

Ensemble BARCAROLE

Agnès MELLON, soprano and Artistic Direction

Press Book

"Agnès Mellon excels in this secular repertoire: her refined, restrained dramatic art and impeccable diction allow her to explore the passions of the soul with infinite delicacy and insight. The instrumental ensemble is an eloquent partner in this intimate conversation. There is no weakness or affectation, just a genuine, refined energy. Agnès Mellon has a true sense of the lyric narrative style of this period; every page provides an opportunity to create a new atmosphere, perfectly adapted to the text and music. We can only admire such commitment to the art at both the vocal and instrumental level."

LES DERNIÈRES NOUVELLES D'ALSACE, Véronique Leblanc, February 7, 2009

"A concert during which the voice of the soprano brilliantly rendered this music from the sacred baroque repertoire."

LES DERNIÈRES NOUVELLES D'ALSACE, February 5, 2009

(CD – *Déeses outragées* or *Offended Goddesses*)

"The soprano approaches the cantata like a lyric tragedy, and the new life she instils in these works transforms them from merely "pretty" into riveting expressions of the human experience. Even the most cantankerous critic, subjugated to the point of overlooking the excellent accompaniment provided by Ensemble Barcarole, would never dare offend such a goddess."

MUSEBAROQUE.FR, Muse d'Or, Viet-Linh Nguyen, July-August 2008

Eighth edition of the *Festival de Musique Ancienne – Avignon*: A handful of incorrigible enthusiasts...

...and the following Tuesday, we could say that perfection was truly achieved. Thanks to the magnificent soprano Agnès Mellon and counter-tenor Dominique Visse, we were invited to take part in a celebration of the fiery and loving partnership that has characterized their 25 years of marriage. What better occasion to perform some of the sublime love duets from the repertoire? [...] We were treated to an Italian evening of *parole e querelle d'amore*, with emotions running the gamut from tenderness, kisses, teasing and desire to jealousy, torment and despair. We can only hope that the undaunted enthusiasts of Avignon will always be this inspired! (RES MUSICA, Geneviève Allène-Dewulf, November 9, 2007)

Médée, Ariane, Circé, Héro...les déesses outragées

"Mellon is perfect as each character, and just as the original singers would have, she creates the anger and pain these women felt with powerful vocal interpretations. Best, however, is how amazingly well her voice merges with instruments all played with the utmost skill and historical integrity by members of Barcarole. Whether in passages of recitative or airs, she navigates the vocal lines with elegance and grace. A must for the fan of French Baroque vocal music..." (EARLY MUSIC AMERICA, Spring 2006, Denise Gallo)

Soprano Agnès Mellon and the *Ensemble Barcarole*: 'Twixt heaven and earth

...such delicacy, such subtlety, and such commitment—both vocal and instrumental—inspires unqualified admiration. (...) 'Twixt heaven and earth, Agnès Mellon's sincerity is breathtaking as she interprets the grief-stricken Virgin with infinitely poignant musicality. A magnificent concert. (LA TRIBUNE – LE PROGRÈS, October 2005)

(*Ensemble Barcarole* at the Arques-la-Bataille festival)

Undisputed specialist of the French baroque repertoire, Agnès Mellon applies her refined dramatic skills and a rich palette of colours to the art of the French cantata. The members of her ensemble provide her with admirable support in this artistic venture. (LA CROIX, Philippe Venturimi, August 24, 2005)

Agnès Mellon astounds at the *Musicales du Luberon*

The organizers of the *Musicales de Luberon* welcomed a truly out-of-the-ordinary singer to the church of Saint-Luc de Ménerbes for their second summer concert. Agnès Mellon is a superb dramatic soprano whose rich and powerful voice possesses a ringing tone and a rare intensity of expression. Her elegant phrasing lends intense feeling to everything she sings.

(VU POUR VOUS, July 31, 2005)

Agnès Mellon's rebel goddesses

The light soprano, launched by Christie and consort, has evolved into a seasoned singer, with a somber, cutting voice. An ideal evolution to tackle the seldom revived French Baroque Cantata (...). Agnès Mellon makes these quite coded scores (where desperate outpourings of emotion alternate with brilliant rebellious arias) sensitive and sensual, spectacular and moving. Virtuosity is no obstacle for her, and she embodies flesh and blood goddesses, solidly supported by the Barcarole Ensemble. This has the potential to change our vision of this repertoire. (Jean-Luc Macia, LA CROIX, April 24th 2005)

Les déesses outragées (Offended Goddesses)

« Formidable program, formidable singer as well, whose charms are made for these heartfelt cries (...) The artist knows lyrical narrative of that period better than anyone; every page opens the door to a new climate, a new mood, with the same precision and generosity. Finally, the instrumental quintet is perhaps the strongest, truest, most varied part of this equivocal repertoire, halfway between chamber and opera music (...) such an album will be remembered in the renewed history of the French cantata (5 diapasons, DIAPASON, April 2005, Ivan A. Alexandre)

Les déesses outragées (Offended Goddesses)

« ... The brilliant and revolutionary interpretation is what makes this recording so priceless. (...) An intrinsically moving tone, with troubling ease and humanity. The singer has changed and this record confirms it (...) The metamorphosis is spectacular and leaves us, just as the fragile Amour caught by the storm, « frozen with terror » (Anacreon) (...) A total selflessness, at the risk of shocking the style doctors and other esthetes of a normalized and refined approach to Baroque. One has to hear it to believe it (...). But hypnotized by the presence of Agnès Mellon, I almost forgot her partners, a very revealing error indeed, since the instrumental support flows so naturally. (FORUM OPERA, Bernard Schreuders, April 2005)

Les déesses outragées (Offended Goddesses)

« (...) Agnès Mellon gives a sizzling rendition of the somber tension found in the four cantatas of this collection. She is an expert at dismissing artifice and following the lyrics' modulations by leaning on the expression of consonants. (...) Has a very sensitive interpretation that unleashes the infinite palette of human psychological climates. Agnès Mellon creates a sort of musical photograph from 1710, from which stems the indisputable creativity of lyrical writers in the intimist context of the cantata : next to the « Grande Machine Versaillaise », we have here a series of little chamber jewels crafted by a small ensemble who has managed to render the polished eloquence

of the instrumentation (...). As involved as the singer, the musicians of Barcarole emphasize with biting grace the incandescent expressivity of the lyrics ». (RES MUSICA, Écouter, voir, lire... Alexandre Pham 10/03/2005)


Les déesses outragées (Offended Goddesses) « Soprano Agnès Mellon gives a superb account of this expressively subtle music and she is ideally supported by the ensemble Barcarole. Both Clerambault pieces have been recorded previously but seldom - if ever - have I heard such impassioned singing as Mellon offers here; it sounds as if her very life depends on it. » (EARLY MUSIC TODAY, June 2005)

Les déesses outragées (Offended Goddesses) « This timely program of French cantatas depicting the legendary women of antiquity marks the welcome return of the very eloquent Agnès Mellon. (...) Agnès Mellon's interpretations are characterized by restraint and subtle sensitivity; (...) her introspective art and impeccable diction perfectly espouse the twists and turns of destructive jealousy. The Ensemble Barcarole (...) carries on an intimate conversation with Mellon's voice during more than an hour of meticulously prepared music that is both scholarly and dramatic. This recording, devoted to a type of music that is not readily accessible, is a perfect model of the genre » (9/10, CLASSICA-RÉPERTOIRE, Vincent Borel, June 2005)

Women who love too much: Agnès Mellon's psychological portraits « (...) As far as the art of performance is concerned, Agnès Mellon is in no danger of being surpassed in the near future. She infuses every phrase, every word with such dramatic inspiration that even the most stereotyped devices sound as if she were using them for the first time. (...) Mellon renders the indications contained in the score with a psychological flair that allows her to express the various states of mind and the profound crises of the women she portrays with astonishing accuracy. The instrumentalists are equally effective in their support of the singer's carefully thought-out interpretations, leaving the listener captivated and deeply moved. » (MUSIKANSICH, Georg Henkel, April 1, 2005)

Les déesses outragées (Offended Goddesses) « The Ensemble Barcarole (...) accompanies Mellon's sensual instrument with an extraordinary variety of nuances. Time seems to have endowed Mellon's voice with more body and presence, as well as more solidity in the lower range, without sacrificing any of the charm of her high notes. It is a true delight to listen to Mellon's exquisite articulation of these texts, which renders the prosody with admirable clarity. (...) We look forward to hearing more from Mme Mellon. » (DIVERDI, Pablo J. Vayon, May 2005)

(Les Déesses outragées / Offended Goddesses) Shimmering operatics [...] « With her generous voice, which is nonetheless perfectly at home in the baroque repertoire, these pieces seem to have been written just for her. [...] ...her warm, powerful soprano was one of the first of such shimmering operatic voices that allowed Cecilia Bartoli, for example, or, more recently, Marie-Nicole Lemieux, to introduce a new, more sensual style of interpretation of baroque music. [...] ...after hearing this vocal performance, one can easily imagine Agnès Mellon interpreting works from the romantic opera repertoire. [...] The instrumental ensemble supports her with enthusiasm and breathtaking eloquence, as we have come to expect from musicians on this label. In the pastoral scenes, Amélie Michel's flute, with its luscious, round tone, brings a wonderful lyricism to the fore, while the robust string playing does justice to the harsher passages »

