



FRANZ LISZT

audite

SARDANAPALO
MAZEPPA

*Joyce El-Khoury
Airam Hernández
Oleksandr Pushniak*

Kirill Karabits

Staatskapelle Weimar

FRANZ LISZT**MAZEPPA 15:32**

Symphonic Poem No. 6, S. 100

SARDANAPALO

Act I, Scenes I-4, S. 687 (unfinished opera),
edited and orchestrated by David Trippett

Scene I

Preludio 1:55

'Vieni! Risplendono festive faci' (Chor) 3:43

'Oh del tetto paterno' (Mirra) 1:56

'L'altera Ninive a te s'inchina' (Chor) 4:23

Scene II

'Più lunga cura' (Mirra) 3:00

'Giù pel piano' (Mirra) 1:42

'Sogno vano' (Mirra) 3:07

'Ahi! Nell'ansio rapimento' (Mirra) 3:01

Scene III

'Nella tua stanza' (Sard. / Mirra) 1:47

'Parla! Parla!' (Sard. / Mirra) 2:51

'Sotto il tuo sguardo' (Sard. / Mirra) 6:26

Scene IV

'Mentre a tuo danno' (Beleso) 4:42

'Se sol l'armi' (Sardanapalo) 2:07

'Oh perché, perché quel core' (Mirra / Bel.) 2:32

'Che far pensi?' (Sard. / Mirra / Bel.) 2:43

'Diletta vergine' (Sard. / Mirra / Bel.) 2:20

Allegro deciso 3:02

Joyce El-Khoury, Mirra

Airam Hernández, Sardanapalo

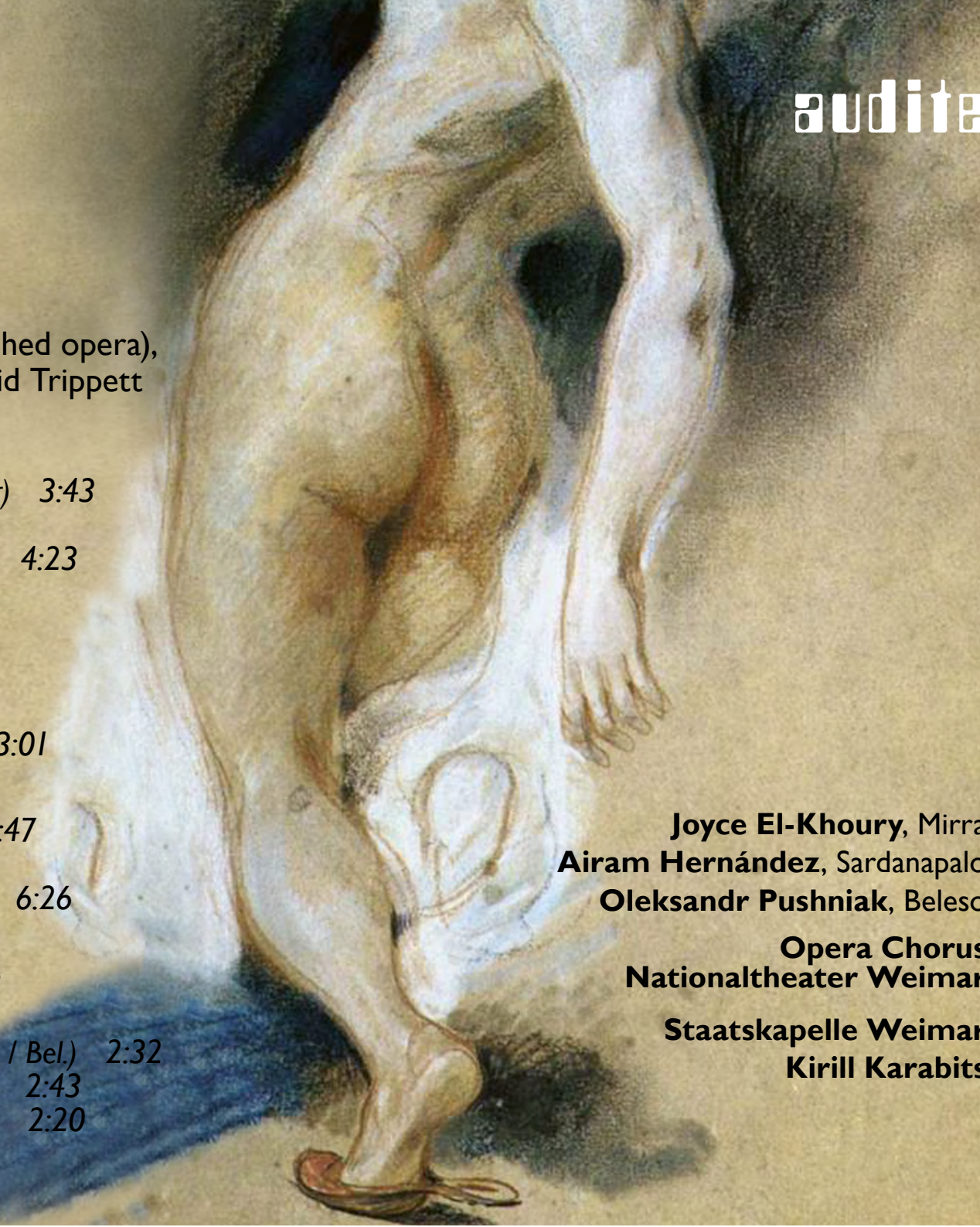
Oleksandr Pushniak, Beleso

Opera Chorus

Nationaltheater Weimar

Staatskapelle Weimar

Kirill Karabits



Liszt and opera

'I have simply asked for my turn at the Opéra and nothing but that.'¹

We tend not to take Liszt's brief career as an opera composer seriously today. But during the 1840s, before drafting any of his symphonic poems, Liszt's strategic ambition was precisely to become a composer of opera. 'Within three years I'll end my career in Vienna and in Pest, where I began it.' – he told the exiled Italian Princess Cristina Belgiojoso in 1841 – 'But before then, during the winter of 1843, I want to première an opera in Venice (*Le Corsaire* after Lord Byron).'² This would be, he explained privately, a means of pivoting away from life as a prodigiously successful touring virtuoso and attaining status as a serious professional composer, alongside Rossini, Meyerbeer and the young Wagner.

By 1855, he felt somewhat differently about opera's role in his future (he would mock the assumption that entering 'the musical guild or brotherhood' automatically meant that one *must* compose operas: 'not every genius can limit his flight within the narrow confines of the stage').³ But for a time his mind fizzed with the literary topics he wished to set as operas. Aside from *Don Sanche* (1825) – an unsuccessful juvenile work whose music only survives in the hand of Liszt's teacher Ferdinando Paër – all other planned operas of the 1840s and 1850s remained the embryos of ambition. These include *Richard of Ples-tine* (Walter Scott), *Le Corsaire* (Byron/Dumas), *Consuelo* (George Sand), *Jankó* (Karl Beck), *Spartacus* (Oscar Wolff), *Marguerite* (Goethe), *Divina commedia* (Dante/Autran), *Jeanne d'Arc* (Friedrich Halm), *Manfred* (Byron), *Semele* (Schiller) and *Sardanapalo* (Byron). This scattergun approach to canonical literature indicates the breadth of Liszt's ambition, but also underscores the extent to which his desire to conjoin literature and music in the present tense – the premise of symphonic poetry – may have first been kindled within the aesthetic potential of opera. The two works on this disc were both begun in 1850-51, the one an opera, the other a symphonic poem, and so offer some perspective on this critical fork in Liszt's creative direction.

Sardanapalo

Sardanapalo is the only mature opera for which Liszt composed any significant music. 110 pages of music are contained in his music book N4, and constitute almost the entirety of Act I. He abandoned it thereafter. Like an unearthed diamond that has been polished by its editor, it reflects myriad shades of musical influence – from the opening Verdian chorus and bass motif from *Nabucco*, to the proto-Wagnerian harmonies and *Tannhäuser* textures, Bellinian melodies, quasi-Palestrinian falso bordone (cf. *Lamentations*), and massed sonorities after Berlioz. *Sardanapalo* refracts the world of mid 19th-century opera through the prism of Liszt's unmistakable voice, in other words. Like a window into a parallel universe, it permits us a glimpse of what might have been had Liszt continued to pursue his belief that the genre of Italian opera could be modernised, even monumentalised, as drama. Significantly, Liszt did not give up on

¹ Franz Liszt to Marie d'Agoult, 14 February 1846, in Serge Gut and Jacqueline Bellas (eds), *Franz Liszt – Marie d'Agoult Correspondance* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), 1121.

² Franz Liszt to Cristina Belgiojoso, October 1841, in Emilie Ollivier (ed), *Autour de Mme d'Agoult et de Liszt* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1941), 181–182.

³ Franz Liszt, "Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie", *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, vol. 43 no. 8 (1855): 79.

the genre of opera after he abandoned *Sardanapalo* in 1852, planning others late into the 1850s. That he neither destroyed nor recycled the music for *Sardanapalo* suggests that it held a special status for him.

The plot

Liszt's opera is based on Lord Byron's *Sardanapalus* (1821) about war and peace in ancient Assyria: Sardanapalo, the last King, a hedonist, effeminate in his tastes, is drawn to wine, concubines and feasts more than politics and war; his subjects find him dishonorable (a 'man queen', a 'silkworm') and military rebels seek to overthrow him, but are pardoned, for the King rejects the 'deceit of glory' built on others' suffering; this leads only to a larger uprising, the Euphrates floods its banks and destroys the castle's main defensive wall, and defeat is inevitable; the King sends his family away and orders that he be burned alive with his lover, Myrrha (for Liszt: Mirra), amid scents and spices in a grand inferno. As Byron put it: 'not a mere pillar formed of cloud and flame, but a light to lessen ages.' For his part, Liszt told a friend that *his* finale 'will even aim to set fire to the entire audience!'

Byron's five-act tragedy conflates the historical account of Diodorus Siculus into a single day. Written in blank verse, it was intended to be read rather than performed on stage. The *Gentleman's Magazine* declared its title 'a name familiar to most', and while its dedication to Goethe only appeared in editions from 1829 onwards, by this time it had already inspired Eugène Delacroix to paint his colossal oil *La mort de Sardanapale* (1827), and would prompt Berlioz to compose a cantata *La dernière nuit de Sardanapale* (setting a text by Jean François Gail), for which he would receive the Prix de Rome in 1830, at the fourth attempt.

Synopsis of Liszt's Act I

Scene 1. Evening. In the royal palace at Nineveh, a festival is taking place. A chorus of concubines calls Mirra, a Greek slave girl and favourite of the King, to the harem to raise her spirits ('Come, come – your palpitating heart, / Shedding all worry, / Will forget the earth and the sky in ecstasy'). Mirra is unhappy, nostalgic for her lost home and sad at her current situation, but the chorus, unabated, venerates her as de facto queen ('Among thousands of virgins ... / The king of Assyria has chosen you / Wreath your brow with garlands of roses and vine leaves').

Scene 2. Despairing, Mirra seeks refuge and peace ('Have no further thought for me!') and relates her predicament in a gentle cavatina: she is ridden with guilt for loving the man who conquered her homeland, and for adopting his Ashurian faith; she weeps while thinking of her mother on the one hand, and of her love for Sardanapalo on the other, angrily declaring herself 'a slave mocked by fate'. Her declamatory recitative confesses her initial passion for the King ('My heart was blessed / With indescribable contentment'), and in a closing cabaletta she defiantly clings to the love she feels for him.

Scene 3. The King enters and asks why she is distressed; she demurs, but he implores her ('Speak! Speak! / Ah, your voice is an enchantment'). He seeks to reassure her with the strength and inevitability of their love ('The stars love the air, the earth loves the sun'). She cannot bring herself to mention her past life in Ionia, so explains only that her adulterous role as his favourite carries no dignity ('Under your vigilant gaze, / My pallor accuses me'), that theirs is an 'ill-fated flame' bringing only shame and grief. But the King – infatuated – doesn't grasp the full circumstances of her unhappiness, promises to encircle her with the splendour of the royal palace, and declares his love in a grand lyric duet ('Let us love as long as / The fervid age still smiles upon us').

Scene 4. While Mirra's predicament remains unresolved, Beleso – a soothsayer (Chaldean) and elder statesman – enters warning of war. He accuses the King of enjoying comforts while ignoring 'the inner voice of duty' as insurgent leaders ready their forces against him. He urges the king to take up arms ('Throw off your soft garments, / Set aside the distaff, grasp the sword!') and earn the people's reverence which only superficially attends the diadem he wears. Sardanapalo hesitates at the prospect of bloodshed and terror, lamenting that 'every glory is a lie / If it must be bought with the tears / Of afflicted humankind.' In a lyric passage, Mirra wonders aloud why he is not stirred to 'noble valour,' and makes a personal plea for action that – ultimately – heralds the moment of peripeteia, as the King is finally persuaded to fight ('The earth is not vast enough for us to live together in peace ... Your wish will be fulfilled.') A grand trio closes the act in which Beleso beats the drums of war, Mirra speaks of love inspiring lofty feeling in the King, and Sardanapalo professes now to wear his royal purple more easily. A closing orchestral march depicts the royal troops mobilising and marching off to battle.

Abandonment and editorial work

We have no statement from Liszt as to why he abandoned *Sardanapalo*. Circumstantial evidence points to Wagner's influence (less than it might seem), and to Carolyn zu Sayn-Wittgenstein's disinclination towards the project (which was associated – for her – with Liszt's earlier liaison with Marie d'Agoult). But Liszt's correspondence also suggests a more practical reason: he never received a revised version of the libretto for Acts 2-3, and so could not set them. It also seems he felt unable to rely on his librettist, whose name he probably never knew, and whose work – he felt – needed doctoring and correcting by Cristina Belgiojoso. This librettist was initially procured by Belgiojoso after Liszt's first choice, the French playwright Félicien Mallefille, had missed two deadlines and Liszt had lost patience with him ('It seems our Shakespeare will not or cannot come up with a suitable scenario. Well fine! Others will manage it better and certainly quicker than him. ... To the devil with Mallefille's *Sardanapalo*!'). Belgiojoso's Italian poet penned a scenario late in 1846 while imprisoned for political activity, sent the versification for Act I by New Year's Day 1847, and – following an eighteen-month delay – sent Acts 2-3 on 10 August 1848. Liszt requested revisions to Acts 2-3 late in 1848, which Belgiojoso felt were unrealistic; it seems he never received a revised libretto, and his correspondence about the opera with Belgiojoso breaks off at that point.

The project bubbled on, however. Liszt's assistant Joachim Raff confirms Liszt had begun composition by 11 April 1850, Liszt discusses the publication with Léon Escudier in February 1851, and Raff remarks as late as December 1851 that he soon expects to orchestrate the opera for Liszt. Thereafter the trail goes cold. Liszt was working at a blistering pace in Weimar – on a range of compositional projects, stage performances, essays and teaching – and it seems his opera project simply fell by the wayside after stalling fatally (despite Liszt's optimistic claim, reported by Hans von Bülow, that the opera is 'well on the way to completion').⁴

The score Liszt left in manuscript is not performable. It is written in a hybrid piano-vocal score, often in shorthand or with abbreviations, and with three short gaps in the accompaniment. In some places a great many details are missing, from accidentals and rests to articulation, dynamics and tempi. Yet the vocal parts are fully notated and are continuous, and the remaining information in the manuscript is just sufficient to retrieve the cardinal analyti-

⁴ Hans von Bülow to his mother, 21 June 1849, Hans von Bülow: Briefe und Schriften, ed. Marie von Bülow, 8 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1895-1908), I:180.

cal parameters – harmony, melody, rhythm, counterpoint and texture – for what was evidently the continuous conception Liszt had at the time. Liszt also left a number of cues for instrumentation to guide Raff's provisional orchestration. We should remember this was a private document; it was in no way intended for a publisher, but that does not mean Liszt didn't know what he meant at the time. The 'gaps' relate to simple accompanimental patterns contained within the basic toolkit of Italian opera, patterns that could be 'composed out' by any competent assistant. In 2017, a remaining task was to orchestrate the music based on Liszt's own cues, while being guided by his contemporary symphonic works and the opera scores on his desk during the early 1850s. The final task was to draw on closing material from the central duet to create the final cadence and stretto, some 20 bars, to end the Act.

Mazeppa

Like the opera (and unlike Liszt's *Orpheus* and *Die Ideale*) the symphonic poem *Mazeppa* (1851) relates a clear-cut story, that of the fabled Ukrainian Cossack leader condemned to death by his compatriots. Bound naked to his horse, he is set loose at the border of Asia to live a life of suffering and humiliation, yet he is rescued, revived, and rallies his new subjects who offer him a crown, at which point he dies in glory. It was begun in 1851, coeval with the music for *Sardanapalo* (whose large orchestra also has a bass clarinet, piccolo and English horn). While Byron published a narrative poem on the topic in 1819, it was Victor Hugo's poem that inspired Liszt, and which he republished in its entirety as a preface to the first edition in 1856.

Not coincidentally, the two routes towards the future – Liszt reflected in 1855 – related to both symphonic poetry and declamatory, modern opera:

"We consider the introduction of the program into the concert hall to be just as inevitable as the declamatory style is to the opera. ... These two trends ... are imperative necessities of a moment in our social life, in our ethical training, and as such will sooner or later clear a path for themselves."⁵

Side by side, *Mazeppa* and *Sardanapalo* present a kind of virtual crucible in music history, a chance to hear this fleeting vision of the future, if only briefly.

David Trippett

David Trippett is University Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Cambridge. His numerous publications include *Wagner's Melodies* (Cambridge: University Press, 2013) and he is recipient of several international awards. The surviving manuscript of *Sardanapalo*'s first act was deciphered and edited by him for the *Neue Liszt Ausgabe* (EMB). His orchestration is published by Schott.

Further reading on www.audite.de/97764: David Trippett, *An Uncrossable Rubicon: Liszt's Sardanapalo revisited*.

⁵ Franz Liszt, "Berlioz und seine Haroldsymphonie", *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, vol. 43 no. 5 (1855): 54.



JOYCE EL-KHOURY (SOPRANO)

Born in Lebanon and brought up in Canada, Joyce El-Khoury earned her Bachelor of Music at the University of Ottawa. She received her Artist Diploma from the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia, and is a graduate of the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program. She is a First Prize winner in many competitions including the Loren L. Zachary Competition, the Opera Index Competition, the George London Competition, and the Mario Lanza Vocal Competition.

Joyce El-Khoury regularly appears in the major international opera houses and concert halls, e.g. in Toronto, Montreal, Paris, New York, London, Amsterdam, Washington D.C., San Diego, Seattle, Vancouver and Seoul. A particularly celebrated success was her debut at the Glyndebourne Festival in summer 2017 in the role of Violetta (*La traviata*). As a concert singer, she performed e.g. with the Munich Philharmonic, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Orchestre de Paris and the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

**AIRAM HERNÁNDEZ (TENOR)**

Hailed by critics for his unique timbre and exquisite musicality, Airam Hernández has become one of the most promising singers of his generation. His versatility has allowed him to stand out in many fields from baroque to contemporary, in opera, oratorio, symphonic and lied. Recent appearances took him to Théâtre du Capitole of Toulouse, Grand Théâtre de la Ville de Luxembourg, Konzerthaus Dortmund, and Elbphilharmonie Hamburg. Future engagements will lead him to a concert tour through China, Teatro Regio di Parma, De Nationale Opera of Amsterdam, The Dallas Opera, Hong Kong Opera, Teatro La Fenice and Teatro Real of Madrid. Past successes were performances at Opéra de Lausanne, Ópera de Tenerife, Semperoper Dresden, Perm Opera and Opernhaus Zürich. His opera repertoire includes the leading tenor parts of *La traviata*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Faust*, *L'elisir d'amore* and *Rigoletto*.

Born in Tenerife/Spain, Airam Hernández is a former French horn player; he graduated with honors in vocal studies with Maestra Dolors Aldea at Conservatori Superior de Música del Liceu of Barcelona.

**OLEKSANDR PUSHNIAK (BASS-BARITONE)**

Oleksandr Pushniak graduated from the National Music Academy of Ukraine. He is award winner of the 7th International Wagner Competition in Karlsruhe and of the European Song Contest of the Austrian music festival styriarte, as well as finalist at the International Vocal Competition 's-Hertogenbosch and semifinalist at the Operalia competition in Paris. From 2008 to 2010, Oleksandr Pushniak performed at the Washington National Opera as a member of Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program and debuted in several roles. Shortly after, the young bass-baritone became member of the ensemble of the Staatstheater Braunschweig where he raised attention particularly in the role of Scarpa. In 2016, he successfully debuted in the title role of the *Flying Dutchman*. Further guest engagements led him to Hong Kong, the Nederlandse Reisopera and the Deutsche Oper am Rhein. Since December 2018, he is permanently engaged at the Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar.



STAATSKAPELLE WEIMAR

Founded in 1491, the Staatskapelle Weimar is one of the oldest orchestras in Germany and among the most illustrious in the world. Its history is closely associated with some of the world's best-known musicians, including Johann Sebastian Bach, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Franz Liszt, and Richard Strauss. Established as the premier musical institution of classical Weimar and part of the Hoftheater Weimar, the orchestra continued to attract attention through the achievements of Liszt and Strauss during the 19th century. These two celebrated figures not only improved its quality and reputation, but also led the Hofkapelle in world premieres of numerous contemporary orchestral works and operas. These positive developments were brought to an abrupt end when the National Socialists seized power. After the calamitous events of World War II, conductor Hermann Abendroth re-established the Staatskapelle Weimar, restoring it to its former grandeur and quality. Since the 1980s, conductors Peter Gülke, Oleg Caetani, and Hans-Peter Frank as well as the current honorary conductor George Alexander Albrecht, who led the orchestra from 1996 to 2002, have left a lasting mark. Kirill Karabits has taken the reins of Thuringia's only A-level orchestra for the seasons 2016/17 through 2018/19.

The ensemble has made guest appearances in Japan, Israel, Spain, Italy, Great Britain, Austria, Switzerland, and the US as well as in the major concert halls throughout Germany and at renowned festivals. Numerous recordings document the orchestra's diverse repertoire.

**KIRILL KARABITS (CONDUCTOR)**

Since 2008, Ukrainian-born Kirill Karabits has held the position of Chief Conductor of Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. In addition, from the season 2016/17 to 2018/19 he has assumed the position of General Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Deutsches Nationaltheater and Staatskapelle Weimar.

Kirill Karabits has worked with many of the leading ensembles of Europe, Asia and North America, including the Cleveland, Philadelphia and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras, Philharmonia Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Filarmonica del Teatro La Fenice, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and the Münchner Philharmoniker. In 2016, he conducted the Russian National Orchestra on their tour of the US and in two concerts at the Edinburgh International Festival. Summer 2016 also saw his debut with the Chicago Symphony at the Ravinia Festival. A prolific opera conductor, Kirill Karabits has conducted at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, English National Opera and the Bolshoi Theatre. He also conducted at the Wagner Geneva Festival, and recently returned to the Staatsoper Hamburg. The 2016/17 season saw his debuts at both the Deutsche Oper and the Oper Stuttgart.

Working with the next generation of bright musicians is of great importance to Kirill Karabits. Thus he commits himself as Artistic Director of I, CULTURE Orchestra, an orchestra of talented, young musicians from Poland and other East European countries. In 2012 and 2014 he conducted the televised finals of the BBC Young Musician of the Year Award. In recognition of his achievements in the UK, Kirill Karabits was named Conductor of the Year at the 2013 Royal Philharmonic Society Music Awards.

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cover: Eugène Delacroix: Female Nude, Killed from Behind
(study to one of the figures in 'The Death of Sardanapalus')

page 12: Eugène Delacroix: Death of Sardanapalus

photos:

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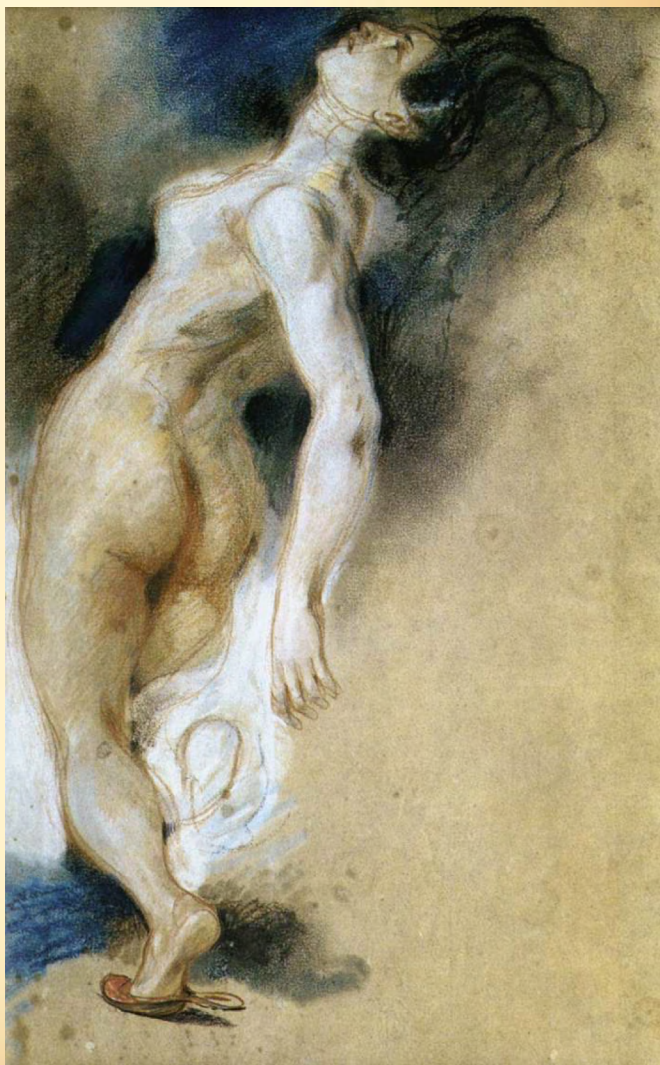
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Delacroix, *female nude, mortally wounded*, 1827 (study for *La Mort de Sardanapale*); Louvre, Paris.

Sardanapalo,
unfinished opera, S. 687
Libretto – Act 1

Written in 1846 by an unknown Italian poet under the care of Cristina Belgiojoso; based on the tragedy by Lord Byron, *Sardanapalus* (1821).

Dramatis Personae

Sardanapalo, King of Assyria	tenor
Mirra, Greek slave girl, and favourite of the King	soprano
Beleso, priest and elder statesman, a Chaldean	bass-baritone
Women of the harem / concubines	female chorus

Setting

The King's chamber in the royal palace of Nineveh, Assyria ca. 650 BC

Libretto reconstructed by Marco Beghelli,
with Francesca Vella and David Rosen.

General Editor: David Trippett.

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SCENA PRIMA

(Mirra circondata dalle concubine di Sardanapalo.)

Coro «di concubine»

Vieni! risplendono - [festive] faci,
le danze invitano - ai molli baci.
Di cure immemore - il petto anelo
obblia nell'estasi - la terra e il [cielo].
Di gioia un fremito - intorno suona,
la luce, l'aëre - d'amor ragiona.
[Vieni!] nel gaudio - comun ti bea
e la mestissima - alma ricrea.

Mirra

Oh del tetto paterno
ineffabili gioje, io v'ho perduto,
e per sempre perduto. Al core affranto
della schiava infelice
supremo bene non riman che il pianto.

Coro «di concubine»

L'altra Ninive - a te s'inchina,
l'Asia ti venera - come rei[na].
Fra mille [vergini], - o giovan[etta],
il re d'Assiria - t'ha prediletta.
Di rose e pampini - ghirlanda il crine,
t'inebrii un'estasi - senza confin[e],
e in baci d'angiol - venga rapita
ogni ora, ogni attimo - della tua vita.

Mirra

[Ah no!] Più lunga cura
non vi prenda di me. Itene! un'ora
di silenzio e d'oblio, oh quante volte
ho supplicato in vano al dolor mio.
Pianger non vista e soffocar nel seno
il prorompente affetto,
lassa! potessi alm[eno].

(Le concubine si ritirano.)

SCENE ONE

(Mirra surrounded by Sardanapalo's concubines.)

Chorus of concubines

Come, the festive torches shine brilliantly;
the dances encourage soft kisses.
Come, your palpitating heart, shedding all worry,
will forget the earth and the sky in ecstasy.
A shiver of joy resounds,
the light and air speak of love.
Come, rejoice in the shared joy
and revive your afflicted soul.

Mirra

Oh the indescribable joys of my native land,
I have lost you, lost you forever.
To the broken heart of this unhappy slave,
no resource remains but a bounty of tears.

Chorus of concubines

Lofty Ninevah bows to you,
Asia venerates you as queen.
Among a thousand virgins, oh young girl,
the king of Assyria has chosen you.
Wreath your brow with garlands of roses & vine leaves,
intoxicate yourself with a boundless ecstasy
and may angelic kisses enrapture
every hour, every moment of your life.

Mirra

Ah no! Have no further thought for me!
Leave! Oh how many times
have I begged in vain
for an hour of silence, an hour of forgetfulness.
Alas, if only I could
at least weep unseen
and staunch the surging passion in my breast.

(The concubines withdraw.)

ERSTE SZENE

(Mirra, umgeben von Sardanapalos Konkubinen.)

Chor der Konkubinen

Komm! Die Fackeln leuchten festlich;
die Tänze beschwören sanfte Küsse.
Komm! Dein pochendes Herz wird verzückt
alle Sorgen des Himmels und der Erde vergessen.
Ein Freudenschauer erfasst alles ringsum,
das Licht und die Luft sind erfüllt von Liebe.
Komm! Teile unsere Wonne
und erquickte deine geplagte Seele.

Mirra

Oh, einzigartig sind die Freuden meines Heimatlandes,
ich habe sie verloren, für immer verloren.
Dem erschöpften Herzen dieser unglücklichen Sklavin
bleiben einzig und allein Trauer und Tränen.

Chor der Konkubinen

Die erhabene Ninive verbeugt sich vor dir,
Asia huldigt dir als Königin,
unter tausenden Jungfrauen, oh, du junges Mädchen,
hat der König von Assyrien dich erwählt.
Winde dir einen Kranz aus Rosen und Wein,
berausche dich an unendlicher Ekstase,
und mögen engelsgleiche Küsse dich
jede Stunde, jeden Moment deines Lebens entzücken.

Mirra

Ach, nein! Sorgt Euch nicht weiter um mich!
Geht! Oh, wie oft habe ich vergeblich
um eine Stunde der Stille und des Vergessens gefleht,
ach, wenn ich doch wenigstens ungesehen weinen,
und die aufwallende Leidenschaft in meiner Brust
ersticken könnte.

(Die Konkubinen gehen.)

SCENA SECONDA

(*Mirra sola.*)

Alla mia patria ingrata,
ribelle alla mia fede,
in van del mio do[lor] chieggo mercede.

Giù pel piano, sull'erto sentiero,
lungo il margin del placido rivo,
«a una speme affidavo il pen[siero].
[Vidi] l'ombra del tetto nativo:
era un sogno ridente, dorato,
che il materno sorriso des[tò].

[Sogno vano...] Infelice! ed un'ora
io non ho che di pianto non [cale]:
il passato, il presente m'accora,
nello schianto la mente tra[sale].
Schiava, sola, ludibrio del fato,
una colpa il mio core tentò.

Io lo vidi in trono assiso
di bellezza altero e re,
tutto un popolo conquiso
atterravasi al suo piè.

Ahi! nell'ansio rapimento
il suo sguardo m'affi[sò]:
d'ineffabile contento
il mio core si beò.

Quando il raggio della sera
[trascolora il cielo d'or]
scende tacita e leggera
una lagrima d'amor,
e d'un bacio sul mio viso
sembra l'alito posar.

Tolta ai gaudi dell'Eliso
quella lagrima mi par.

