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# Opera

## OPERA CHOICE



## Authentic Lully drawing on original sources

This new Atys recreates the atmosphere of the opera's premiere, writes *John-Pierre Joyce*



Vocal goddess: Véronique Gens is outstanding as Cybèle

### Lully

#### Atys

Mathias Vidal, Véronique Gens, Sandrine Piau et al; Les Pages et les Chantres du Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles; Les Ambassadeurs – La Grande Écurie/Alexis Kossenko

Alpha Classics ALPHA1193 176:53 mins

In addition to William Christie's landmark 1987

CD set and Christophe

Rousset's much-praised

2024 issue, we have

this new recording of

Lully's opera Atys by

Alexis Kossenko and Les

Ambassadeurs. The performers draw on original

sources to recreate the atmosphere of the first

performance, given in the presence of Louis XIV

at Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1676.

Their most obvious innovation is the inclusion

of specially-made oboes and cromornes (early

French Baroque woodwind instruments) and a

musette bagpipe, which make arresting, even

raucous, appearances in the Prologue and in

Acts 1 and 2. The orchestra's division into two

'choeurs' and the distribution of adults' and

children's voices in various choral combinations also accentuate the dynamism of Lully's setting of Philippe Quinault's libretto.

Solo singers are handpicked for their likely vocal similarities to performers at the 1676 premiere. Véronique Gens (who was a deity on Christie's recording) is outstanding as Cybèle, the goddess who slides from infatuation to

murderous revenge and bitter regret in her pursuit of the Phrygian youth, Atys.

In the title role, Mathias

Vidal is passionate and

sincere, while Sandrine

Piau is tender and crystalline-voiced as

Sangaride, Atys's true love. Mathias Vidal, Atys

on Rousset's recording, makes a seductive cameo

appearance as Le Sommeil in the celebrated

sleep scene. If you like your Lully authentic but a

little edgy, then this is the Atys for you.

★★★★★

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If you like your Lully authentic but a little edgy, this is the Atys for you

### Dennehy

#### The First Child

Sarah Shine, Emmett O'Hanlon et al; Irish National Opera, Crash Ensemble, Irish National Opera Children's Choir/Ryan McAdams

Signum SIGCD946 89:02 mins



The First Child is the compelling final opera in a trilogy by Irish composer Donnacha

Dennehy and playwright Enda Walsh. Each of the three operas explores a suburban horror, and this last instalment examines, with haunting ambiguity, the lasting legacy of school bullying. Walsh's libretto tells the story of Karen who, as childhood memories surface, finds herself drawn with menacing intensity to a couple who have just welcomed their first child. The text pairs idiomatic dialogue with dreamlike poetry, the latter freeing the work to delve more richly into its theme of cyclical trauma. Dennehy's striking music supplies the right balance of tension and emotional release: the score is characterised by percussive forward propulsion and sinewy unease, with the use of microtonal pianos adding to the mood of disquiet.

The 2021 premiere production by Irish National Opera won plaudits for its imaginative staging but the opera proves entirely gripping as an audio experience. The eight children from INO Children's Chorus deserve special mention for their beautifully eerie performances, while soprano Sarah Shine brings clarity of tone to the role of Karen and countertenor Eric Jurenas gives a chilling performance as the enigmatic nurse. Unsettling throughout, *The First Child* is a captivating conclusion to this powerful trilogy. *Kate Wakeling* ★★★★★

### Handel

#### Sosarme

Logan Lopez Gonzalez, Rémy Brès-Feuillet et al; Orchestre de l'Opéra Royal/Marco Angioloni

Château de Versailles CVS160

151:45 mins



The gestation of Handel's *Sosarme*, first performed in February 1732, was complex: