

Armida

Music by Joseph Haydn

Libretto taken from Antonio Tozzi's 1775 opera *Rinaldo*,
as amended by Nunziato Porta

LEFT: Armida costume design for the 1784 *Armida* premiere, from *The magnificence of Esterháza* by Máttyás Horányi, Dufour Editions, Philadelphia, © 1962.

RIGHT: Armida costume designed by Christie Milton for the 2016 production at Pinchgut Opera, photo by Brett Boardman.



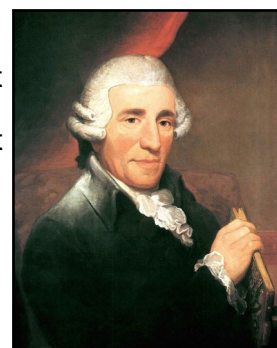
An Enchanting Story from the First Crusade

In 1095, Pope Urban II called for a Crusade to liberate Jerusalem from Muslim forces. An important leader of the First Crusade was Godfrey of Bouillon, a medieval Frankish knight. Godfrey fought in several minor battles after the Crusaders left Constantinople, but legends about his immense strength and prowess in battle grew after he recaptured Jerusalem.

In 1581, Torquato Tasso wrote *Gerusalemme liberata*, an elaborately fictionalized poem about the capture of Jerusalem featuring Godfrey as the hero. The epic poem enshrined the story in a largely mythified version that inspired many other works of art. The story's popularity continued throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when it was an important source text, prompting nearly 100 operas and ballets, including Haydn's *Armida*. Two main characters—Armida and Rinaldo—permeated other operas by Lully, Handel, Salieri, Rossini, and Dvořák. The episode featuring Armida (a character based on the mythical witch Circe in Homer's *Odyssey*) and her love for the Christian hero Rinaldo was particularly attractive to opera librettists.

In Tasso's epic, Rinaldo is a fierce and determined knight who is also honorable and handsome. Armida, a vibrant and vengeful Saracen sorceress, has been sent to stop the Christians from completing their mission and is about to murder the sleeping soldier, but falls in love instead. She creates an enchanted garden where she holds him a lovesick prisoner. Two fellow Crusaders find him and hold a shield to his face so he can see his image and remember who he is. Rinaldo barely resists Armida, but his comrades insist that he return to his Christian duties.

The premiere of Haydn's *Armida* was February 26, 1784, and it received 54 performances from 1784 to 1788 at the *Esterháza* Court Theatre in Fertőd, Hungary. During Haydn's lifetime *Armida* was also performed in Pressburg, Budapest, Turin, and Vienna. Haydn himself regarded the work as his finest opera. *Armida* then disappeared from the general operatic repertoire; it was revived in 1968 in concert form in Cologne, and later a production in Bern. The American premiere took place in Manchester, New Hampshire in 1981, when director Peter Sellars set the production during the Vietnam War. In Europe, Haydn's *Armida* is sometimes presented in staged productions, but more often in concert versions.



Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732–1809)
Portrait by Christian Ludwig Seehas, 1785

Armida Synopsis

To prevent the capture of Jerusalem by the knights of the First Crusade, The Prince of Darkness has sent the enchantress Armida into the world to seduce the Christian heroes and turn them from their duty. The bravest of these, Rinaldo, has fallen under Armida's spell. She comes to love him so deeply that she cannot bring herself to destroy him.

Act 1

In an oasis in the desert outside Jerusalem, King Idreno is alarmed that the crusaders have crossed the Jordan River. The heathen sorceress Armida seems to have triumphed over the crusaders, but she fears that her conquest is not complete without gaining the love of the Christian knight Rinaldo. Now Rinaldo is obsessed with Armida and promises to fight against his fellow Christians, if victorious King Idreno offers him the kingdom and Armida's hand. Armida prays for Rinaldo's safety.

The knights Ubaldo and Clotarco plan to free Rinaldo from Armida's clutches. Idreno sends Zelmira, the daughter of the Sultan of Egypt, to ensnare the Christians, but on encountering Clotarco she falls in love with him and offers to lead him to safety.

Rinaldo admires the bravery of the approaching knights. Ubaldo warns Rinaldo to beware Armida's charms, and reproaches the dereliction of his duty as a Christian. Although remorseful, Rinaldo is unable to escape Armida's enchantment.

Intermission

Act 2

In a ghastly forest, Zelmira fails to dissuade Idreno from planning an ambush of the crusaders. Idreno pretends to agree to Clotarco's demand that the Christian knights enchanted by Armida be freed. Reluctantly, Rinaldo leaves with Ubaldo. Armida expresses her fury.