SCENE TWO

(*Mirra alone.*)

Ungrateful to my homeland,
rebellious to my faith,
in vain, I ask relief from my grief.

Descending the steep path to the plain
along the bank of the peaceful brook,
a hope took shape in my mind,
and in the shadow of my home there was a
golden, pleasant dream
awakened by my mother's smile.

Oh useless dream! Unhappy me!
I can't have an hour untroubled by weeping.
The past, the present break my heart,
my mind recoils at its wrenching apart.
A slave, alone, plaything of fate,
an error tempted my heart.

I saw him seated on the throne,
a king, of lofty beauty.
An entire conquered people
were kneeling at his feet.
Ah! In my anxious rapture
his gaze fixed upon me:
my heart was blessed
with indescribable contentment.

When the evening ray
turns the sky golden,
a tear of love descends,
silently and lightly.
And the breeze seems
to place a kiss on my face.
That tear seems to me stolen
from Elysium's joys.

ZWEITE SZENE

(*Mirra allein.*)

Undankbar gegen mein Heimatland,
aufbegehrend gegen meinen Glauben,
erhoffe ich – vergeblich – Befreiung von meinem Kummer.

Den steilen Pfad hinabsteigend,
an der Böschung eines ruhigen Bachs,
kam die Hoffnung zu mir zurück:
im Schatten meines Elternhauses,
trug ein lachender, goldener Traum mich davon
und ich sah das Lächeln meiner Mutter.

Vergeblicher Traum! Ich Unglückliche!
Ich habe keine unbesorgte Stunde,
die Vergangenheit, die Gegenwart
schrecken meinen Verstand jäh auf.
Sklavin, allein, Spielball des Schicksals –
nur ein Irrtum lockte mein Herz.

Ich sah ihn, den König,
in erhabener Schönheit auf dem Thron sitzen,
zu seinen Füßen
kniete ein ganzes bezwungenes Volk.
Ach, welch banges Entzücken!
Er sah mich an,
und mein Herz fühlte
nie dagewesenes Glück.

Als der Abend
den Himmel golden färbte,
kam mir still und leise
eine Träne der Liebe
und eine Brise hauchte
einen Kuss auf meine Wange.
Diese Träne schien mir
den Freuden Elysiums entrissen.

SCENA TERZA

*(Sardanapalo, e detta.)***Sardanapalo**

Nella tua stanza solitaria e mesta,
 Mirra, pur sempre rimaner vor[rai?]
 Dimmi, dimmi, fanciulla, angelo mio,
 l'affanno che ti tocca.

Mirra

Da' benefici tuoi l'alma commossa
 divelarti vorria
 quel che prova in segreto,
 ma all'ardente desir manca la possa.
 Di ritegno indi[s]creto,
 deh, mio signor, non dinegar perdo[no].
 Clemente sei pur tanto.

Sardanapalo

Parla! parla!

Ah, tua voce è un incanto.

Alla tua voce io palpito
 di gioja e di speranza.
 Nella pupilla tremula,
 su la gentil sembianza
 la più ridente immagine
 il ciel rifletta in te.

Mirra

Cessa, signor! Deh, lasciami
 se ancor mi sei pietoso.
 Su me, su me non volgere
 lo sguardo insidioso.
 Troppo sovente, ah misera!
 obbligo me stessa in te.

Sardanapalo

Di che pa[venti? Ah, calmati!
 Rossor ti] tinge il viso.
 Ah, non tremar! Dischiudeti
 la vita il suo sorriso.
 Aman le stelle l'aëre,
 ama la terra il sol.

SCENE THREE

*(Sardanapalo and Mirra.)***Sardanapalo**

And yet you always wish to remain
 in your sad and solitary room, Mirra?
 Tell me, tell me, girl, my angel,
 what painful thought distresses you.

Mirra

My soul, touched by your kind favours,
 would like to show you
 in secret what it feels
 but my ardent wish lacks the power to do so.
 Ah, my lord, do not deny me your pardon
 for my unseemly restraint;
 Surely your mercy is that great.

Sardanapalo

Speak! Speak!

Ah, your voice is an enchantment.

At hearing your voice I tremble
 with joy and hope;
 in your fluttering eye,
 on your noble countenance
 may heaven enlighten you
 with the most smiling image.

Mirra

Stop! My lord, oh leave me
 if you still have pity on me.
 Do not turn
 your insidious gaze upon me;
 too often, ah wretch that I am,
 I forget myself in you.

Sardanapalo

What do you fear? Ah, calm yourself!
 Guilty blushing reddens your face.
 Ah, do not tremble!
 Life reveals its smile to you.
 The stars love the air,
 the earth loves the sun.

DRITTE SZENE

*(Sardanapalo und Mirra.)***Sardanapalo**

So willst du, Mirra, also ewig
 in deinem einsamen, wehmütigen Zimmer bleiben?
 Sag mir, sag mir doch, mein Mädchen, mein Engel,
 welch Kummer dich quält.

Mirra

Gerührt von deinen Wohltaten,
 wünscht sich meine Seele sehnlichst
 dir zu zeigen, was ich im Verborgenen fühle,
 aber mir fehlt dazu die Kraft.
 Ich bitte dich, Herr,
 verzeih mir diese ungehörige Zurückhaltung;
 ich weiß, deine Güte ist so groß.

Sardanapalo

Sprich! Sprich!

Ach, deine Stimme ist bezaubernd.

Deine Stimme hörend,
 zittere ich vor Freude und Hoffnung.
 In deinem aufgeregt flackerndem Auge,
 in deiner noblen Haltung,
 schafft sich der Himmel
 das schönste, leuchtendste Abbild.

Mirra

Halt ein, Herr! Verlass mich,
 wenn du noch Mitleid mit mir hast!
 Wende deinen Blick,
 deinen verhänglichen Blick von mir,
 denn ich Armselige
 verliere mich zu oft in dir.

Sardanapalo

Was fürchtest du? Ach, beruhige dich!
 Dein Gesicht ist schamvoll errötet.
 Ach, zittere nicht!
 Das Leben offenbart dir seine Fülle.
 Die Sterne lieben die Luft,
 die Erde liebt die Sonne.

Mirra

[Sotto] il [tuo] sguardo vigile
il pallor «mio» mi accusa;
la speme e la letizia
amore mi ricusa;
per me la fiamma infausta
non ha che onta e duol.

Sardanapalo

Ti sta a cuore il re soltanto?
Ti seduce il trono e l'ara?

Mirra

[Cessa! Cessa!]

