



## Dear Trustees of Angel Early Music

We are writing on behalf of Ensemble OrQuesta to extend our thanks to you for the grant that you gave us to support our performances of **Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre's *Céphale et Procris* at The Grimeborn Festival at the Arcola Theatre from August 29<sup>th</sup> to September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023.**

**The overall aims of the project were:** to champion the work of an early female composer, offer creative, musically authentic performance experiences to early career artists and specialist early musicians, and provide an opportunity to hone our new edition. Jacquet de la Guerre was musically innovative for her time and the opera offered EO a challenging range of previously unknown roles and 'new' instrumental music to explore.

### **Pride in our high standards and our artistic aims for this project:**

♪ Our productions aim to be of the highest quality both in terms of musical rendition and dramatic representation; we aimed to honour the composer's original intentions and work to make an interesting contemporary interpretation without compromising original text or musical authenticity.

♪ We aimed to give exposure to the work of a female composer to address the current shortcoming in classical music whereby barely 3% of work performed is written by women - championing an under-recognised group demonstrates to the new generation that creativity is not just a male preserve.

♪ We aimed to hone our practical new edition including perfecting our sample continue realisation and clarification / translation of ancient French text, thereby enabling other groups to access this work with greater ease. This neglected little-known early baroque composer was musically innovative for her time – this unique and unusual early baroque music deserves recognition and dissemination.

♪ We aimed to provide expert coaching in language, stagecraft, vocal technique, and style, and high quality imaginative but musically authentic performance opportunities for early career singers alongside period instruments to further young artist training in baroque style and enhance early career progress.

♪ We aimed to offer ensemble performance experience for young early music instrument specialists, with high-grade guidance in baroque style to help to develop their careers.

♪ We aimed to make a positive impact in broadening the appeal of opera with our reasonable ticket prices, our unique reputation, and innovative approach. In adding this unique baroque piece to the Arcola's Grimeborn Festival we aimed to make early music part of the reawakening of interest in opera.



arcola  
theatre

# Céphale et Procris

Opera by **Elisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre**  
Directed by **Marcio da Silva**

A production by: **EO Ensemble  
Orquesta**

\* performed in French with English Surtitles with baroque ensemble

**29 Aug - 2 Sep 2023**

[www.arcolatheatre.com](http://www.arcolatheatre.com)  
020 7503 1646

24 Ashwin Street, Dalston,  
London E8 3DL



Dalston Junction / Dalston Kingsland  
20 mins from Oxford Circus

### Delivering the project:

We undertook **six performances** of the opera: 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup>, August and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> September at 7:30pm, and a relaxed performance on 2<sup>nd</sup> September at 2.30pm. It was a challenging time for the company as our Production Manager, Helen May, and our Artistic Director, Marcio da Silva, became proud parents of a daughter on June 11<sup>th</sup>.

Intensive training and rehearsals took place from Monday 21<sup>st</sup>- Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> August at St Margaret's Church in Putney, with our stage and music director Marcio da Silva offering skilled coaching in all aspects of performance, stagecraft, musical style, language, and vocal technique to our young artists with the additional support of Predrag Gosta and Cédric Meyer. Marcio also offered each singer several individual online coaching sessions prior to the intensive rehearsal period to ensure that each singer had opportunities to refresh their grasp of the finer aspects of language, vocal technique, and style prior to rehearsing movement and staging work and working with the musicians at the Arcola itself.

The project involved six young professional singers at the onset of their careers, and five early career specialist early-music instrumentalists. Because we had received your kind support for our young artists, we were able to use other funds to bring in an additional early music specialist, the eminent Predrag Gosta, on the harpsichord, a specialist lutenist to support the rehearsal of our instrumentalists and singers, and an additional recorder player.

Our voluntary publicity team worked hard on flyer distribution in the area surrounding the Arcola Theatre pre- and during production, and our Production Manager ensured that our social media profile was strong. This was important in terms of extending our audience base, increasing our press impact, and maximising publicity for our young artists. Our extended support team ensured that the programme, website information, and flyers were of a professional standard.



**Impact: audience.**

We were quite pleased with tickets sales overall. On the first night, audience was **63%** of capacity. The Saturday afternoon performance sold just **27%** of capacity. We sold over 500 tickets overall.

We believe strongly in the importance of **The Arcola** and the **Grimeborn Festival** as a significant fringe venue for opera. The Grimeborn festival is increasingly recognised as an important event in the cultural calendar as it offers access to innovative and creative opera performances at reasonable prices in an unusual and intimate performance space where the proximity of audience and performers enables a deep engagement with both music and drama.

Céphale was an unknown work for audiences, and we were pleased to receive positive reviews.

**Owen Davies** for [Plays to See](#) gave the production a ★★★★★ review. He praised several aspects of the performances commenting: ‘The thwarted love of Cephale and Procris is the heart of the opera and in Kieran White and Poppy Shotts we have young artists of the highest calibre singing with passion and impressive lyrical style. White’s high tenor – always a musical treat – here is employed to bring vividly to life the heart-breaking trials that Aurora inflicts on him. And Shotts is an entirely worthy match for him, using her powerful soprano voice to best effect in the scenes of despair when Aurora’s plans have turned her love to misery. There are other two-singer scenes, often ending in short but finely drawn duets, that impress too and demonstrate the strength of de la Guerre’s writing. The tussle between minor characters, Arcas and Dorine – sung by the ubiquitous Marcio da Silva and the marvellous Anna-Luise Wagner – is a treat and as were the scenes in which Aurora, sung by Helen May, seeks to seduce Cephale. Helen May’s voice really deserves bigger spaces than the Arcola (and the Cockpit, where OE often perform). With such a large cast it is impossible to do justice to all the fine performances, but it would be unforgivable not to pay tribute to the ensemble work, typical of Marcio da Silva’s directorial style – all the performers contribute to the scene setting even when not singing. EO’s orchestra of early music specialists excel again, even when packed into what looks like an uncomfortable ‘pit’ at the back of the stage.’

**Florence Anna Maunders** for [Planet Hugill](#) commented: ‘The dynamic one-man force of nature that is Marcio da Silva has committed everything in his power towards the success of this production, directing, conducting, producing a new edition of the score, performing in the orchestra and even appearing in the small role of Arcas. It can’t be denied that the production has some successful moments. Although the nature of the drama strived and ultimately failed to escape its 17th Century sensibilities, it still had plenty of elegance, style and moved through the many short musical episodes with a surefooted and rapid pace.’ She also noted that: ‘The small orchestra of period instrument specialists were lively and engaging, providing a range of continuo colours and displaying some beautifully phrased melodic lines from the violins and woodwinds. The addition of percussion at various moments served to underpin the dance origins of much of the musical material, and the tempi, even in the more sensual moments, were never allowed to drag. This was some really quite fine baroque chamber playing, from musicians who seemed to have a genuine rapport with each other and a respect for the music.’

**Nick Kimberley** for [The Evening Standard](#) commented: ‘Working with his own company, Ensemble OrQuesta, Marcio da Silva directs and conducts; he also designed the set, costumes and choreography, while also preparing a new performing edition of the score. He even takes a singing role. The result is not a one-man show but a convincing ensemble performance. The young cast performs idiomatically, not overdoing the fervour but achieving real intensity. In the title roles, Kieran White and Poppy Shotts, and Jack Lawrence-Jones as Borée, sing with unusual emotional clarity, matched throughout by the eight-piece instrumental ensemble: the period instruments carry just the right weight for the Arcola’s tiny performing area.’





**Final evaluation:**

The whole production was judiciously managed by our core team, with attention to health and safety and the well-being of performers. We are pleased to report no incidents of virus transfer during the production. All aspects of budgeting were prudently handled and monitored, and the project came in within budget.

Opera still tends to be associated with posh venues and black-tie expensive picnics. By contrast **The Arcola** is a modest but vibrant theatre venue. By producing opera in this setting, we have offered 'alternative' opera for ordinary people in unpretentious surroundings. Yet we passionately believe that people who attend such performances deserve high-quality music. Thanks to the support of your grant, we were able to pay first-rate singers to give outstanding performances of this ground-breaking and unique opera in this accessible venue. The reviews demonstrate that we were able to provide an evening that many considered both absorbing and uplifting. Fringe venues such as this have a vital role in offering accessible high-quality performances for ordinary people to enjoy.

We would like to thank you whole heartedly for your continued support of the work of Ensemble OrQuesta. It has made a meaningful difference to us. We are extremely proud of this production and delighted at the achievement of our young artists. We believe that we made a meaningful impact in terms of increasing the audience and appeal of early music, as demonstrated by the excellent reviews of our work.

Although it is undoubtedly a challenge to champion the work of an early unknown female composer, we believe that such effort is artistically valid and important, and our performers and audience clearly found it to be a musically interesting and enriching experience.

With our renewed thanks.

**The Trustees of Ensemble OrQuesta.**