(PIZZICATO,  Luxembourg, Erwin Hösi, June 2005)

L'orgue et la voix à l'unisson (Été à Bourges)

« The best for last (...) a soprano with the voice as pure as a diamond. An extraordinary duo (...). More than 1500 people attended, at the Bourges Cathedral, the concert given by soprano Agnès Mellon ». (LE BERRY RÉPUBLICAIN, September 20th, 2004)

A divine concert

Angels must have been in attendance at the church during the concert given by Agnès Mellon and Kenneth Weiss of the ensemble Barcarole. Under the arches, the singer's voice showed extraordinary sonorities which made more than one music lover shiver. (MORBIER, August 2004)

Royal Haendel in Cavaillon

The Barcarole Ensemble embrace faithfully the numerous forms of the songs and never cease to highlight the voices. First, Agnès Mellon's voice, who stand for each single one of her parts with exemplary conviction, thus giving life to all arias she sings. We also heard a cantata by Barbara Strozzi which enabled Agnès Mellon to find for her voice, emphasis of a rare dramatic intensity, in a magnificently contrasted interpretation. A duet, excerpt from Monteverdi's *Coronation of Poppea* reached a summit of happiness, in a loving complicity by these two inspired soloists. LA PROVENCE, July 2003

Musiques d'Automne : Accompanied by her ensemble Barcarole, Agnès Mellon knew how to give to these « Gods' Passions » human and touching inflexions.

It is with passion that Agnès Mellon took over the character of Armide, translated it into violence and hesitation as well. Her voice, with nuances, gave a communicative warmth, thus helping us to grasp the expressive strenght of this great musician which is Lully. ...in the aria « *Deh! Piangete* » : what emotion and grace in the ornamentation. LA TRIBUNE – LE PROGRÈS, October 2002

« Soprano Agnès Mellon expresses Dido's and Medea's pain with genius, sometimes subdued, often exacerbated... her dramatic approach makes up for the lack of depth of *La mort de Didon's* libretto, and suits the emotional excess of a character like Medea. All of this is quite harmonious, and even more so with the ultimate italian touch of Montéclair's *La morte di Lucrezia* ». OUEST-FRANCE, February 2001

« Agnès Mellon has given a very moving performance of Montéclair's *La mort de Didon*, putting emphasis on the dignity and the violence of the character. Clérambault's *Medée* was rendered with equal quality. With the purity of her inflexions and the expressiveness of her ornamentations, Agnès Mellon has given here a true lesson in baroque interpretation ». COURRIER DE L'OUEST, February 2001

A. Mellon and D. Visse: Stars of the baroque scene

« Dark, languid, sparkling or teasing, and sung by two highly qualified singers, the arias, madrigals and cantatas showed the subtleties of the emotions they tackled... may it be said, this concert was pure wonder ». (LILLE-MÉTROPOLE, January 2001)

Agnès Mellon and the Barcarole Ensemble

« Chills were certainly felt when Agnès Mellon's serene and clear voice was heard: a wonderful example of emotional expertise ». (LA VOIX DU MERCREDI, January 2000)

« It was impossible not to be seduced by the soprano's performance of *Lucrezia*, a performance which was human, emotional and certainly moving... »

« A programme that showcased Agnès Mellon's expressive singing, large and controlled voice, and rich harmonic range, which were in perfect harmony with Kenneth Weiss's harpsichord performance ». (LYON FIGARO, January 2000)

The Barcarole Ensemble at the peak of their art

« The sensitive and intelligent accents of Agnès Mellon's voice suits Michel Lambert's art perfectly. In Lully's flamboyant *Plainte italienne*, Agnès Mellon's vocal technique was divine. In an excerpt from Monteverdi's *Scherzi Musicali*, her perfect diction and surprising inflexions fit the structure of the music like a glove.

In *Lucrezia*, Agnès Mellon stunned the audience with extremely delicate effects, particularly during the third aria, where she was phenomenal. She ended with an excerpt from *Samson*, hence demonstrating her ease in Haendel's music ». (LA MONTAGNE- ÉDITION VICHY, July 1999)

« Much like Purcell's *Celia*, Agnès Mellon's voice has a thousand charms, among which there is the supreme musical intelligence which characterizes her. The most splendid example of this were the last notes of Michel Lambert's *Ombre de mon amant*, which seemed suspended in the air in a state of miraculous and strange grace ». (LYON CAPITALE, June 1999)