

Jules Massenet

Thaïs

CONDUCTOR
Jesús López-Cobos

PRODUCTION
John Cox

MS. FLEMING'S COSTUMES BY
Christian Lacroix

LIGHTING DESIGNER
Duane Schuler

CHOREOGRAPHER
Sara Jo Slate

GENERAL MANAGER
Peter Gelb

MUSIC DIRECTOR
James Levine

Opera in three acts

Libretto by Louis Gallet, based on the novel
by Anatole France

Saturday, December 20, 2008, 12:00–3:20pm

New Production

The production of *Thaïs* was made possible by a
generous gift from **Mr. and Mrs. Sid R. Bass.**

The production of *Thaïs* is the property of
Lyric Opera of Chicago.

The Metropolitan Opera

2008–09 Season

The 67th Metropolitan Opera performance of

Jules Massenet's

Thaïs

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This performance is also being broadcast live on Metropolitan Opera Radio on SIRIUS channel 78 and XM channel 79.

Conductor
Jesús López-Cobos

IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

Cenobite Monks
Daniel Clark Smith
Roger Andrews
Kurt Phinney
Richard Pearson
Craig Montgomery

Palémon
Alain Vernhes

Athanaël
Thomas Hampson

Guard
Trevor Scheunemann

Crobyle
Alyson Cambridge**

Myrtale
Ginger Costa-Jackson*

Nicias
Michael Schade

Thaïs
Renée Fleming

La Charmeuse
Leah Partridge

Albine
Maria Zifchak

SOLO DANCER
Zahra Hashemian

VIOLIN SOLO
David Chan

Saturday, December 20, 2008, 12:00–3:20pm

This afternoon's performance is being transmitted live in high definition to movie theaters worldwide. *The Met: Live in HD* series is made possible by a generous grant from the Neubauer Family Foundation.



Kent Howard/Metropolitan Opera

Renée Fleming
in the title role of
Massenet's *Thaïs* with
Thomas Hampson as
Athanaël

Chorus Master **Donald Palumbo**
Musical Preparation **Robert Myers, Donna Racik,
Gareth Morrell, Howard Watkins, and Pierre Vallet**
Assistant Stage Directors **Eric Einhorn,
Gregory Anthony Fortner, and
Kathleen Smith Belcher**
Stage Band Conductor **Gregory Buchalter**
Prompter **Donna Racik**
Met Titles **Kelley Rourke**
Sets constructed by **Adirondack Scenic Studio,**
painted by **Michael Hagen, Inc.,**
Glens Falls, New York
Costumes supervised by **Rachel Dickson, London**
Wigs executed by **Metropolitan Opera Wig
Department**

Thaïs is performed by arrangement with Theodore Presser Company, agents for Heugel S.A., Paris, publisher.

This performance is made possible in part by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts.

Before the performance begins, please switch off cell phones and other electronic devices.

Met Titles

To activate, press the red button to the right of the screen in front of your seat and follow the instructions provided. To turn off the display, press the red button once again. If you have questions please ask an usher at intermission.

Yamaha is the official piano of the Metropolitan Opera.

Latecomers will not be admitted during the performance.

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Alexandria and the Thebaid desert in Egypt, fourth century A.D.

Act I

SCENE 1 A Cenobite settlement in the desert

SCENE 2 Nicias's house in Alexandria

Intermission

Act II

SCENE 1 Thaïs's house in Alexandria

SCENE 2 Outside Thaïs's house

Intermission

Act III

SCENE 1 In the desert outside the convent of Mother Albine

SCENE 2 The Cenobite settlement

SCENE 3 The convent garden

Act I

Athanaël, a monk, returns from Alexandria with news that the city is in a state of sin. The people are besotted by Thaïs, a courtesan and actress, whose performances are causing a sensation. Athanaël admits to his fellow monks that once in his youth he fell under her spell. Now he considers her behavior an affront to God and is determined to convert her to a Christian life. Palémon reminds him that it is against his vows to interfere with the secular world, but after dreaming of Thaïs, Athanaël defiantly returns to Alexandria to save her soul.

Athanaël goes to the house of his old school friend Nicias, now a leading Alexandrian of extreme wealth. Nicias is skeptical of Athanaël's chances with Thaïs but offers to introduce him. She is, after all, his current lover—a service he purchased at a great price but which he cannot afford to renew. That night, at the farewell party, a very public confrontation occurs between the two adversaries. Thaïs rejects Athanaël's impertinent demands that she change her way of life and warns him against suppressing his human nature. He vows to continue his campaign for her soul. She dares him to do so and submits him to a humiliating ceremony in the name of Venus.

