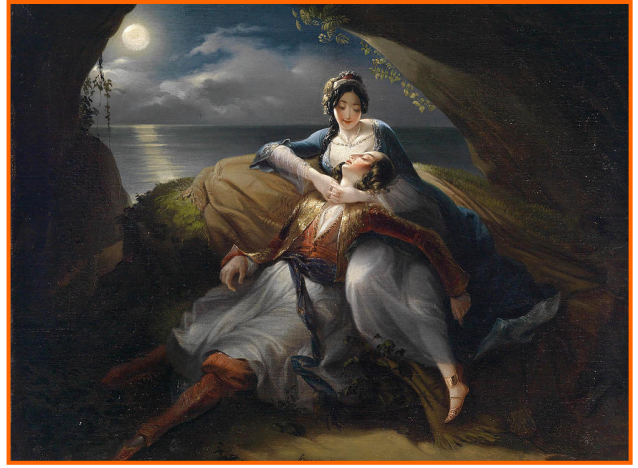


Alcina

Music by George Frideric Handel
Libretto by Antonio Marchi



George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)



Angelika and Medor. Scene From Orlando Furioso by Mihael Stroj (1803–1871)

A Timeless Tale

by Rachel Silverstein

The story of Handel’s *Alcina* comes from the epic poem *Orlando Fusioso* (1532), or quite literally “Orlando’s Frenzy,” by the Italian poet Ludovico Ariosto. The poem is a compilation of stories about the knights of Charlemagne and their grand adventures during wars with Muslim Spain. Ariosto based his work on the unfinished epic poem *Orlando Innamorato* (1495) by Matteo Maria Boiardo.

Two plot threads connect the stories in the collection; the tale of the knight Orlando’s fall to madness and the star-crossed love of Ruggiero and the woman Bradamante. In Ariosto’s poem, Ruggiero and Bradamante are knights from opposing sides of the war who find love, but Ruggiero is captured and put under a spell by the sorceress Alcina. Handel’s opera focuses on this romantic conflict, emphasizing the love between these characters and their struggle to stay together.

Handel used the libretto of the Italian opera *L’Isola d’Alcina* (1728) by Riccardo Broschi for his own composition. Broschi’s opera is mostly lost, but the libretto lives on with alterations by librettist Antonio Marchi, one of Handel’s frequent collaborators. Handel’s *Alcina* became part of society’s historical game of telephone, where artists focus on a different plot element and interpretation of the drama in each retelling. For Handel, the emphasis is on the joys and trials of love with various kinds of love represented; Alcina’s possession of Ruggiero is Mania and Morgana’s love for the disguised Bradamante is Eros. But the highlight of the story is the unconditional love Bradamante has for Ruggiero, displaying the

lengths to which Bradamante goes to rescue her lover.

Pittsburgh Opera’s production of *Alcina* is set in the 18th century, when the piece was composed, but the story of love is timeless.

Charlemagne Story Retellings

<i>Vita Karoli Magni</i> (817–833)	Biography
<i>La Chanson de Roland</i> (1040–1115)	Sung epic poem
<i>Orlando Innamorato</i> (1495)	Epic poem
<i>Orlando Fusioso</i> (1532)	Epic poem
<i>Bradamante</i> (1582)	Tragicomedy
<i>Roland</i> (1685)	Opera
<i>Orlando Furioso</i> (1727)	Opera
<i>L’Isola d’Alcina</i> (1728)	Opera
<i>Alcina</i> (1735)	Opera

Alcina Synopsis

PART I Bradamante and Melisso journey to find Bradamante's lover Ruggiero but become shipwrecked and are cast ashore. Bradamante is disguised as a man to protect her identity, going by the name of her brother Ricciardo. They meet Morgana, Alcina's sister, who falls in love with Bradamante's male persona ("**O s'apre al riso**") and promises to take them to Alcina. Alcina receives the travelers graciously and tells Ruggiero to show them the sights of the island ("**Di', cor mio**"). Bradamante confronts Ruggiero's behavior but he denies any wrongdoing—he is the faithful lover of Alcina ("**Di te mi rido**"). Oronte, Alcina's commander-in-chief, is jealous of Morgana's new feelings for "Ricciardo" and charges Bradamante with having stolen Morgana's love. Morgana defends Bradamante and insults Oronte while Bradamante tries to calm their mutual recriminations ("**È gelosia**").