In Armida's pleasure palace, Ubaldo welcomes Rinaldo, who prepares to go into battle. Armida begs for refuge and Rinaldo's love. Rinaldo departs for battle with Ubaldo and the other soldiers.

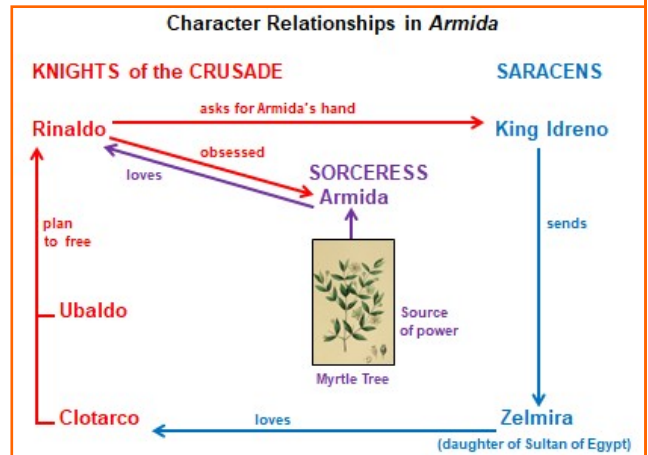
Intermission

Act 3

In Armida's enchanted garden, which includes a large myrtle tree, Rinaldo, knowing that the tree holds the secret of Armida's powers, enters the wood intending to cut it down. Zelmira appears with a group of nymphs, and they try to get him to return to Armida. As he is about to strike the myrtle, Armida, disheveled, appears from it and confronts him. Armida cannot bring herself to kill him; Rinaldo strikes the tree and the magic wood vanishes.

On the shore outside Armida's palace, the crusaders prepare for battle against the Saracens. Armida appears, swearing to pursue Rinaldo everywhere. As Rinaldo moves off, she sends an infernal chariot after Rinaldo.

Courtesy of Pinchgut Opera



Characters

Armida [ahr-MEE-dah]	<i>soprano</i>
A sorceress	
Rinaldo [ree-NAHL-doh]	<i>tenor</i>
A knight	
Zelmira [zeh-MEE-rah]	<i>soprano</i>
Accomplice of Armida	
Idreno [ee-DRAY-noh]	<i>bass</i>
King of the Saracens	
Ubaldo [oo-BAHL-doh]	<i>tenor</i> (<i>high baritone</i>)
Friend of Rinaldo	
Clotarco [clou-TAHR-coh]	<i>tenor</i> (<i>mezzo-soprano</i>)
A knight	
Nymphs	Dancers

ORCHESTRATION

Armida is scored for flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns/trumpets, timpani, strings, continuo.



Rinaldo and Armida by François Boucher (1703–1770)

conflict between Christians and Muslims (though with fantastical elements added), was based on historical facts and included literary elements that are lacking in other Renaissance epic poems. Like other works of the time that portray conflicts between Christians and Muslims, the subject matter had a timely resonance to readers when the Ottoman Empire was advancing through Eastern Europe.

The poem is composed of 1,917 stanzas in *ottava rima* (15,336 hendecasyllabic lines), grouped into twenty cantos of varying length. Tasso frequently borrowed plot elements and character types directly from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. Tasso's poem also has elements inspired by the classical epics of Virgil and Homer (like the mythical witch).

One of the most characteristic literary devices in Tasso's poem is the emotional quandary endured by characters torn between their heart and their duty. The depiction of Rinaldo's love, at odds with martial valor or honor, is a central source of lyrical passion.

The image at left is Boucher's 1734 oil painting inspired by Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*. Armida holds Rinaldo captive in her enchanted palace. Arriving to rescue their fellow knight are Ubaldo and Carlo (Clotarco), hidden at right between two columns of the ruined temple. The knights surprise Rinaldo, who is love-stricken at the feet of the enchantress. At right, Cupid aims an arrow at Rinaldo, evoking the ties of love that now bind the young Crusader to the enchantress Armida. The oil painting is housed in the Musée de Louvre, Paris.

