audiences for 583 performances at the Paris Opera between 1787 and 1844, it faded from the repertoire until Opera Lafayette's revival and recording of the work, based on the second play from Sophocles's Oedipus trilogy. The opera was introduced to Opera Lafayette by Dr. Nizam Kettaneh, who continues to play an important advisory role to the company.

“In the years since its debut, the company has grown to become one of the most intellectually exciting fixtures of the Washington music world with tonight's performance of Sacchini's *Oedipe à Colone* they are making perhaps their most substantial and lasting contribution to the larger understanding of 18th-century French musical life.” (Philip Kennicott, *The Washington Post*, May 14, 2005)

The company released its first CD on the Naxos label in March 2005, its critically acclaimed recording of Gluck's *Orphée et Euridice*.

"... beautifully shades the details of the tempi and dynamics. This magically produces the most transparent sort of sound picture and singing that is exciting and idiomatic at the same time...a reference recording of the Paris version." (*Das Opernglas*, June 2005 on Gluck's *Orphée et Euridice*)

"... as hypnotic a 90 minutes as you can hope for ..." (*The London Observer*, April 2005, on Gluck's *Orphée et Euridice*)

The fusion of music and research that underscores Opera Lafayette's work was displayed during a remarkable day-long seminar on "French Opera: Sensuality, Sentiment and Spectacle" sponsored by the Smithsonian in April 2005. Under the direction of Opera Lafayette conductor and artistic director Ryan Brown, musicians and scholars examined the beginning of French opera and its development through Lully, Rameau, Gluck, Berlioz, Bizet, Debussy, Poulenc and Messiaen.

2005-2006: Fouchécourt's Valentine to Rameau, Mozart's Intense Idomeneo

Opera Lafayette's ambitious musical breadth was on display in the 2005-2006 season with performances at the University of Maryland. Jean-Paul Fouchécourt's interpreted Airs from the

operas of Rameau, including *Platée*, *Les Indes Galantes*, *Zoroastre*, *Castor et Pollux*, and *Dardanus* and created an unforgettably magical evening, revisiting the roles of the celebrated 18th-century haute-contre Jélyotte with the assistance of musicologist Sylvie Bouissou.

“What makes tenor Jean-Paul Fouchécourt a supreme artist is the way he gets to the heart of French music Ryan Brown, the ensemble’s founder, conducted an intriguing program of airs, recitatives and instrumental excerpts from the operas and opera-ballets of Jean-Philippe Rameau Infinitely malleable, focused and delicately intense, Fouchécourt’s voice fully transmits these qualities with coloristic innuendos subtly distinguishing among the emotional intimations of each character – Neptune’s tender moments in “*Nais*” and Thespis’s comic mockery in “*Platée*.” In “*Castor et Pollux*,” the tenor voiced passionate unrest against the strings’ Arcadian calm Above all, Fouchécourt’s infinitely extended yet controlled roulades of melodic embellishment left every listener in awe. The orchestra captured the sonic essence of Rameau’s exacting imagery ... sheer elegance.” (Cecelia Porter, *The Washington Post*, February 14, 2006)

Opera Lafayette marked the 250th anniversary of Mozart’s birth with two concert performances of Mozart’s *Idomeneo*, the composer’s first great opera, which was based on a French libretto and influenced by the *tragédie-lyrique*. The wonderful cast included remarkable performances by Stephanie Houtzeel as the royal son Idamante, Kirsten Blaise as Ilya, Millicent Scarlett as Electra, and Robert Baker as the High Priest, as well as choreography by Catherine Turocy for the New York Baroque Dance Company.

"Brown's energized period-instrument orchestra, cast and chorus, in collaboration with the New York Baroque Dance Company, proved that one of Mozart's most lengthy and least understood operas could be as sparkling and musically rewarding as *The Marriage of Figaro* or *Don Giovanni* this *Idomeneo* came alive with more drama and intensity than you're likely to find in any formal opera house." (Tom Huizenga, *The Washington Post*, June 5, 2006)

In December 2005, the Society for the Preservation of Greek Heritage presented a seminar organized by Opera Lafayette on the “Influence of Greek Drama on Classical Opera” at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, DC. Dr. Herbert Golder, professor of classics at Boston University, examined the qualities of Greek drama that became “operatic.” Music historian Dr. Nizam Kettaneh traced the rediscovery of ancient Greek classics and how they became the basis for 17th-century Italian opera, with mezzo-soprano Barbara Hollinshead and theorbist Dan Swenburg performing music by Monteverdi and his contemporaries. Opera Lafayette conductor and artistic director Ryan Brown examined how Greek myths and drama were modified to suit changing tastes and values through the two different operatic treatments of *Idomeneo* by Campra and Mozart.