Act II

Alone in her bedroom, Thais wearily considers the worthlessness of her life and seeks assurance both from her mirror and from Venus that her beauty will be eternal. Athanaël visits her unannounced. Her routine seduction has no apparent effect on him, but when he claims that the love he offers her will bring eternity, it resonates with her. The voice of Nicias outside makes it clear that the decision is with her. She sends Athanaël to dismiss Nicias and his world, but left alone, she collapses in perplexity and fear.

Athanaël waits outside for Thais's decision. In due course she appears with the news that she has made up her mind to follow him. Athanaël is overjoyed, but makes it clear that the road will be hard. He demands that she destroy her house and everything in it. As they are making plans, Nicias brings a happy crowd to her door in the hope of reclaiming her for the night's revels. But all hope of that vanishes when she and Athanaël appear at the threshold of the burning house. The citizens try violently to keep their idol, but when her determination becomes clear to Nicias, he helps Thais and Athanaël escape the angry crowd.

Act III

Thais and Athanaël are in the desert on their way to the convent of Mother Albine. Thais is exhausted and broken, but Athanaël ruthlessly demands that she push on. Only when he sees her bleeding feet does he feel pity. Thais thanks him for having brought her to salvation. At the convent the nuns welcome her. When the door closes, Athanaël suddenly realizes what it will mean to him never to see her again.

Athanaël has been back with the Cenobites for three months. In spite of prayer, fasting, and flagellation, he is unable to drive the physical image of Thais from his spirit. He attempts to confess to Palémon but even here fails, and Palémon realizes that he is probably lost. That night Athanaël has a violently erotic dream of Thais, and voices tell him she is dying. He decides to return to the convent to steal her away from God.

After three months of penance, Thais is at the end of her strength. Her virtue and purity have been such that the nuns have already declared her a saint. Athanaël arrives too late. Thais is already out of his grasp as she dies in a vision of angels.
—*John Cox*

Take a Seat

A \$3 million donation from the Met Board allows opera lovers to purchase tickets to weekend performances for \$25 in a time of economic strain.

In response to the recession, the Metropolitan Opera's Board of Directors has decided to subsidize some of the best seats for weekend evening performances for the duration of the season. Prime seats in the Orchestra and Grand Tier, which usually range in price from \$140 to \$295, will now be available for \$25 through a weekly drawing. The \$3 million dollar cost to underwrite the program has been contributed entirely from among the Board's managing directors.

"Although supported by the full Board, the idea for this new \$25 ticket program came from managing director Agnes Varis," General Manager Peter Gelb explains. "The Board wanted to demonstrate its support for the public in this difficult time."

Every Monday through the end of the season, visitors to the Met's website can enter their names for the weekly ticket drawing, which will be held on Tuesday mornings with winners' names posted on the website that day at noon. (Entries must be received by 11:50 P.M. eastern time on Monday night.) Winners may then call Met Ticket Service at 212-362-6000 or go to the Met box office to purchase their \$25 tickets. The number of tickets will vary each week depending on availability.

In total, more than 16,000 tickets to 31 performances will be made available thanks to the Board's contribution.

For detailed information, including the online entry procedure, visit metopera.org.

Jules Massenet

Thaïs

Premiere: Paris Opéra, 1894

Jules Massenet's opera about the power of feminine allure and the desperation of male obsession has served as a showcase for a variety of great artists in the lead roles. Thaïs is an Egyptian courtesan and actress whom the Christian monk Athanaël seeks to reform. While she ultimately achieves salvation, he falls prey to his growing lust for the woman. Although Massenet composed *Thaïs* for the Paris Opéra, where spectacle was often the order of the day, he wisely concentrated on the inner lives of the two lead roles. The result is an opera as seductive as its heroine, a fascinating story of two people locked in an opposing yet parallel metamorphosis. Massenet was sometimes accused by his contemporaries of indulging in musical sensuality, but his genius soared in works such as this, where sensuality itself is the core issue. He was well aided by a strong libretto, in unrhymed free verse modeled on classical Greek poetry, that can be appreciated even without knowing French.

The Creators

Jules Massenet (1842–1912), a French composer wildly popular in his day, was noted for his operas, songs, and oratorios. His somewhat sentimental style lost popularity in the early 20th century, with only his romantic treasure *Manon* (1884) maintaining a steady place in the repertory. Many of his other operas, especially *Werther* (1892) and *Thaïs*, have found places for themselves in the repertory in the last few decades. The libretto for *Thaïs* was written by Louis Gallet (1835–1898), a prolific writer who provided other theatrical adaptations for composers such as Bizet and Saint-Saëns. The opera is based on a novel, considered scandalous in its day, by Anatole France (1844–1924), an influential French author and wit whose works epitomized his era's sophistication and sense of irony.

The Setting

The opera takes place in the city of Alexandria, Egypt, and in the surrounding desert, in the fourth century A.D. Alexandria was a cosmopolitan city, while the harsh desert was the birthplace of the severe traditions of hermits and monks. The setting reflects the conflict between human passion and religious fervor at the core of the drama.

The Music

With *Thaïs*, Massenet wrote one of his most sinuously beautiful and psychologically perceptive scores. None of the captivating musical effects are gratuitous. The baritone's Act I aria "Voilà donc la terrible cité" is a stentorian denunciation of

the city of Alexandria and everything associated with corrupt urban life. The broad phrases of the monk's vocal lines make his righteous anger apparent, but the lavish orchestration before and underneath the singing suggest a latent attraction to everything he is ranting against. The heroine's showpiece aria, Act II's "Dis-moi que je suis belle," is a glittering occasion for vocal display, but this quality perfectly suits this particular moment in the drama, as Thaïs revels in her glitzy, superficial lifestyle. Her evolution is marvelously depicted in the famous "Méditation" between Scenes 1 and 2 of Act II, an orchestral interlude carried by a solo violin whose seductive delicacy is emblematic of this refined work. Thaïs's growth and maturity become apparent in the next act's duet with the baritone: she now sings measured, stately phrases, while his disjointed lines parallel his psychological unraveling. It is one of opera's most interesting depictions of two people at cross-purposes.

Thaïs at the Met

The 1917 Met premiere of this opera starred the immensely popular Geraldine Farrar and baritone Pasquale Amato. Maria Jeritza, the diva sensation of the post-war period, was given an entirely new, first-rate production in 1922, designed by Joseph Urban. After seven more performances in 1939, split between the American Helen Jepson and the Australian Marjorie Lawrence, the opera was shelved for almost four decades. It returned to the Met in 1978 for 17 memorable performances with Beverly Sills and Sherrill Milnes, directed by Tito Capobianco. Acclaimed for her interpretation of the title role, Renée Fleming stars in the Met's new production this season.

Dressing the Diva

Renée Fleming's costumes for the new production of *Thaïs* were created by fashion designer **Christian Lacroix**, who also outfitted the soprano as Violetta in *La Traviata* for the Opening Night Gala. "I was lucky to hear from Renée herself about her personal approach to the character," Lacroix says. "And John Cox came to Paris and gave me advice. The Met stage is so huge that you have to strongly underline each aspect of the character through silhouette, color, embellishments, and textures. The idea of seduction has to be even more sensual with scarlet chiffon; fame has to be even more pronounced with gold chiffon and purple velvet; and eroticism has to be even more feminine with flesh-shaded fabric. I feel grateful for having been invited to design costumes for such a diva, in such a role by a French composer, and in such a prestigious opera house."

Program Note

“**Y**ou have lifted my poor Thaïs to the first rank of operatic heroines.” In his memoirs, Jules Massenet recalls receiving this praise from Anatole France, whose novel provided the basis for the opera, the day after *Thaïs* had its premiere at the Paris Opéra on March 16, 1894. “I am happy and proud,” France continued, “to have furnished you with the theme on which you have developed the most inspiring phrases.”

Massenet’s music apparently won France over, despite the strenuous objections the author voiced concerning the libretto prepared by Louis Gallet. A highly experienced man of the stage who also collaborated with Ambroise Thomas, Bizet, and Saint-Saëns, Gallet fundamentally transformed the tone of France’s novel—originally a satirical attack on piety—into a straightforward dramatic conflict more suitable for operatic treatment. *Thaïs* is hardly an isolated case of this sort of revisionism: Wagner bleached the satire from the Heinrich Heine tale that he drew on for *The Flying Dutchman*, while Tchaikovsky set Pushkin’s ironic *Eugene Onegin* with heart-on-sleeve emotionalism.

France was not the originator of the Thaïs story, and he, too, radically altered the source that first triggered his interest. The apocryphal legend of Saint Thaïs—a supremely beautiful courtesan who gives up the way of all flesh and becomes an ascetic to purge her sins—emerged during the period of the early Christian monks, in Roman Egypt in the fourth century. In the Middle Ages it gained popularity as a morally uplifting parable about the power of divine forgiveness. An extraordinary 10th-century Benedictine nun and writer by the name of Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim composed a philosophical drama based on Saint Thaïs. It came to France’s attention when, as a young critic, he was assigned to review a puppet version of her play. The story fascinated France and inspired his own literary response: first in the form of a poem and then, over two decades later, in a novel that was serialized before being published in 1890.

The novel became a *succès de scandale* thanks to its wickedly anticlerical point of view. Indeed, France’s writings were consigned to the Church’s Index of Forbidden Books in the 1920s—shortly after he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. With his signature irony, France parodies the monastic movement that sprang up in the waning days of the Roman Empire. His focus transforms the monk, whose project is to redeem Thaïs, into the central character. (In the novel, as in the legend, his name is Paphnuce; Gallet changed it to Athanaël to avoid the unfortunate anatomical rhyme that would inevitably give ammunition to critics.) The real sin, in France’s retelling, is the ascetic rejection of the world and of Thaïs’s physical love. The monk stands revealed in the end as a repulsive vampire: “Passing his hand across his face,” the novel ends, “he felt his own hideousness.”

Aside from the scandalous associations France’s novel might have provoked, the opera *Thaïs* came handily equipped with controversial elements when it was first brought before the Paris public. Massenet had written the title role for Sybil Sanderson, the alluring young soprano from California reputed to have a solid

range of three octaves, whose interpretation of Manon became a sensation. Her rapport with the married composer was a lively topic of gossip. The ambitious diva's behavior nearly derailed the production when she secretly changed allegiance from the Opéra-Comique (which had been promised the premiere) to the Opéra, forcing Massenet to go along with her defection. On opening night, Sanderson had a notorious "wardrobe malfunction" that exposed her breasts at the end of the first act.

Sanderson's debut at the formidable Opéra marked a personal triumph over the prevailingly skeptical attitude toward her skills—"absolute perfection, unexpectedly so," as one review put it. But *Thaïs* itself failed to win over the public, and in 1897 Massenet revised the score, adding the superbly effective oasis scene in Act III (but suppressing a more shockingly dissonant ending). For the most part, the critics were ill-disposed toward the opera, accusing it of immorality, attacking Gallet for misunderstanding France's novel, or chastising Massenet for "vulgar paltriness, with the seedy rhythms of a dance hall composition." This sort of critique has been plentifully echoed, albeit in more recent formulations, by those who tend to dismiss *Thaïs* as hokum, another "tart with a heart" story. They regard the opera merely as part of a pattern of fin-de-siècle "Orientalism," a titillating indulgence in religious eroticism that would reach its fevered extremity in Richard Strauss's *Salome*.

Stories centered on the conflict between spiritual and erotic desire were something of a specialty for Massenet. His first success as a composer was an oratorio based on the Mary Magdalene story, to a libretto by Gallet. Massenet had himself tackled the topic of Salome and John the Baptist—though from a markedly different angle—in the Flaubert-inspired 1881 opera *Hérodiade*. But the sensationalism surrounding *Thaïs* has tended to distract from serious engagement with its considerable merits.

Consider the *Méditation* from the middle of the second act—the wordless interlude featuring a solo violin that accompanies the heroine's overnight conversion. This excerpt has come to represent the opera but also serves as an emblem for the misunderstanding of *Thaïs* as wholly shallow. On the surface, it seems the epitome of pleasing but saccharine melodiousness. Yet as Ernest Newman shrewdly observes, the *Méditation* suggests Massenet projecting outward from his character's point of view: "It is precisely in some such silken, caressing terms as these that a *Thaïs* would embrace a new faith."

What's more, the melody unspooled by the violin contains a hint of yearning as it stretches into distant keys. This yearning takes an overtly anguished turn in the (often overlooked) middle section of the *Méditation*. In fact, it's the same music to which Athanaël voices his own conversion at the end of the opera, as he tries to convince the dying *Thaïs* that his promise of heaven was a lie and that the only truth is "life and the love between human beings." What seems like a tear-jerking recap of the score's signature tune turns out to represent a catastrophic

reversal that destroys Athanaël's faith. At the opera's close, the Méditation's radiant D major is replaced by harsh D minor chords.

Massenet's psychological interest in his characters guides his musical choices. The sharp distinctions that France's prose draws between the punishing austerity of the monastic huts on the Nile and Alexandria's pagan opulence might have suggested a schematic (and predictable) musical vocabulary to delineate these polar extremes. Instead, Massenet first conjures the city's luxury from Athanaël's point of view, expressed in the ardent aria "Voilà donc la terrible cité." He develops a web of musical images that make it clear how much of his "worldly" youth Athanaël has internalized and provides clues to the monk's final about-face. The ambiguous laughter, for example, with which Thaïs dismisses him on the eve of her conversion returns in demented cascades in Athanaël's vision of Thaïs in Act III. His conflicted nature gains from Massenet's treatment a humanity and dimension pointedly lacking in the contemptuous portrayal by France.

Much discussion of the opera centers on the problematic suddenness of Thaïs's conversion. Yet where France relies on a lengthy backstory about her troubled childhood to provide motivation, Massenet begins to prepare the way from his heroine's first entrance. Her love music with Nicias is among the score's most beautiful passages, marked by a bittersweet melancholy over the sense of time passing that is the explicit subject of her aria at the beginning of Act II. And just after the conversion, we realize that Thaïs, like Athanaël, maintains elements of the personality she has supposedly overcome. Along with the inherent sensuality of the Méditation, her invocation of Eros betrays her very human perspective of divine love as "a rare virtue."

Despite fluctuating critical reception, *Thaïs* has steadfastly offered career-enhancing challenges to its interpreters. Lina Cavalieri's advocacy advanced the opera after Sanderson's premature death, while in 1908 Mary Garden chose to play the courtesan saint in her American debut—which also marked the opera's first American staging—with Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera Company, an erstwhile rival of the Met. (Garden even starred in a film version that was shot in 1917 in Florida and Jersey City.) Her Athanaël was Maurice Renaud, who, according to Henry T. Finck (an early Massenet fan based in America), made the monk "sometimes tender, sometimes stern, sometimes more of a man, sometimes more of a saint." And no less a legend than Geraldine Farrar introduced the role to the Met's stage in 1917, opposite Pasquale Amato as Athanaël. As Renée Fleming and Thomas Hampson add their names to this illustrious lineage, they also reclaim Massenet's opera as more than a fin-de-siècle curiosity.

—Thomas May

The Cast and Creative Team



Jesús López-Cobos
CONDUCTOR (TORO, SPAIN)

THIS SEASON *Thaïs* at the Met and *Un Ballo in Maschera*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Le Nozze di Figaro* in Madrid at the Teatro Real.

MET APPEARANCES *Adriana Lecouvreur* (debut, 1978), *La Favorita*, and *Manon*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS He is currently the music director of Madrid's Teatro Real and conductor emeritus of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra (having served as the orchestra's music director from 1986 to 2001). In addition, he previously served as the general music director of the Deutsche Oper Berlin (1981–90), music director of Switzerland's Lausanne Chamber Orchestra (1991–2000), and principal guest conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra (1981–86). With his career almost equally balanced between operatic and orchestral engagements, he has recently conducted performances at La Scala, Covent Garden, and Lyric Opera of Chicago, and concerts in North America with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the symphony orchestras of Montreal, Atlanta, Seattle, St. Louis, Dallas, New Jersey, and Cincinnati.



John Cox
DIRECTOR (BRISTOL, UNITED KINGDOM)

THIS SEASON *Thaïs* at the Met and *Fidelio* next summer at the Garsington Opera.

MET APPEARANCES *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (debut, 1982), *Die Zauberflöte*, *Capriccio*, and *Werther*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Recent productions include *Capriccio*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and *Thaïs* for Lyric Opera of Chicago; *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Arabella* for the Santa Fe Opera; *Don Giovanni* for Scottish Opera; *Così fan tutte*, Barber's *Vanessa*, and the world premiere of Lowell Liebermann's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in Monte Carlo; Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* for Glimmerglass Opera; *The Beggar's Opera* and *Vanessa* in Strasbourg; Pizzetti's *Assassinio nella Cattedrale* in Turin; and *Capriccio* for Opera Australia. For six seasons he was the production director for the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden, where he staged major revivals of *Manon*, *Die Fledermaus*, and *Don Carlo*, and new productions of *Guillaume Tell*, *Capriccio*, *Il Viaggio a Reims*, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, and *Eugene Onegin*. He was appointed director of productions at Glyndebourne in 1971.



