

ALCIONE

Music by Marin Marais

Libretto by Antoine Houdor de la Motte

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Prologue: The Rivers and Naiads are discovered resting on their urns and forming a waterfall down the side of a mountain. In their midst stands Timolus, the son of Mars, who announces that Apollo and Pan are soon to meet in battle. Apollo will champion the cause of Peace and triumph over Pan, who glorifies in War, an allusion to the War of the Spanish Succession which had broken out in 1701: the future "victor", Louis XIV, will take up arms only to ensure a new era of universal peace propitious to Love. It is a hope that the god of the arts expresses once again, when he compares the calm that he wishes to see on earth with the calm that the Alcyonids could reestablish over the sea if they quelled the fury of the waves.

Act I: A magnificent room in the palace of King Ceys of Trachis. Preparations are underway to celebrate his wedding with Alcione, the daughter of Aeolus. The couple are in love by a friend of Ceys's. Peleus, is also enamored of his friend's future wife. Although reluctant to destroy the happiness of the man who saved his life, he finds it hard to conceal his suffering. The sorcerer Phorbas, whose ancestors had once ruled over Trachis, takes advantage of the situation, to disrupt the wedding ceremony, which is celebrated by the High Priest of Hymen and his retinue: the Furies ascend from Hades, seize the torches from the hands of the priests and set the palace on fire.

Act II: The curtain rises on a scene of terrible desolation at the entrance to the cave where Phorbas works his evil spells. In his despair Ceys arrives in search of the sorcerer to entreat both him and Ismene, who is endowed with similar powers, to consult with Hades and ease the rigours of his fate. Having refused to give up Alcione, he is made to witness a terrible ceremony in which he finds himself transported to Pluto's underworld palace. Mystically inspired, Phorbas announces that he will lose the woman he loves and he himself will perish unless he repairs to Claros to consult with Apollo himself. It is advice, however, intended to hasten the ills that Ceys seeks to avoid.

Act III: The port of Trachis. The vessel that is to take Ceys to Claros is ready to set sail. Sailors arrive to accompany their king on his journey, providing the pretext for a picturesque divertissement. Phorbas tells Peleus that he has removed his rival from the scene to improve his chances of winning Alcione's heart. But Peleus cannot be too happy and guilty and he suffers even more when, following Ceys's departure, he sees the woman he loves fall to the ground in a faint.

Act IV: Disconsolate at being separated from her "dear husband", Alcione offers up a sacrifice in the Temple of Juno in the hope of obtaining heaven's assistance. In the course of a ceremony conducted by the Temple Priestess and her retinue, she succumbs to the charms of Sleep who, in consort with the allegorical figures of Dreams, conjures up a vision in which she sees a vessel foundering in a storm-wracked sea. From among the sailors, Morpheus appears in the shape of Ceys and addresses a moving appeal to her.

Act V: The gardens of Ceys overlooking the sea. Alcione longs for death. Peleus enters, confesses his love and, still assailed by remorse, demands that she kill him. She seizes his sword but, instead of running him through with it, attempts to turn it on herself. Happily, her servant Cephisa disarms her and Ceys's father, Eosphorus, announces his son's return. The shadow

world of night give way to day and the man whom Alcione thought was lost forever reappears on the grass, apparently lifeless. Believing him dead, she impales herself on Ceys's sword but Neptune rises out of the billows with all his court and restores the lovers to life, entrusting them with the task of calming the waves. The sea-gods celebrate their apotheosis in a final disvertissement.