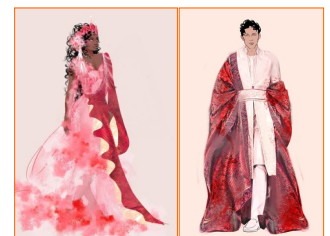
Torquato Tasso's influential poem

Torquato Tasso (1544–1595) was an Italian poet known for his poem *Gerusalemme liberata* (*The Liberation of Jerusalem*), in which he depicts a highly imaginative version of the battles between Christians and Muslims at the end of the First Crusade, during the Siege of Jerusalem of 1099. His work was widely translated and adapted, and Tasso was one of the most widely-read European poets until the early 1900s.

Tasso's choice of subject matter, an actual historic

BASIC DATES and FACTS TO REMEMBER about the *Armida* story

- 1099 Christians and Muslims battled to gain control of Jerusalem in the First Crusade
- 1581 Poet Torquato Tasso wrote his version of the battles (*Gerusalemme liberata*)
Characters: Armida, Clorinda, Erminia, Olindo, Rinaldo, Sofronia, Tancred
- 1686 Lully composed *Armide*, loosely based on the Tasso epic poem
- 1711 Handel composed *Rinaldo*, loosely based on the Tasso epic poem
- 1771 Salieri composed *Armida*, loosely based on the Tasso epic poem
- 1784 Haydn composed *Armida*, loosely based on the Tasso epic poem**
- 1817 Rossini composed *Armida*, loosely based on the Tasso epic poem
- 1904 Dvořák composed *Armida*, loosely based on the Tasso epic poem



Armida costume designs by Yinxue Wang

CHARACTERS in *Rinaldo* and *Armida* operas

Armida by Lully	Rinaldo by Handel	Armida by Salieri	Armida by Haydn	Armida by Rossini	Armida by Dvořák
Armide	Rinaldo	Armida	Armida	Armida	Armida
Renaud	Almirena	Rinaldo	Rinaldo	Rinaldo	Rinald
Chevalier Danois	Armida	Ismene	Zelmira	Goffredo	Ismen
Hidraot	Goffredo	Ubaldo	Ubaldo	Gernando	Petr
Ubalde	Argante		King Idreno	Ubaldo	King Hydraot
	Mago		Clotarco	Carlo	

Joseph Haydn and his Patron

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) was a prolific Austrian composer of the Classical period. He developed and revised the forms and styles of chamber music, such as the string quartet (68) and piano trio (50), and composed more than 100 symphonies. He is called the “Father of the Symphony” and “Father of the String quartet.” Haydn was a friend and mentor of Mozart and a tutor of Beethoven. Though Haydn produced numerous operas (20), masses (14), concertos, piano sonatas, and other compositions, he is best known for his orchestral works. Haydn’s compositions were catalogued by Anthony van Hoboken, who sorted the works by musical genre.

Haydn spent much of his career as a court musician for the wealthy Esterházy family at *Eszterháza*. Until the later part of his life, this isolated Haydn from other composers and trends in music so that he was, as he put it, “forced to become original.” Yet his music circulated widely, and for much of his career he was the most celebrated composer in Europe.

Papa Haydn was especially respected by the Esterházy court musicians whom he supervised, as he maintained a cordial working atmosphere and effectively represented the musicians' interests. Haydn’s “Farewell” Symphony (1772) is evidence of his sense of humor and concern for the musician’s personal lives. When Esterházy, his patron, extended his residence at *Esterháza* and kept the musicians away from their families a day’s journey away, Haydn *diplomatically* composed the last movement of the “Farewell” symphony such that each musician stops playing, snuffs out the candle on his music stand, and leaves. At the end of the *adagio*, there were just two muted violins left and Esterházy got the message. The Prince and the musicians returned to Eisenstadt the next day.

During the 1770s and 1780s, Haydn ran an opera troupe for Prince Esterházy and produced nearly 150 performances per year. A number of the operas were Haydn’s own work, but they are seldom performed today. *Armida* (Hob. XXVIII/12) was Haydn’s last opera for the *Eszterháza* opera house and his most successful there.



Eszterháza is a 126-room palace in Fertőd, Hungary, built by Prince Nikolaus Esterházy. Sometimes called the “Hungarian Versailles,” it is Hungary’s grandest Rococo edifice. *Eszterháza* was the home of Joseph Haydn and his orchestra from 1766 to 1790. Built near the south shore of the Neusiedler See on swampy land, the palace includes a large library, a banquet room, two opera houses, a marionette theater, a picture gallery, and a music room.

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Inspiring words from Joseph Haydn

It is the melody which is the charm of music, and it is that which is most difficult to produce. The invention of a fine melody is a work of genius.

Young people can learn from my example that something can come from nothing. What I have become is the result of my hard efforts.

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