Duane Schuler

LIGHTING DESIGNER (ELKHART LAKE, WISCONSIN)

THIS SEASON *Thaïs* and *La Rondine* at the Met.

MET APPEARANCES Has designed lighting for 21 productions with the company, including *The First Emperor*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *La Traviata*, *Fidelio*, *Samson et Dalila*, and *Andrea Chénier*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Recent projects include *Boris Godunov* and *La Bohème* for the San Francisco Opera, *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Falstaff* for the Santa Fe Opera, *Benvenuto Cellini* for the Salzburg Festival, *Tannhäuser* in Baden Baden, and *The Pearl Fishers* for the Lyric Opera of Chicago. His work has also been seen at Covent Garden, La Scala, Barcelona's Liceu, New York City Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin (Unter den Linden), American Ballet Theatre, Stuttgart Ballet, Goodman Theatre, and Manhattan Theatre Club. Upcoming projects include *La Fanciulla del West* for the Netherlands Opera, *Lulu* in Lyon, and the world premiere of Daron Hagen's *Amelia* for the Seattle Opera. He is a founding partner of the theater planning and architectural lighting design firm Schuler Shook, with offices in Chicago, Minneapolis, and Dallas.



Sara Jo Slate

CHOREOGRAPHER (SUNRIVER, OREGON)

THIS SEASON *Thaïs* for her Met debut.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS She is a former member of the award-winning Troupe Shalimar (Oregon) and the founder of Troupe Taleeba (Indiana). In addition to nightclub, festival, and educational performances throughout the United States, she has given solo performances at the Embassy Theater (Indiana), the Fort Wayne Performing Arts Center, the Tower Theater (Oregon), Les Schwab Amphitheatre (Oregon), and the Chicago Civic Opera House. In 2003 she choreographed the Lyric Opera of Chicago's production of *Thaïs* and performed in the production as a principal soloist. Known in the Middle Eastern dance community as "Zweena bint Asya," she began belly dancing in 1990 and has been teaching since 1997.

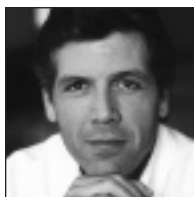


Renée Fleming
SOPRANO (INDIANA, PENNSYLVANIA)

THIS SEASON The title roles of *Thaïs* and *Rusalka* and the Opening Night Gala at the Met, the Countess in *Capriccio* with the Vienna State Opera, the title role of *Lucrezia Borgia* with Washington National Opera, *Violetta* in *La Traviata* at Covent Garden, European tours with Orchestre National de France and Orchestre de Paris, and a North American recital tour.

MET APPEARANCES Title roles of *Manon*, *Rodelinda*, *Arabella*, and *Susannah*, *Violetta*, *Desdemona* in *Otello*, *Tatiana* in *Eugene Onegin*, the Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro* (debut, 1991), *Donna Anna* in *Don Giovanni*, *Rosina* in the world premiere of Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles*, *Imogene* in *Il Pirata*, the *Marschallin* in *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Ellen Orford* in *Peter Grimes*, *Fiordiligi* in *Così fan tutte*, and *Marguerite* in *Faust*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Appearances in all the world's leading opera houses, recipient of two Grammy Awards. She was honored by the French government in 2005 as Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur and in 2002 when she was awarded the Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, and was a winner of the Met's 1988 National Council Auditions.



Thomas Hampson
BARITONE (SPOKANE, WASHINGTON)

THIS SEASON Athanaël in *Thaïs*, the title role of *Eugene Onegin*, and the Opening Night Gala at the Met; *Rodrigo* in *Don Carlo* in Zurich; a recital in Portsmouth; and concerts in New York, Dubrovnik, Milan, Lucerne, Berlin, Madrid, and London.