Sardanapalo

Adunque tanto
è la porpora a te [cara?]
Del mio trono, del mio soglio
ti circondi lo splendore.
Farti lieta io bramo, [io voglio].

Mirra

Di sé stesso è premio amore.

Sardanapalo

M'ami tu?

Mirra

Nol potess'io!
Il mio fato il ciel segnò.

Sardanapalo

Amiam fin che ne invitano
le forme tue leggiadre,
amiam fin che la fervida
età ne arride ancor.

Troppo s'involan presti
i dolci istanti, o cara,
troppo è la vita amara
se non l'abella amor.

Mirra

Under your vigilant gaze,
my pallor accuses me;
love denies me
hope and joy;
this ill-fated flame brings me
nothing but shame and grief.

Sardanapalo

Is it only the king that you see in me?
Do the throne and the altar seduce you?

Mirra

Stop! Stop!

Sardanapalo

Is the royal purple
so dear to you then?
Let the splendour of my throne,
of my regal palace encircle you,
I wish to make you happy.

Mirra

Love is its own reward.

Sardanapalo

Do you love me?

Mirra

Would that I could not!
Heaven has sealed my fate.

Sardanapalo

Let us love as long as
your graceful forms invite us;
let us love as long as
the fervid age still smiles upon us.

Too quickly fly
the sweet moments, my dear;
too bitter is life
if not adorned with love.

Mirra

Unter deinem wachsamem Blick,
beschuldigt meine Blässe mich;
die Liebe verwehrt mir
Hoffnung und Seligkeit,
diese unglücksselige Flamme
bringt mir nur Schmach und Kummer.

Sardanapalo

Sieht dein Herz nur den König in mir?
Verführen dich der Thron und der Altar?

Mirra

Halt ein! Halt ein!

Sardanapalo

Ist das Purpur
Dir so teuer?
Dann lass meinen herrlichen Thron,
meinen königlichen Palast dich umgeben;
ich möchte dich glücklich sehen.

Mirra

Die Liebe ist der größte Lohn.

Sardanapalo

Liebst du mich?

Mirra

Wenn ich es nur nicht könnte!
Der Himmel hat mein Schicksal besiegelt.

Sardanapalo

Solange deine anmutige Gestalt will,
lieben wir uns!
Solange die feurige Zeit uns gewogen ist,
lieben wir uns!

Zu schnell verfliegen
die süßen Augenblicke, oh Liebste,
zu bitter ist das Leben,
wenn die Liebe es nicht versüßt.

Mirra (*fra sé*)

Vedrò, vedrò sorridere
di scherno il cortigiano,
d'offesa sposa il vindice
sdegno seguirmi ognor.

Lassa! Potesse almeno
la schiava favorita
a prezzo della vita
scontare il suo rossor.

SCENA QUARTA

(*Beleso furente, e detti.*)

Beleso (*a Sardanapalo*)

Mentre a tuo danno i ribellanti duci
[ap]prestan l'armi e movono la plebe,
[non corri al tuo dovere?]
Trascorri la tua vita in ozio an[cora?]
Di te, d[el]i tuoi nullo pensier ti prende
e in molli ozi travolgi?
La voce del dovere in te non [scende?]
O di regi d'Assiria ombre famo[se],
onnipotente Belo
che per gesta gloriose
in fra gli Eterni avesti seggio in[nante],
d'un vostro successor mirate il [fallo]:
scordar lo scettro a ignobil schiava amante.

Sardanapalo

Guai se un tuo detto a rammentar mi forza
[che] re son io.

Beleso

[Non per molto ancora
se ignori il cenno mio.]

Getta i molli vestimenti,
lascia il fuso, impugna il brando!
Piomba ratto al par di venti
sul Persian che va predando
i tuoi campi e le città.

Mirra (*to him*)

I shall see, I shall see the courtier
smile with disdain,
and the vengeful rage of a wounded wife
will follow me evermore.

Alas, if only I,
the favourite slave girl,
could at least erase her shame
at the cost of my life.

SCENE FOUR

(*Beleso, furious, Sardanapalo and Mirra.*)

Beleso (*to Sardanapalo*)

While the insurgent leaders ready their arms
and move the commoners against you,
you do not hasten to your duty?
You still spend your life in leisure?
No thought of yourself, of your people, occurs to you
and you drug them into soft ease?
And you do not dain to notice the inner voice of duty?
Oh famous shades of the kings of Assyria,
omnipotent Belus,
who for glorious deeds
holds a place in the forefront of the eternal elect,
witness the error of a successor of yours:
forgetting the sceptre for a base slave mistress.

Sardanapalo

Woe betide you if what you say forces me to remember that
I am king.

Beleso

Not for much longer
if you fail to heed my words.

Throw off your soft garments,
set aside the distaff, grasp the sword!
Let it fall quick as the wind
into the Persian who goes about preying
on your fields and cities.

Mirra (*für sich*)

Ich sehe, ich sehe den Höfling
verachtungsvoll lächeln,
und der rachedurstige Zorn der betrogenen Ehefrau
wird mich immer verfolgen.

Ach, könnte doch ich,
das bevorzugte Sklavenmädchen,
meine Scham auslöschen,
ich gäbe mein Leben dafür.

VIERTE SZENE

(*Beleso, wütend, Sardanapalo und Mirra.*)

Beleso (*zu Sardanapalo*)

Während die aufständischen Anführer ihre Waffen
bereitmachen,
Und das Volk gegen dich richten,
eilst du nicht zu deinen Pflichten?
Du genießt dein Leben noch immer in Muße?
Kein Gedanke an dich? Kein Gedanke an dein Volk?
Stattdessen betäubst du sie mit vorgegaukelter Ruhe?
Auch die Stimme der Pflicht willst du nicht hören?
Oh, berühmte Schatten der Könige von Assyrien,
allmächtiger Belus, der du für deine glorreichen Taten
an der Spitze der ewig Seeligen stehst,
bezeuge nun den Irrtum deines Nachfolgers:
das Zepter vergessend für eine niedere Geliebte, ein Sklavin.

Sardanapalo

Wehe dir, wenn das, was du sagst, mich zwingt zu erinnern,
dass ich der König bin.

Beleso

Nicht mehr lang,
wenn du nicht meine Warnung hörst.

Wirf deine weichen Gewänder ab,
lass die Spindel, nimm dein Schwert!
Lass es, schnell wie der Wind,
auf den Perser niederfahren,
der deine Felder und deine Städte beraubt.

Frena il satrapo ribelle
che t'insidia entro la re[gia],
e non solo il volgo imbelle
del diadema che ti fregia
lo splendore adore[rà].

