

Opera Restor'd The Dragon of Wantley

A Burlesque Opera

by John Frederick Lampe (1703-1751)

7.30pm

St Peter's Church, Oundle



Artistic Directors	Jack Edwards and Peter Holman
Libretto	Henry Carey
Margery	Angela Henckel
Mauxalinda	Tamsin Dalley
Moore of Moore Hall	Arwel Treharne Morgan
The Dragon/Servant	David Freedman
Gubbins	Michael Bundy
Production directed by	Jack Edwards
Music directed by	Peter Holman
Design	Ashley Shairp
Lighting Design	Peter Milne
Score edited by	Peter Holman
Company Manager	Caroline Anderson
Stage manager	John Lucas
Costumes made by	Students of the City College, Liverpool
Props made by	Students of the Theatre Design Department, Nottingham Trent University
Backdrop painted by	Mercury Theatre, Colchester
Dragon's smoke	courtesy of Keith Major
Opera Restor'd Band	
Judith Tarling	violin
Theresa Caudle	violin
Paul Denley	viola
Katherine Sharman	cello
Peter McCarthy	violone
Peter Holman	harpichord and direction
Assistant	
Musical Director	John Flinders

Opera Restor'd

Specialising in 17th and 18th century English opera and music theatre, Opera Restor'd re-creates and makes accessible the rich musical life of earlier centuries. By concentrating principally on small-scale, flexible productions of 18th century comic operas supported by a small orchestra, the company has toured to a variety of venues from barns to opera houses, and has performed all over the UK and in France, Spain, Holland, Belgium, Austria and Turkey.

Opera Restor'd was the first opera company to tour on the Early Music Network, has provided music and performers for the feature film, *Princess Caraboo*, and featured in the BBC Radio series *Opera Out and About*.

John Frederick Lampe and The Dragon of Wantley

Nothing is known about John Frederick Lampe before he was admitted to the University of Helmstedt in May 1718, where he studied law. An early associate in England was the poet and composer Henry Carey, who foretold fame for him: 'Light him but up! let him in publick blaze, /He will delight not only but amaze', and indeed fame was to come to him though his settings of Carey's comic opera libretti.

Lampe's first operas were serious. However he discovered his true metier, the satire of Italian opera, with *The Opera of Operas*, an adaptation of Fielding. He was a bassoonist in Handel's opera orchestra, and we may imagine him doing 'research' for his parodies during performances of his compatriot's heroic operas.

The Dragon of Wantley was first seen on 10 May 1737 at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, and was a sensation. The Dragon was played by the bass Thomas Reinhold, and was partly inspired by a ridiculous monster currently appearing at Covent Garden in Handel's *Giustino*. Thomas Salway played the hero, Moore of Moore Hall, by taking off the great castrato Farinelli, while Margery and Mauxalinda, rivals for Moore's affections, were played by the sisters Isabella and Esther Young. Isabella, Thomas Arne's sister-in-law, married Lampe in 1738.

Italian opera is satirised essentially by transferring its artificial conventions and high-flown sentiments to a down-to-earth English setting. In this case the story was known nationally through a ballad printed by Thomas D'Urfey in *Pills to Purge Melancholy* (1699).

Carey's text was reprinted fourteen times in little more than a year; the work was quickly transferred to Covent Garden and it held the stage until 1782. It was the most popular English comic opera of the century after *The Beggar's Opera*. Lampe never had another success to match *The Dragon*. In 1748 he went to Dublin for two years, and then on to Edinburgh, where he fell prey to a fever and died on 25 July 1751.

SYNOPSIS

Setting: Wantley (Wharncliffe), near Rotherham, Yorkshire

Act I: A Rural Prospect

The inhabitants of Wantley are bemoaning the state of fear in which they live, terrorised by a dragon that eats their breakfasts and the people too. Margery, the pretty young daughter of Gubbins, has a brilliant idea: they should call in the local hero, Moore of Moore Hall, Stout, vig'rous and tall, a man who is also, apparently, irresistible to women.

Moore Hall

Moore is in relaxed mood, contemplating the manly joys of drink and women. However, when he is faced with the supplicant Margery begging him on her knees to save them all, he knows where his duty lies, and modestly requests in return only that she should take care of his needs the night before the battle. Margery falls in love with him instantly but Mauxalinda, Moore's current love, overhears and is none too happy with this bargain, reminding Moore of his promise to marry her. Moore, hero that he is, decides to brave it out and declares he belongs only to Mauxalinda. In their closing duet they declare: *Pigs shall not be/So fond as we*.

Act II: A Garden

Margery has had a terrible dream in which her hero has been killed by the dragon, but Moore assures her it is impossible because his new suit of armour will protect him against anything. Mauxalinda, who is getting into the habit of overhearing things, takes advantage of his departure to pick a fight with, and preferably murder, Margery. *Your too much feeding/Has spoiled your breeding/Go Trollop go, & etc.* Moore returns, as heroes will, to save Margery's life in the nick of time. He then manages, by threatening to invoke solicitors, to get them to kiss and make up. Just as they are dwelling on the ever popular theme of the covetousness of woman and the deceptiveness of man, the Dragon's roar is heard and the denouement is at hand.

Act III: A rural prospect near the Dragon's Den

Moore, confident of his prowess but afraid for Margery's safety, sends her up a tree to watch. He surprises the dragon by hiding in a well, then leaping out and kicking him. This ensures victory and he can now take his reward with justification and congratulations from Gubbins. Everyone sings: *An Oratorio/To gallant Morio//To Margerenia/Of Roth'ram Greenia..*

THE DRAGON AND THE LAW

It is thought that the popular ballad on which the libretto of *The Dragon* was based was itself a satire upon chivalric tales such as that of St George and the Dragon. However, there may have been an additional agenda; a note in a 1738 edition of *The Dragon* implies that the original ballad was possibly a satire on the ways of the legal profession:

"in Days of old, a certain Gentleman, a Member of the Law, and here represented by the Dragon, being left Guardian to three Orphans, and finding some little Flaw in the Titles, put in his Claim, depriv'd them of their Estate, took Possession of it himself, and turn'd them over to the Parish. Upon which another (here called Moore of Moore-hall) took up their Cause, sued the unjust Guardian, cast him, and recover'd the Estate for the Children.."



Carey certainly took up the legal theme at one point in his libretto. In the last Act the two female rivals for Moore's attentions are fighting over him and are only separated by a threat to invoke the law.

The Dragon continued to be performed until the end of the century and influenced fashion to such an extent that no Italian opera was performed in London for several seasons. There is no record, however, of it having any influence whatever on the foibles of the legal profession.

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