MET APPEARANCES Title roles of *Simon Boccanegra*, *Doktor Faust*, *Werther*, and *Billy Budd*, *Count Almaviva* in *Le Nozze di Figaro* (debut, 1986), *Rodrigo*, *Don Carlo* in *Ernani*, *Guglielmo* in *Così fan tutte*, *Riccardo* in *I Puritani*, *Valentin* in *Faust*, *Wolfram* in *Tannhäuser*, *Marcello* in *La Bohème*, *Amfortas* in *Parsifal*, *Figaro* in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and *Germont* in *La Traviata*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Has sung in all the world's leading opera houses, is a Kammersänger of the Vienna State Opera, and was named a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the Republic of France. Holds the Austrian Medal of Honor in Arts and Sciences and was a 1981 winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.



Michael Schade

TENOR (GENEVA, SWITZERLAND)

THIS SEASON Nicias in *Thaïs* at the Met, the Prince in *Rusalka* in Toronto, Aschenbach in *Death in Venice* in Hamburg, and Flamand in *Capriccio*, Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*, and Henry Morosus in *Die Schweigsame Frau* with the Vienna State Opera.

MET APPEARANCES Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, Jaquino in *Fidelio* (debut, 1993), Count Almaviva in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Don Ottavio, and Alfred in *Die Fledermaus*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS He has appeared with most of the world's leading opera companies in roles including Tamino with the Los Angeles Opera, David in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* with the San Francisco Opera, Nemorino in *L'Elisir d'Amore* and the title roles of *Oedipus Rex* and *Idomeneo* in Toronto, *Oedipus Rex* in Edinburgh, Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* in Paris, *Idomeneo* in Dresden, and Don Ottavio at Covent Garden and with the Vienna State Opera on tour in Japan. He has appeared at the Salzburg Festival for 15 consecutive summers.



Alain Vernhes

BASS-BARITONE (LYON, FRANCE)

THIS SEASON Palémon in *Thaïs* for his Met debut, the Bailiff in *Werther* with the Paris Opera, Ramon in Gounod's *Mireille* in Marseille, and Arkel in *Pelléas et Mélisande* in Brussels.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Recent performances include Count des Grieux in *Manon* in San Francisco, Naples, Geneva and Palermo; Scarpia in *Tosca* in Toulouse; Claudius in Thomas's *Hamlet* in Barcelona and Trieste; Arkel and Count des Grieux at La Scala; Arkel in Brussels; the High Priest in *Samson et Dalila* in Seville; and Germont in *La Traviata* in Washington, Rome, Turin, and Tokyo. He has also sung Athanaël in *Thaïs* in Athens, Sancho Panza in *Don Quichotte* in Genoa and at Parma's Teatro Regio, Méphistophélès in *Faust* in Montpellier and Lille, and Fieramosca in *Benvenuto Cellini* in Rome.

Tree Season

Plaza construction hasn't left room for Lincoln Center's giant holiday tree this season, so Met staff has banded together to provide and decorate their own.



JONATHAN TICHLER/METROPOLITAN OPERA

Earlier this month, members of the Met's Technical Department hoisted a 28-foot blue spruce onto the exterior balcony of the opera house. Donated by General Manager Peter Gelb and his wife, Keri-Lynn Wilson, the tree was delivered courtesy of Daybreak Express, which stores and ships Met scenery. Once installed, it was decorated with ornaments made by the Met's Scenic Shop. "When Peter Gelb asked us for homemade ornaments," shop head Doug Lebrecht says, "I thought of operatic versions of popcorn and gingerbread children, paper chains, peppermint candies—the things my classmates and I

made in school." The material wasn't hard to find. "Remnants of the plastic that is used for the mirror ceiling in *Madama Butterfly* became the paper chains," Lebrecht explains. "Expanding foam we used for the desert sand in *Thaïs* was perfect for popcorn. And glitter and mylar left over from *The Magic Flute* and *The First Emperor* put sparkle on some of the ornaments. So here's your third-grade classroom tree, on a grand operatic scale!"

On December 10, a crowd gathered on Lincoln Center Plaza for the tree-lighting. "If we were on the Met stage now, we could make it snow," Gelb joked about the less-than-perfect weather conditions. "But unfortunately we can't do anything about the rain out here." The Met's Children's Chorus and members of the brass section of the Met Orchestra then performed a selection of carols, including a rendition of "Jingle Bells" that drew cheers from the audience. Cookies and hot chocolate were served compliments of Patina, the company that runs the Grand Tier restaurant.