2006-2007: The Armide Project; Honoring François Loup

Opera Lafayette’s masterful marriage of musical artistry and intellectual rigor was fully realized in the 2006-2007 season. Its *Armide* project was a unique exploration of two *tragédies-lyriques* set to the same libretto by Quinault, one by Lully and the other by Gluck, based on Tasso’s magnificent classic tale of a sorceress and her love for an invading soldier. Stephanie Houtzeel was Armide in Opera Lafayette’s February 2007 concert staging of Lully’s *Armide*, based on

Lois Rosow's scholarly edition of the opera; the dancers of the New York Baroque Dance Company added exquisite movement to help tell the story. In April 2007, the Opera Lafayette Orchestra joined with the Maryland Opera Studio and its gifted students, a select few of whom participated in the Lully, for four fully staged performances of Gluck's *Armide*, with Adria McCulloch in the title role. The students worked under the tutelage of Leon Major, director of the studio, as well as with conductor Ryan Brown. All *Armide* performances were at the University of Maryland.

"[Lully's *Armide*] was lovingly set forth by Opera Lafayette and the New York Baroque Dance Company, under the direction of Ryan Brown and Catherine Turocy, respectively. Brown led his small, supple orchestra and sweetly blended chorus with authority, dramatic intensity and willing musicianship the outstanding performance of the afternoon was that of mezzo-soprano Stephanie Houtzeel in the role of *Armide*. It would be a cliché to say she was "larger than life" and, in fact, she seemed something even more elemental. At its best, her *Armide* seemed life itself, with its messy joys, sorrows, hungers and contradictions, and the role was sung with all the ardor, intelligence and vocal luster at Houtzeel's command, which was plenty. This was the sort of daring, impassioned performance that can make a career ..." (Tim Page, *The Washington Post*, February 5, 2007)

A December 2006 seminar at the Embassy of France provided a behind-the-scenes look at the revival of the two operas. In addition to Ryan Brown, participants included music historian Dr. Nizam Kettaneh introducing the story line of Tasso's *Gerusalemme* and its historical context; Orest Ranum, professor of history, emeritus, Johns Hopkins University, on *Armide* at the court of Louis XIV; Patricia Ranum, French diction coach, rhetorician and author, on Quinault's libretto as set by Lully and Gluck; Leon Major on staging Gluck's *Armide*, and Philip Kennicott, Washington Post culture critic, on *Armide* beyond the 18th century, a theme he elaborated in a lengthy article on Tasso's poetry in *The Washington Post* of January 28, 2007. Soprano Ah Young Hong and harpsichordist Joseph Gascho joined moderator Ryan Brown in illuminating the music under discussion.

Earlier in the season, a special evening at the French Embassy highlighted François Loup's extraordinary career -- as bass-baritone extraordinaire, director and teacher. He was joined on stage by his students from the Maryland Opera Studio.

"The distinguished bass-baritone François Loup joined with Opera Lafayette and young singers from the University of Maryland's Opera Studio on Sunday for a dazzling sweep through three centuries of comic opera. The French Embassy presentation ranged widely-- from a Renaissance madrigal and scenes from operas of Lully, Gluck, Pergolesi and Haydn to those of Beethoven, Bizet and Rossini Loup's voice radiates warmth, zest and an amazingly precise characterization of many comic styles ... Brown has made an extraordinary name for himself in reviving operatic jewels of the 17th and 18th centuries, displaying astute sensitivity to historic style while also winning over today's audiences." (Cecilia Porter, *The Washington Post*, October 17, 2006)

This concert coincided with the release of Opera Lafayette's second CD on the Naxos label in September 2006, capturing François Loup's masterful work on Sacchini's *Oedipe à Colone*.

