



press information

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SHAKE HANDS WITH THE DEVIL:
BERLIOZ'S *LA DAMNATION DE FAUST* AIRS
ON *GREAT PERFORMANCES AT THE MET*

James Levine Leads
New Production

Radiant mezzo-soprano Susan Graham and dashing Italian tenor Marcello Giordani are unlucky lovers in Hector Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust*, Berlioz's classic take on dancing with the devil, Saturday, February 28 at noon (ET) on *Great Performances at the Met* (check local listings). Presented by THIRTEEN in 5.1 digital surround sound on PBS HD, the new Met production is conducted by Music Director James Levine and conceived by visionary Canadian director Robert Lepage.

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Nearly stealing the show: handsome young Canadian bass-baritone John Relyea as a most persuasive Méphistophélès.

"Stunning," wrote *The New York Times* of Lepage's breakthrough use of video imagery, depicting everything from a grassy field to a fiery hell. Also lauded were Graham's "rapturous richness and elegant restraint," Giordani's "ardor and intelligence" and Relyea's "wily, seductive lyricism."

Based on Goethe's *Faust* Part I, the work retells the timeless tale of the devil-dealing title character (Giordani) who ultimately barter his soul for the salvation of his beloved Marguerite (Graham). In one of music's most chilling exits, he and his diabolical nemesis gallop to hell in Berlioz's celebrated, and fearsome, *Ride to the Abyss*.

Perhaps best known today as the composer of the bizarrely delightful *Symphonie*

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Fantastique (1838), Hector Berlioz toiled relentlessly in the field of opera. Although slow to find their places in the world's repertory, these efforts included *Benvenuto Cellini* (1838) and his masterpiece, *Les Troyens* (1858). *La Damnation de Faust*, which he termed a "légende dramatique" and not written for the stage, was first performed in Paris in 1846.

Director Lepage, in his Met debut, has reconceived the production he originally created for Japan's Saito Kinen Festival and the Opéra National de Paris. The new staging features enhanced media and technology that was previously not available – some of which was developed by Lepage and his Quebec-based company, Ex Machina. The entire production team makes its Met debut with the production: set designer Carl Fillion, costume designer Karin Erskine, lighting designer Sonoyo Nishikawa, choreographers Johanne Madore and Alain Gautier, and video designers Holger Foerterer and Boris Firquet.

Great Performances at the Met: La Damnation de Faust, the third of 11 productions to air this season on the series, is sung in French with English surtitles. The libretto is adapted from Goethe by Berlioz and Almere Gandonnière. It was recorded on stage in performance November 22, 2008, as part of *The Met: Live in HD* series. Barbara Willis Sweete directs, with Susan Graham as opening host and baritone Thomas Hampson stepping in at intermission. Jay Saks is audio producer.

Great Performances is funded by the Irene Diamond Fund, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, public television viewers, and PBS. Corporate support for *Great Performances at the Met* is provided by Toll Brothers. Telecast funding for *La Damnation de Faust* is provided by Donald G. Sisler.

Visit **Great Performances Online** at pbs.org/gperf for additional information on this and other *Great Performances* programs.

For the Met, Mia Bongiovanni and Elena Park are Supervising Producers, and Louisa Briccetti and Victoria Warivonchik are Producers. Peter Gelb is Executive Producer. For *Great*

Performances, Bill O'Donnell is Series Producer; David Horn is Executive Producer.

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About WNET.ORG

New York public media company WNET.ORG is a pioneering provider of television and web content. The parent of Thirteen, WLIW21 and Creative News Group, WNET.ORG brings such acclaimed broadcast series and websites as Great Performances, Worldfocus, Nature, American Masters, Charlie Rose, Wide Angle, Secrets of the Dead, Religion & Ethics Newsweekly, Visions, Consuelo Mack WealthTrack, Wild Chronicles, Miffy and Friends, and Cyberchase to national and international audiences. Through its wide range of channels and platforms, WNET.ORG serves the entire New York City metro area with unique local productions, broadcasts and innovative educational and cultural projects. In all that it does, WNET.ORG pursues a single, overarching goal – to create media experiences of lasting significance for New York, America and the world. For more information, visit www.wnet.org.

About the Met

Under the leadership of General Manager Peter Gelb and Music Director James Levine, the Met has a series of bold initiatives underway that are designed to broaden its audience and revitalize the company's repertory. The Met has made a commitment to presenting modern masterpieces alongside the classic repertory, with highly theatrical productions featuring the greatest opera stars in the world. Six new productions debut at the Met in 2008-09, including the company premiere of John Adams's *Doctor Atomic*.

Building on its 77-year-old international radio broadcast history – heard over the Toll Brothers-Metropolitan Opera International Radio Network – the Met now uses advanced media distribution platforms and state-of-the-art technology to attract new audiences and reach millions of opera fans around the world. *The Met: Live in HD*, the company's Emmy-winning series of live performance transmissions, shown in high definition (HD) in movie theaters around the world, expands from eight to eleven transmissions in 2008-09 and includes distribution in New York City public schools and a number of pilot programs in schools around the country. Global distribution of the series this season reaches over 850 participating venues in North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. These performances subsequently air on PBS, and a selection of these HD performances are available on DVD. Metropolitan Opera Radio on SIRIUS channel 78 and XM channel 79 is a subscription-based audio service broadcasting both live and rare historical performances. The Met recently introduced *Met Player*, a new subscription service that makes its extensive video and audio catalog of full-length performances available to the public for the first time online, and in exceptional, state-of-the-art quality. In addition to providing audio recordings through the *Met on Rhapsody* on-demand service, the company also presents free live audio streaming of performances on its website once every week during the opera season with support from RealNetworks®.

The Met has recently launched several audience development initiatives, including Open House dress rehearsals, the Arnold and Marie Schwartz Gallery Met, reduced ticket prices—including an immensely popular new rush ticket program, and an annual Holiday Series presentation for families. For more information, please visit: www.metopera.org.

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(Photos available at thirteen.org/pressroom and pbs.org/pressroom)