Sardanapalo

Se sol l'armi e[d] il terrore
chiamar deggio a mio sostegno,
se del soglio lo splendore
all'invidia, all'odio è segno,
io non merto che pietà.

D'una gloria passeggera
non m'illud[e] il facil vanto,
ogni gloria è menzognera
se mercar si dèe col pianto
dell'afflitta umani[tà].

Mirra (*fra sé*)

Oh perché, perché quel core
non s'accende a nobil sdegno,
percotendo di terrore
ogni perfido disegno
che il rebel tramando va?

Se di speme lusinghiera
non m'illude il dolce incanto,
coll'affetto e la preghiera
ridestarlo a nobil vanto
ben quest'anima saprà.

Beleso (*a Sardanapalo*)

Che far pensi? Al Medo altero
cederai la regia e il trono?

Sardanapalo (*fra sé, fissando Mirra*)

Acquistar quell'alma io spero
colla grazia e col perdono.

Beleso (*a Sardanapalo*)

E l'Assiria inulta [giace
mentre fuggi tu la guerra?]

Stop the rebellious satrap
who lays traps for you within your royal palace, and
then it will be not merely the faint-hearted common herd
who will revere the splendour
of the diadem that adorns you.

Sardanapalo

If I must call upon arms and terror
alone for my support,
if the splendour of my throne
is marked by envy and hatred,
then I deserve only pity.

I am not deceived by the easy boast
of a fleeting glory.
Every glory is a lie,
if it must be bought with the weeping
of afflicted humankind.

Mirra (*to him*)

Oh why, why is that heart
not aflame with noble disdain,
striking with terror
every treacherous scheme
that the rebel is weaving?

Unless I am deluded
by the sweet illusion of a false hope,
this soul of mine,
with loving entreaties,
can well reawaken him to noble valour.

Beleso (*to Sardanapalo*)

What are you planning to do? Will you yield
the kingdom and the throne to the haughty Mede?

Sardanapalo (*to him, looking at Mirra*)

I hope to win over that soul
with mercy and with forgiveness.

Beleso (*to Sardanapalo*)

And Assyria lies unavenged,
while you flee battle?

Bekämpfe den rebellischen Satrap,
der dir Fallen im Palast stellt,
und dann wird es nicht nur das feige Volk sein,
das die Pracht deines Diadems
bejubeln und verehren wird.

Sardanapalo

Wenn ich für meinen Rückhalt
an Waffen und Terror appellieren muss,
wenn der Glanz meines Throns
von Eifersucht und Hass flankiert wird,
dann verdiene ich nur Mitleid.

Ich lasse mich nicht trügen von der Pracht
des flüchtigen Ruhms.
Alle Pracht ist eine Lüge,
wenn sie mit dem Weinen
der leidenden Menschheit erkaufte werden muss.

Mirra (*für sich*)

Oh warum, warum brennt dieses Herz
nicht mit nobler Verachtung,
die verräterischen Pläne
der Rebellen zerschlagend?

Wenn die süße Illusion falscher Hoffnung
mich nicht täuscht,
dann kann meine Seele
- mit liebendem Flehen -
seine edle Tapferkeit wieder erwecken.

Beleso (*zu Sardanapalo*)

Was wirst du tun?
Willst du das Königreich und den Thron dem
hochmütigen Meder überlassen?

Sardanapalo (*für sich, er schaut Mirra an*)

Ich hoffe, diese Seele
mit Gnade und Vergebung für mich zu gewinnen.

Beleso (*zu Sardanapalo*)

Und Assyrien bleibt ungerächt,
wenn du dem Kampf entfliehst?

Sardanapalo (*a Beleso*)

Per capirci entrambi in pace
non è vasta assai la terra.

Mirra

Se diletta a te son io
mostra al mondo il tuo valor!

Sardanapalo

Sarà pago il tuo desio.

Beleso

Fia punito il traditor!

Andiamo! Adunisi - il Parlamento.
Udranno i satrapi - del medo Ar[bace]
svelar l'insidie, - il tradimento;
udranno i perfidi - chieder mercé.

Sardanapalo

Diletta vergine, - mio dolce amore,
gli affanni allevia - di chi t'ado[ra].
E della porpora - [il grave onore]
più lieto reggere - saprò per te.

Mirra

Eccelsi sensi - t'ispiri amore,
è lieta l'anima - di chi t'adora.
Della tua gloria - allo splendore
saprò serbarti - eterna fé.

(Escono rapidamente. Le truppe reali si preparano per la guerra e marciano in battaglia.)

Sardanapalo (*to Beleso*)

The earth is not vast enough
for us to live together in peace.

Mirra

If I am dear to you,
show the world your valour!

Sardanapalo

Your wish will be fulfilled.

Beleso

Let the traitor be punished!

Let's go! Let Parliament be assembled.
The satraps will hear revealed the
treachery, the treason of the Mede Arbace,
they will hear the traitors call for mercy.

Sardanapalo

Beloved virgin, my sweet love,
alleviate the anguish of the one who adores you.
And I will be able to carry more happily
the heavy honor of the regal purple for you.

Mirra

May love inspire in you lofty feelings.
Happy is the soul of the one who adores you.
To the splendour of your glory,
I will be able to keep eternal faith.

(They leave quickly. The royal troops make ready for war and march to battle.)

Sardanapalo (*zu Beleso*)

Um zusammen in Frieden leben zu können,
Ist die Erde nicht groß genug.

Mirra

Wenn du mich liebst,
Zeige der Welt deine Tapferkeit!

Sardanapalo

Dein Wunsch sei dir erfüllt.

Beleso

Bestraft den Verräter!

Lasst uns gehen! Das Parlament soll sich sammeln,
Die Satrapen werden aufgedeckt sehen,
Den Verrat des Medern Arbace,
Die Verräter werden um Gnade flehen.

Sardanapalo

Liebste Jungfrau, meine süße Liebste,
Lindere die Qual desjenigen, der dich liebt.
Dann werde ich glücklich imstande sein
Die schwere Ehre des königlichen Purpur zu tragen, für
dich.

Mirra

Möge die Liebe deine erhabenen Gefühle inspirieren,
Glücklich ist die Seele derjenigen, die dich liebt.
Der Herrlichkeit deines Ruhms
Werde ich ewig treu sein.

(Sie gehen schnell ab. Die königlichen Truppen machen sich bereit für den Krieg und marschieren in die Schlacht.)

End of Act 1

Libretto reconstructed by Marco Beghelli,
with Francesca Vella and David Rosen.