"This is a major issue, one that does more than justice to one of the most important neglected operatic works of the 18th century. As such, it is an obligatory addition to the library of anyone interested in the genre." (*Fanfare*, March/April 2007 on Sacchini's *Œdipe à Colone*)

"It is difficult to imagine a better interpretation splendid playing on period instruments ... a 'must-buy'." (*Music Web-International*, November 2006, on Sacchini's *Œdipe à Colone*)

2007-2008: Zélindor Borne Aloft; A New York Debut; Don Giovanni through the Ages; Young Artists Program Launched

Opera Lafayette's 2007-2008 season featured the first contemporary revival of *Zélindor, roi des Sylphes*, an *opéra-ballet* following in the footsteps of Rameau by Paris Opera directors François Rebel and François Francœur, which tells the story of the ultimately happy union between Zélindor (Jean-Paul Fouchécourt) and his sorely tested human love (Heidi Grant Murphy). The gorgeously costumed New York Baroque Dance Company helped bring to life the rococo work's fantastical meeting of the denizens of earth, sky and sea. The Washington area performance was the company's first at the Music Center at Strathmore. Opera Lafayette then made its much lauded New York debut with *Zélindor* at the Rose Theater in Frederick R. Rose Hall, home of Jazz at Lincoln Center, New York City.

"Ryan Brown led Opera Lafayette at Strathmore on Wednesday in the first modern performance - a brilliant one - of "Zélindor," a French tale of romance gone right ... The vocal soloists captured the essence of baroque style - melodies couched in endless trills and embroidered cadences. Fouchécourt's voice resonated with concentrated energy; Murphy sang with vibrancy and nuanced phrasing; and baritone William Sharp gave depth to the role of Zulim, Zélindor's sagacious fellow sylph. As the Nymph and Sylphide, Ah Young Hong's soprano was glistening and resilient. Issuing words of wisdom, the chamber chorus sang with a gusto matched by the orchestra's rhythmic pungency ... " (Cecilia Porter, *The Washington Post*, October 6, 2007)

"[The dancing of] the New York Baroque Dance Company [was] gracefully if soberly vivacious, and ornate in bright period costumes that included two magnificent Tennesseque lizard masks The evening's strength, however, was the crisp, resilient playing of the period orchestra, bringing the lilting dance music to colorful life. Opera Lafayette has just recorded the work for release in 2009. Fans of early music should seek it out." (Anne Midgette, *The New York Times*, October 20, 2007)

In the season's other highlight, Opera Lafayette explored "The Genesis of Don Giovanni," performing scenes and excerpts from Mozart's score as well as its forerunners, including Gazzaniga's *Il Convitato di Pietra* and Melani's *L'Empio Punito*. The program also featured the world premiere of an excerpt from Albertini's *Il Don Giovanni* (Warsaw, 1780) from a manuscript provided to Opera Lafayette by the Italian scholar Dr. Charles Russell.

"Opera Lafayette's survey, which was like an iTunes playlist of past 'Giovanni' highlights, began with Gluck's 1761 ballet, which was clearly known to Mozart ... The other versions were an

early, classicized setting from 1669 by Alessandro Melani (gracefully put across by two of Opera Lafayette's trainee sopranos, Meghan McCall and the ardent Adria McCulloch), and an opera by Albertini that was popular in Poland after its 1780 premiere Ryan Brown, the group's founder, spoke, conducted and played the violin (in the Melani) with a palpable and contagious engagement.” (Anne Midgette, *The Washington Post*, March 11, 2008)

The 2007-2008 season marked a new chapter in Opera Lafayette's commitment to teaching 17th and 18th-century musical traditions to the next generation of artists with the creation of the company's Young Artists Program. The program's origins began with the successful collaboration between the company and the talented students of the Maryland Opera Studio, a professional training program of the University of Maryland, in the *Armide* performances of the 2006-2007 season. The Young Artists Program gives talented emerging singers the opportunity to work with specialists in the field of 17th and 18th-century music. Through mainstage performances in secondary roles, covering of lead roles, and special coaching sessions, participants polish their skills and gain valuable performance and recording experience with Opera Lafayette.

Naxos released Opera Lafayette's third CD in September 2007, “Rameau Operatic Arias” with Jean-Paul Fouchécourt.

"Here is another welcome solo disc celebrating the repertoire of a great singer from the past [Fouchécourt] superbly captures other qualities noted by the author [Louis de Cahusac] in Jélyotte's singing: 'le goût, la précision, l'expression et la légèreté du chant' The disc offers a representative sample of Rameau's writing for tenor, drawing on the tragédies lyriques as well as the lighter, pastoral-type pieces known as ballets Take Dardanus's prison scene, sung here as a real expression of despair, or the love songs of Zoroastre and Zaïs, different in character yet here equally touching, or Neptune's florid ariette (Naïs) designed to temper the north winds, dispatched by Fouchécourt with panache. The period-instrument orchestra of the Washington-based Opera Lafayette, which in its decade-long existence has done so much to further the cause of 18th-century French opera, provides exemplary support under Ryan Brown ..." (OPERA, January 2008, on Rameau's Operatic Arias)

2008-2009: The Charms of Opéra-Comique in *Le Déserteur*; Kennedy Center Debut; Homage to Handel

The highlights of Opera Lafayette's 2008-2009 season were the modern American premiere of *Le Déserteur*, an influential 18th-century *opéra-comique* by composer Pierre Alexandre Monsigny and librettist Michel-Jean Sedaine, and Handel's exquisite pastorate *L'Allegro ed Il Pensiero*, performed in commemoration of the 250th anniversary of Handel's death.

On January 24, 2009, the Embassy of France hosted a provocative seminar as background to *Le Déserteur*. A panel of distinguished speakers joined Ryan Brown to discuss the origins and legacy of 18th century French *opéra-comique*. Raphaëlle Legrand, Professor of History and Analysis of Baroque Music (Université de Paris-Sorbonne, Paris IV), musicologist Dr. Nizam Ketteneh, Dr. Elise Kirk, a noted scholar on early American opera, and Catherine Turocy, Artistic Director of the New York Baroque Dance Company, described the influence of

companies that performed *opéra-comique* in prerevolutionary France. Other subjects included the musical and dance traditions of *Le Déserteur*, and *opéra-comique*'s appeal and performance history in both Europe and America, especially in the lively French opera scene of New Orleans, where *Le Déserteur* was a frequently-performed favorite.

The Washington performance of *Le Déserteur* marked Opera Lafayette's debut at the Kennedy Center Terrace Theater; the company returned to Lincoln Center's Rose Theater for its second New York performance. *Le Déserteur* was historically influential in its blend of the comic and serious, and was an early precursor of the "rescue opera" (most closely associated with *Fidelio*), in which the heroine (in *Le Déserteur*, Louise, sung by Dominique Labelle) extricates her lover (Alexis, sung by William Sharp) from prison and death, with Alexis's drunken fellow prisoner (Montauciel, sung by David Newman), providing comic relief. With a script by Nick Olcott based on Sedaine's dialogue, actor John Lescault and Catherine Copeland of The New York Baroque Dance Company brought out the fun and playfulness of much of the stage action, in keeping with musical theater traditions of the work.

"... the opera was enormously popular in its day, surviving long enough into the 19th century to win the admiration of Berlioz and even reaching the United States Monsigny and Sedaine were pioneers in bringing a sentimental dimension to the opera comique, which deepened the genre's seriousness the fine baritone William Sharp made a compelling figure of Alexis Dominique Labelle ... invested Louise's music with dark, creamy tones and dramatic urgency the orchestra impressed with the warmth of its strings and the clarity of its winds." (George Loomis, MusicalAmerica.com, February 6, 2009)

In October 2008, Naxos released Opera Lafayette's recording of Lully's *Armide*.

"... the last of Lully's tragic operas. Premiered in Paris in 1687, it enjoyed a long and colorful history in French opera repertory for the next century. Opera Lafayette under conductor Ryan Brown does a fabulous job." (*Toronto Star*, November 25, 2008)

In 2008-2009, Opera Lafayette initiated new educational programs in two Washington, DC public schools, with students participating in interactive classroom sessions with Opera Lafayette artists. The company's young-artist singers also brought the fun of *Le Déserteur* to a family/community performance at the Atlas Performing Arts Center in Northeast Washington, DC. The overture to *Le Déserteur* was one of the first to set out the themes and describe the story of the opera, so by choreographing the overture, students learned and participated in the central dramatic action of the story. By learning the popular 18th- century song which closes the work, students were able to join the cast for the opera's final scene.

Opera Lafayette returned to the Kennedy Center Terrace Theater for its final performance of this season with Handel's exquisite *L'Allegro ed Il Penseroso*, which sets to music John Milton's beautiful poetry. The singing of Christine Brandes, Ann Monoyios, Nicholas Phan and David Newman conveyed the poetry's ever-changing moods, while actors Naomi Jacobson and Gary Logan narrated the poetry Handel's image-rich poetry.

“ ... a delightful and too-seldom performed work The Milton texts are interleaved so that the ‘Allegro’ (the happy man) and the ‘Pensieroso’ (the pensive one) debate each other about the merits of Mirth and Melancholy. Their discourse is threaded with descriptive vignettes that allowed the composer a field day in writing illustrative pastorals and cityscapes, happy music and sad music All of this music came through with a will, a spring in the step of conductor and Artistic Director Ryan Brown ... “ (Anne Midgette, *The Washington Post*, April 6, 2009)

2009-2010: Fifteenth Anniversary Season Celebrates Three Great French Musical Traditions

Triumphant performances of Gluck’s *Armide* in Washington and New York formed the centerpiece to Opera Lafayette’s 15th-anniversary season, with Charpentier’s *Les Arts Florissants* and Philidor’s *Sancho Pança* opening and closing the 2009-2010 season respectively. Each production highlighted a different French musical tradition, and in so doing, underscored Opera Lafayette’s mature range and versatile artistry.