Oronte comes upon Ruggiero and concocts a tale that Alcina now loves "Ricciardo" and will soon add Ruggiero to her collection of discarded lovers ("**Semplicetto!**"). Ruggiero believes Oronte and heaps reproaches on the puzzled Alcina, who assures him that her feelings are unchanged ("**Sì, son quella**"). Bradamante accuses Ruggiero of disloyalty but he retaliates with defiance, accusing "Ricciardo" of having stolen Alcina's love. Bradamante discloses her true identity to Ruggiero, but Melisso, worried that Ruggiero is not ready for this information, convinces him to ignore Bradamante's claim. Morgana warns Bradamante that Alcina plans to change "Ricciardo" into a wild beast to appease Ruggiero but Bradamante tells Morgana not to worry because "he" does not love Alcina, but another. Morgana proclaims her love and Bradamante gives a false confession to keep Morgana as an ally ("**Tomami a vagheggiar**").

Melisso reproaches Ruggiero for abandoning the path of glory and gives him a magic ring, which brings him to his senses. Ruggiero, now realizing his actions, regrets his faithlessness to Bradamante but Melisso advises him to apologize ("**Pensa a chi geme**"). Melisso instructs Ruggiero to pretend that he still loves Alcina and to make his escape on the pretext of going hunting. Bradamante again reveals her identity ("**Vorrei vendicarmi**"), only to have Ruggiero reject this revelation as another of Alcina's deceptions.

Alcina is preparing to change "Ricciardo" into a wild beast to appease Ruggiero but Morgana tries to dissuade her ("**Ama, sospira**"). Ruggiero returns and assures her that he is no longer jealous so drastic measures are no longer necessary ("**Mio bel Tesoro**"). Alcina notices that Ruggiero is not in his usual spirits and when he requests to go hunting she consents and he departs. Oronte brings the news that Ruggiero is planning to flee and Alcina falls into despair ("**Ah, mio cor**").

Intermission

PART II Oronte tells Morgana that "Ricciardo" is about to leave her but she refuses to believe this and departs scornfully, leaving him to lament her power over him ("**è un folle**"). Ruggiero is at last convinced that Bradamante is really herself. Morgana discovers them embracing, and realizing Bradamante is actually a woman, reproaches her for being a faithless guest and Ruggiero for betraying Alcina. Ruggiero looks forward to the end of the enchantments ("**Verdi prati**").

Alcina makes spells to bind Ruggiero to her but loses heart and casts her wand aside ("**Ombre pallide**"). Morgana tries to ingratiate herself with Oronte ("**Credete al mio dolore**"), who pretends indifference, but he admits to himself that he still loves her ("**Un momento di contento**"). Alcina upbraids Ruggiero for trying to leave her. He tells her that his betrothed Bradamante has his love ("**Sta nell'ircana pietrosa tana**"). Alcina

Characters

Alcina *soprano*
[al-CHEEN-ah]
A sorceress, in love with Ruggiero

Ruggiero *mezzo-soprano*
[ruhd-JER-roh]
A knight who is Alcina's prisoner

Morgana *soprano*
[mor-GAHN-ah]
Sister to Alcina, in love with Bradamante's male persona

Bradamante *contralto*
[brah-dah-MAHN-teh]
A young woman disguised as a man, rescuing her lover Ruggiero

Oronte *tenor*
[oh-ROHN-teh]
Alcina's commander, in love with Morgana

Melisso *bass*
[meh-LEES-soh]
Bradamante's tutor who is traveling with her

NOTE: The three acts of Handel's opera have been reworked into two parts in Pittsburgh Opera's production.

threatens vengeance, though unable to obliterate her tender feelings for him. Bradamante, Melisso, and Ruggiero plan their campaign. Oronte tells Alcina about the complete defeat of her forces and she laments her cruel fate (“**Mi restano le lagrime**”).

Ruggiero and Bradamante confront Alcina, each advising the other to avoid her deceptions (“**Non è amor**”). Alcina pleads and threatens in vain as Ruggiero smashes the urn that holds Alcina's secret power. With all her spells broken, the rocks, trees, and animals resume their human shapes. All those previously enchanted rejoice at their liberty and celebrate the triumph of love.

Condensed by Rachel Silverstein

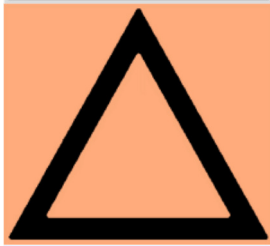
Alchemical Elements Symbolism

Medieval Alchemists believed that all matter was comprised of varying proportions of the four alchemical elements: air, water, earth, and fire. The Pittsburgh Opera production of *Alcina* uses the symbolic interpretations of these elements to portray the powers and relationships of the characters and sensation.



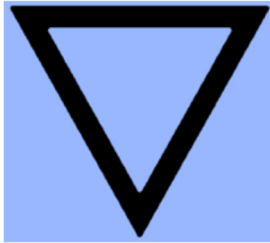
Air (Alcina)

Associated with the colors grey and white. Hot and wet (Water vapor). Represents new beginnings and life.



Fire (Ruggiero)

Associated with the colors red and orange. Hot and dry. A masculine symbol. Represents passion, hate, and destruction.



Water (Morgana)

Associated with the color blue. Cold and wet. A feminine symbol. Represents emotion and wisdom.



Earth (Oronte)

Associated with the colors green and brown. Cold and dry. Represents physical movement and sensation.

A Pittsburgh Opera Original Production

This *Alcina* production is Pittsburgh Opera's first ever in the company's history, allowing the creative team the freedom to create something entirely new and unique!

The process of creating a new production is multileveled with many collaborative elements. Ideally, the structure of the production is planned a year in advance and the costumes are constructed as soon as the overall designs are approved. The Pittsburgh Opera Wardrobe Department overlaps preparation for two or three opera productions at the same time, so scheduling and organization are key. Building a single costume can take several weeks before it is ready for the fitting stage and then alterations happen through dress rehearsals to perfect the look and feel for the singer. About 30% of the costume elements used in this production are from the company's collection of pieces, but the majority of this production is comprised of newly-created props and costumes.

Most of the costumes have a historic basis in 18th-century clothing styles but with a decidedly modern twist. For example, the use of modern fabrics allows for more contrasting textures and brighter colors than the use of traditional woolen fabrics. Also, Morgana's "swimming" costume is a fictional recreation, as swimming was not a common pastime in the 18th century and there are no swimming costumes from that era. The 18th-century influence allows the story to feel like something from a distant past, but the integration of modern elements projects the story to the 21st century.

Once the *Alcina* production closes, the prop pieces and costumes will be stored, but not forever. Opera companies often rent out production elements to each other and these pieces could be a part of this system of shared creativity. So who knows, maybe we will be seeing these costumes again in a few years, enchanting audiences in another state.



Morgana costume
designed by Jason Bray

Handel's Operas performed by Pittsburgh Opera

(Opera season listed in parentheses)

By Megan Swift

Giulio Cesare (*Julius Caesar*) (2003–2004) premiered at King's Theatre in London on February 20, 1724. An epic of love and war often considered Handel's finest work, *Giulio Cesare* has a richly intricate plot and the bonus of a brilliantly characterized and outrageously seductive Cleopatra. The role of Caesar was written for a castrato; today, the role is often sung by a countertenor.

Xerxes (2005–2006) premiered at King's Theatre in London on April 15, 1738. The opera opens with one of Handel's best-known arias, "Ombra mai fu," sung by Serse, King of Persia, in honor of a plane tree and its shade. A plot of jealousy, infidelity, and treachery results in a cocktail of bravura music.

Rinaldo (2010–2011) premiered at Queen's Theatre in London on February 24, 1711. As Handel's first opera for the London stage, *Rinaldo* features scenes of magic and supernatural forces at work. The libretto derives from a 16th-century Italian epic poem, Torquato Tasso's "Gerusalemme liberate," a very fanciful version of the first Crusade.

Rodelinda (2014–2015) premiered at King's Theatre in London on February 13, 1725. Based on an obscure historical incident from 8th-century Italy, *Rodelinda* is often described as Handel's feminist opera. The plot concerns the supposedly widowed Queen of the Lombards who is being courted by the usurper Grimoaldo, but in fact, her husband Bertarido is still alive.

Richard the Lionheart (*Riccardo Primo*) (2016–2017) premiered at King's Theatre in London on November 11, 1727. The setting is Cyprus in the late 1100s; the story is about King Richard the First of England's pending marriage to the Spanish princess Costanza. Handel wrote the role of King Richard for a castrato and it is frequently performed by mezzo-sopranos as a "pants role."

Alcina (2019–2020) premiered at Covent Garden Theatre in London on April 16, 1735.

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/aug/20/top-50-operas> <https://bachtrack.com/top-ten-handel-operas-baroque-month-february-2018> [https://www.pittsburghopera.org/uploads/PghOpera_RichardLionheart_Nov2016_\(1\).pdf](https://www.pittsburghopera.org/uploads/PghOpera_RichardLionheart_Nov2016_(1).pdf)

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