In October 2009, Opera Lafayette reprised Charpentier’s *Les Arts Florissants*, the beautiful 17th-century chamber opera in which the figures of Music (Ah Young Hong), Poetry (Opera Lafayette Young Artist Stacey Mastrian), Architecture (Monica Reinagel) and Painting (Tony Boutté) are threatened by Discord (William Sharp) and then allowed to flourish again by the arrival of Peace (Nathalie Paulin), with Caroline Copeland dancing in choreography by Catherine Turocy. Karim Sulayman, in his Opera Lafayette debut, joined with veteran François Loup and Tony Boutté to enliven several of Charpentier’s pieces for the plays of Molière.

On February 1, 2010, Opera Lafayette made its Kennedy Center Concert Hall debut with a sold-out performance of Gluck’s *Armide*, and reprised this performance before another full house on February 3 at Rose Theater, Frederick P. Rose Hall, home of Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City. Gluck’s *Armide* is one of the masterpieces of the 18th century, intense and psychologically complex yet grand in its proportions; the music both looks back to the tradition of lyric tragedy established by Lully and anticipates the romanticism of Berlioz and Wagner. The production featured the Opera Lafayette Chorus and Orchestra, the full New York Baroque Dance Company performing world premiere choreography by the company’s Artistic Director Catherine Turocy, vocal artists from past seasons and two Washington vocal debuts. Dominique Labelle returned as the imperious sorceress-princess Armide, whose passion for the crusader-knight Renaud forms the emotional core of the opera. William Burden made his Washington debut as Renaud, whose escape from Armide’s enchantments shatters her. Dutch soprano Judith van Wanroij, as Sidonie, Lucinde and Un Plaisir, also made her Washington debut. Stephanie Houtzeel returned as the implacable La Haine. The extraordinary cast was completed by Opera Lafayette veterans Nathalie Paulin (Phénice and Mélisse), Robert Gretchell (Artémidore and Le Chevalier Danois), William Sharp (Hidraot) and Darren Perry (Aronte and Ubalde). Ryan Brown also gave a lecture to the Wagner Society of Washington, DC, on Gluck’s *Armide*.

“Ryan Brown realized the composer’s goal of dramatic immediacy There was a grace and ease to his phrasing, and a vividness to the playing of his small ensemble, that freed the opera

from the ponderous stasis that so often attends even the most well-meaning revivals of 18th-century opera ... “ (Anne Midgette, *The Washington Post*, February 3, 2010)

“an adventurous period company Mr. Brown conducted a stylish and flowing performance, with an admirable cast headed by the lustrous soprano Dominique Labelle Phénice and Sidonie ([were] two fine young sopranos, Nathalie Paulin and Judith Van Wanroij) The tenor William Burden brought a virile voice and subtle expressivity to Renaud. Robert Getchell, a fine lyric tenor, was an excellent Artémidore ... mezzo-soprano Stephanie Houtzeel stopped the show as La Haine ...” (Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, February 4, 2010)

The season closed with the modern American premiere of Philidor’s *opéra-bouffon*, *Sancho Pança* in May 2010, in the Terrace Theater, in which hilarious characters out of the *commedia dell’arte* tradition plot to rid Sancho of his delusions of grandeur. In an elaborate semi-staging, the work featured an original script by Nick Olcott based on the traditions of the *opéra-comique*, and was directed by Catherine Turocy, with Darren Perry in the title role. This performance marked the first time the orchestra used the pit at the Terrace Theater, and the first time at the Terrace when all the singers and actors were in full costume.

Opera Lafayette continued its commitment to educational and community outreach in 2009-2010, with performances of both *Les Arts Florissants* and *Sancho Pança* in family/community performances at the Atlas Performing Arts Center in Washington, DC, preceded by interactive classroom sessions with Opera Lafayette artists.

In October 2009, Naxos released Opera Lafayette’s fifth CD, *Zélindor, roi des Sylphes*.

“Under director Ryan Brown, the Washington D.C. –based ensemble Opera Lafayette brings a graceful, stylistically sure touch ... the playing of the Opera Lafayette Orchestra is spirited and fleet, from the overture (with wind machine) to the final dance movements, with fine detail and beautifully shaped phrases.” (Judith Malafronte, *Opera News*, April, 2010)

2010-2011: The Romance of the Rose in of Grétry’s *Le Magnifique*

Opera Lafayette’s 16th season began with *La Muse de l’Opéra*, soprano Judith Van Wanroij’s virtuoso evocation of several 17th and 18th-century French composers, moving from the controlled expressivity of Louis XIV’s court to the more sensual atmosphere in opera under Louis XV. As the season centerpiece, Opera Lafayette presented the young Swiss tenor Emiliano Gonzalez Toro and soprano Elizabeth Calleo in the modern world premiere of Grétry’s *Le Magnifique*, a dazzling romantic comedy in which the dropping of a rose by a young woman bound to silence by her old and jealous guardian tells her ardent lover that his affection is reciprocated. The season ended with Handel’s *Acis and Galatea*, starring Thomas Michael Allen and Rosa Lamoreaux in a work that melds the poetry of Alexander Pope and John Gay with Ovid’s amorous mythological tale of metamorphosis and love.

In June 2010, between the 16th and 17th seasons, Opera Lafayette held a benefit dinner and silent auction at La Maison Française of the Embassy of France; His Excellency Pierre Vimont, then-Ambassador of France to the United States, kindly served as Honorary Chair of the benefit dinner.

“... A real find: ‘Le Magnifique’ ... Ryan Brown, the ensemble’s conductor and artistic conductor, drew a stylish performance from an appealing young cast and a fine periodinstrument orchestra.” (Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, February 11, 2011)

Naxos released Opera Lafayette’s CD of Monsigny’s *Le Déserteur* in September 2010.

"In filling a glaring oversight by the recording industry ... Naxos has instantly scored a coup. The performers, though mostly English-speaking, have a completely idiomatic vocal style the recording's revelation is William Sharp as Alexis. Largely unknown until now ..., he truly bursts forth here: overpoweringly beautiful timbre, superb phrasing, power, textual perceptiveness, perfect diction . . . a star singer is born." (Dominique Joucken, *CLASSICA Magazine* [France], 2010)

2011-2012: An International Debut at Versailles and a Modern World Premiere: Monsigny’s *Le Roi et le fermier*

Opera Lafayette’s 17th season began with Duetto/Duo, the happy pairing of two beloved company veterans, Jean-Paul Fouchécourt and Gaële Le Roi, in a concert program of works from 17th-century France and Italy. Then, in a milestone for this artistically ambitious company, Opera Lafayette made its international debut with the critically acclaimed modern world premiere of Monsigny’s *Le Roi et le fermier* (1762), a popular and controversial work in which a king and a commoner, ignorant of the king’s identity, speak of class issues to a subtly subversive libretto by Sedaine. Sets found at Versailles and used by Marie Antoinette when she performed the work at her Théâtre de la Reine in 1780, were refurbished and used in Opera Lafayette’s performance in the Opéra Royal, Château de Versailles in February 2012, following performances in Washington, DC and New York City. Thomas Michael Allen (Le Roi), William Sharp (le fermier) and Dominique Labelle (Jenny, the role sung by Marie Antoinette) led an infectiously charming cast. Director Didier Rousselet and Associate Director Monica Neagoy wittily propelled plot through narrative created for the speaking roles of Monsieur and Madame Sedaine.

“This production should be noted and remembered in the annals of Versailles, for the intelligence of its staging, the beauty of its sets, and its high musical quality.” (Jacques Bonnaure, *Opéra Magazine* [France], March 2012)

Opera Lafayette finished the season with Paisiello’s *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1762), his vivacious and then-popular take on Beaumarchais’s fabulously successful play and a musical precursor to the now better-known operatic progeny of Beaumarchais by Rossini and Mozart. Jennifer Casey Cabot and Robert Baker headed a cast of comically adept singers, with Nick Olcott directing.

Following the conclusion of the 2011-2012 season, which included his debut conducting the Seattle Symphony, Ryan Brown, Opera Lafayette’s founder, conductor and artistic director, was awarded La Médaille d’Or du Rayonnement Culturel from La Renaissance Française in a private ceremony on May 31, 2012, at the residence of the Ambassador of France to the United States. Ambassador François Delattre and La Renaissance Française President Jane M. Robert presented Brown with the award that recognizes persons who have rendered distinguished service in the

promotion of French culture. In June 2012, Opera Lafayette held a gala dinner and silent auction at La Maison Française of the Embassy of France, at which Opera Lafayette honored Roland Celette, the Embassy's long-serving and inexhaustible Cultural Attaché prior to his retirement. Opera Lafayette expressed its deep gratitude for M. Celette's tireless support for Opera Lafayette and its appreciation to Ambassador Delattre for his support.

In October 2011, Naxos released its Opera Lafayette's seventh CD, *Philidor's Sancho Pança, gouverneur dans l'isle de Barataria*.

2012-2013: Opera Lafayette's Artistic Journey Transports Audiences to the Road from Delhi to Samarkand with David's Lalla Roukh

Soprano Emmanuelle de Negri launched Opera Lafayette's 18th season with *L'Invitation au Voyage*, an evening of chamber music spanning music from the early 18th century through the late 19th century presented in collaboration with La Maison Française of the Embassy of France. The company then marked another major milestone in its continuing exploration of the repertoire of the Opéra Comique with *Lalla Roukh* (1862), the 19th-century orientalist masterpiece by Félicien David, based on the poem by the Irish poet Thomas Moore. The production, a modern world premiere and the company's first appearance in the Kennedy Center's Eisenhower Theater before moving to New York, was vocally and visually sumptuous, with glorious singing from a cast led by Marianne Fiset and Emiliano Gonzalez Toro under the direction of singer/director Bernard Delétre, the stunning choreography of Anuradha Nehru's Kalanidhi Dance troupe, the colorfully authentic costumes of Delhi-based fashion designer Poonam Bhagat, and the beautifully atmospheric lighting of Colin K. Bills. Opera Lafayette was honored by and deeply grateful for the patronage and support of Her Excellency Nirupama Rao, the Ambassador of India to the United States, who graciously hosted a gala dinner at her residence in December 2012 to benefit *Lalla Roukh* and Opera Lafayette.

"... Opera Lafayette presented a graceful and witty production of Félicien David's 'Lalla Roukh' ... Together with Ryan Brown, who conducted with a fine ear for flow and comic timing, they made a solid case for 'Lalla Roukh' as an overlooked gem of more than historical interest." (Corinna de Fonseca-Wollheim, *The New York Times*, February 3, 2013)

The season concluded with Charpentier's *Actéon* (1684), a compelling work of French classicism in one act by a cast led by Aaron Sheehan and Yulia Van Doren in a semistaged production directed by modern choreographer Seán Curran.

In November 2012, Naxos released its Opera Lafayette's eighth CD, Grétry's *Le Magnifique*.

"To resuscitate this unjustly forgotten work [Le Magnifique], an important link in the production of Gretry, Naxos has had the happy idea to call in the American Ryan Brown and his ensemble Opera Lafayette ... If the orchestra instruments are modern, this does not prevent bounciness and vivacity, and guarantees rock solid pitch accuracy, particularly in the brass. The singers ... are at ease in this universe: everyone is easily understood, and no one pushes or overdoes a passage which would have the effect of destroying the fragile beauty of this music. We will mention in particular the soprano Elizabeth Calleo, whose Clementine is ideally fresh and prim. A beautiful

return of a score which bears its name appropriately.” (Dominique Joucken, *Diapason Magazine* [France], 2013; translation courtesy of Nizam Kettaneh)

2013-2014: Opera Lafayette Returns to Versailles with its French *Così* Project; Rameau Salon

Opera Lafayette was invited for the second time to the Opéra Royal of Versailles, following performances in Washington and New York, to present its French *Così* Project, an imaginative pairing of Mozart’s *Così fan tutte* and Philidor’s *Les Femmes Vengées*. Under Nick Olcott’s adroit direction, the two works were presented as a continuous story line, with Mozart’s young lovers becoming older, if not wiser married couples in the Philidor work. Pascale Beaudin, Blandine Staskiewicz, Alex Dobson, Antonio Figueroa, Claire Debono and Jeffrey Thompson appeared in both operas, with Bernard Deletré as Don Alphonse, who sets the intrigues in motion. The season closed with a concert of chamber music works by Rameau, the first of a two-part commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the composer’s death. French harpsichordist Olivier Beaumont, a professor at the Paris Conservatory, was featured in a solo suite. He then joined Opera Lafayette artistic director Ryan Brown in one of the composer’s *Pièces de clavecin en concert* and performed transcriptions from *Les Indes Galantes* with harpsichordist Andrew Appel. A quartet of vocalists joined to perform the lively Canons and Airs from Rameau’s historic *Treatise on Harmony*.

“On paper, it sounds kind of crazy and wildly ambitious. On the stage, this French “Cosi” was nothing short of delightful ... it was hands-down one of the most enjoyable. I wish everyone who loves Mozart had a chance to see it.” (Anne Midgette, *The Washington Post*, October 20, 2013)

In March 2014, Naxos released Opera Lafayette’s CD of David’s *Lalla Roukh*.

“Noureddin's serenades, above all, make it a fine vehicle for a high lyric tenor, and are ravishingly sung by Emiliano Gonzalez Toro. Marianne Fiset is supremely elegant in the title role, and there are strong, sharply characterised performances from Nathalie Paulin and Bernard Deletré as the comic servants, Mirza and Baskir.” (Tim Ashley, *The Guardian*, April 10, 2014)

“Brown is to be commended for bringing this captivating work so brilliantly back to life and into our consciousness.” (Marvin J. Ward, *Classical Voice North America*, April 25, 2014)

2014-2015: 20th Anniversary Season: Rameau’s Magnificent *Les Fêtes* (1748); *Un clin d’œil au passé* with Dominique Labelle in works of Bach and Handel; A Modern Premiere of Grétry’s *L’Épreuve Villageoise* (1784)

Opera Lafayette launched its 20th season with a modern premiere of Rameau’s magnificent *opéra-ballet héroïque, Les Fêtes de L’Hymen et de L’Amour, ou Les Dieux d’Egypte*, the last of the composer’s large-scale *opéras-ballets* to be revived and performed in modern times. Opera Lafayette’s production was based on a new edition of the work by Opera Omnia Rameau. Opera Lafayette collaborated with three different choreographers and dance companies to highlight the plot’s emphasis on uniting warring peoples through love and marriage and to demonstrate Rameau’s inspiration and relevance to the modern stage. The opera begins with a metaphorical dialogue between L’Amour and L’Hymen and their respective followers, represented by the New

York Baroque Dance Company (Catherine Turocy, Artistic Director) and danced in 18th-century style. This troupe then transformed into Egyptians who journey through the three *entrées* of the opera. In the first act, *Osiris, ou les Amazones*, they encounter the warrior female tribe, represented by Kalanidhi Dance, an Indian dance company trained in Kuchipudi style (Anuradha Nehru, Artistic Director). This act includes a presentation of the bounties of the earth and the most beautiful goods created by the world's artisans, which persuade the warlike people to lay down their arms. In the second act, *Canope*, an angry god and the flooding Nile persuade the Egyptian people to abandon the barbaric ritual of human sacrifice. The retinue of the powerful and magical God of the Nile is represented by the Seán Curran Dance Company. The third act, *Aruéris, ou les Isies*, depicting a competition overseen by the God of the Arts whose winner best unites talent and love, unites all three dance companies and peoples. The Washington performance of *Les Fêtes* marked Opera Lafayette's first video recording, made possible through the support of two generous friends, Ishtar Méjanès and Nizam Kettaneh.

"So kudos to Opera Lafayette, the intrepid Washington, D.C.-based company that specializes in 18th-century French opera, for mounting *Les Fêtes*... one of their most imaginative productions ever..." (Heidi Waleson, *The Wall Street Journal*, October 13, 2014)

"[*Les Fêtes*] explodes on stage... all in the resplendent service of extolling the power of love – and music-theatre." (Susan Galbraith, *DC Theatre Scene*, October 8, 2014)

Upcoming in the 2014-2015 Season: In February, Opera Lafayette travels back to its chamber music origins in February with *Un clin d'oeil au passé*. This recital evening of exquisite works by two of Baroque's most beloved composers, George Frideric Handel and Johann Sebastian Bach, will feature the magnificent voice of Dominique Labelle (previously with the company as Gluck's *Armide* and Jenny in Monsigny's *Le Roi et le fermier*) alongside principal orchestra players. In May, Opera Lafayette concludes its 20th season with a modern premiere of Grétry's *L'Épreuve Villageoise*, an opera that delighted audiences during the early 19th century, not only in an opera-rich Europe, but also in the young American cities of New Orleans and New York. With an extraordinary cast hailing from the three nations whose cultures animated New Orleans at the time – France, Spain, and the United States – Opera Lafayette re-imagines a performance by the storied Théâtre d'Orléans. In contrast to the court opera of Rameau, Grétry's *L'Épreuve Villageoise* depicts the trials and tribulations of a small country town. The rustic story and charming musical composition blend beautifully, emphasizing an essential aspect of Grétry's operas that helped ensure his place as one of the 18th century's most admired composers.

The Naxos release of Philidor's *Les Femmes Vengées* is scheduled for 2015.