

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY OPERA
PRESENTS

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1 AT 8PM

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2 AT 3PM

ALEXANDER KASSER THEATER

LA CALISTO

By Francesco Cavalli

Libretto by Giovanni Faustini

Premiere: Teatro Sant'Apollinare in Venice, Italy, November 28, 1651

Sung in Italian with English supertitles

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY OPERA

Rebecca Jo Loeb, Stage Director

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Kyle Ritenauer, Conductor

**MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE & DANCE**

Donna Scro Samori, Choreographer

Daniel Gurskis

Dean, College of the Arts

Anthony Mazzocchi

Director

John J. Cali School of Music

John J. Cali
School of Music

MONTCLAIR
STATE UNIVERSITY



**MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY
OPERA GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES**

Coccia Institute, Co-Sponsor
Inserra Family, Co-Sponsor

PRODUCTION TEAM

Production Concept and Director: Rebecca Jo Loeb
Head of Artistic Operations/Opera: Karen Driscoll
Production Manager: Phil Clifford
Scenic Design: Tyler Herald
Technical Director: Roy Chambers
Lighting Design: Stacey Boggs
Projections Design: Paul Deziel
Choreographer: Donna Scro Samori
Costume Design: Matsy Stinson
Assistant Costume Designer: Elizabeth Clark
Wardrobe Supervisor: Sean Hoffman
Sound Design: Alexa Tabbacchino
Poster Art: Andrew Bullock
Production Stage Manager: Elli Caunitis
Assistant Director: Lilly Grady
Assistant Stage Manager: Mandi Delicoma
Surtitle Operator: LeAnn Overton
Surtitle Writer: Rebecca Jo Loeb
Livestream Production: Jordy Monegro-Ventura
Opera Department Graduate Assistant: Hannah Bogard

MUSICAL PREPARATION

William Hobbs, Assistant Conductor and Répétiteur
Victoria Schwartzman, Music Director and Répétiteur

ROLE COACHES

Michael Caldwell
Peiwen Chen
William Hobbs
Mory Ortman
LeAnn Overton
Mary Pinto
Victoria Schwartzman
Grant Wenaus

Pietro Francesco Cavalli LA CALISTO

Opera in 2 acts with prologue

Edited by Raymond Leppard

Used by arrangement with European American Music Distributors Company, U.S. and
Canadian agent for Faber Music Ltd., London

PROGRAM

Total running time: 2 hours 15 minutes, with one intermission

CHARACTER

Child
La Natura/Furia/Echo
(cover)
L'Eternità/Furia/Echo
(cover)
Il Destino/Furia/Echo
(cover)
Giove
Mercurio
Calisto
Endimione
Diana/Giove as Diana
Linfea
Satirino
Pane
Silvano
Giunone

SATURDAY CAST

Sydney Bias
Maria Jo Phelps
Gabrielle Guida
Brianna Coppolino
Sydney Swearingin
Maya Henry
Thalia Suleymanov
Deiniol McGovern
Thalia Suleymanov
Sonia Fortezza
Gabrielle Guida
Clara Luz Iranzo
Sydney Swearingin
Hannah Bogard
Ben Silvesti
Tyler Kriney
Victoria Mango

SUNDAY CAST

Sydney Bias
Maria Jo Phelps

Brianna Coppolino

Jenna Fererra

Clinton Garrison
Hannah Bogard
Caitlin Caulfield
Maria Jo Phelps
So Yeon Kim
Sarah Sweeney
Maya Henry
Alan Pinzon
Marcello Fois
Jacklynn Wick

UPCOMING OPERA CALI IMMERSIVE RESIDENCY EVENT



J'NAI BRIDGES

OPERA MEZZO-SOPRANO

MARCH 3 + 5, 2025

Bridges Series Concert at Merkin Concert Hall MARCH 5, 2025

American mezzo-soprano J'Nai Bridges, known for her "rich, dark, exciting sound" (Opera News) is quickly becoming one of the most sought-after talents of her generation. Two-time Grammy® Award-winning American mezzo-soprano J'Nai Bridges, known for her "plush-voiced mezzo-soprano" (The New York Times), and "calmly commanding stage presence" (The New Yorker), has been heralded as "a rising star" (Los Angeles Times), gracing the world's top opera and concert stages.

Schedule and Reserve Tickets: montclair.edu/music/cali-residency



MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Kyle Ritenauer, Conductor

CONTINUO ENSEMBLE

Harpsichord

Hsuan-Wen Chen

Cello

India Enter

Theorbo and Baroque Guitar

Jason Priset

ORCHESTRA

Violin I

Zach Wood

Carlos Santamaria

Brianna Almonte

Haydn Ng

Violin II

Chelsea Xuereb

Park Choy

Rafael Linares

Miguel Paniagua

Viola

Noah Stevens

Jasmine Tunac

Hector Otero

Denton Moreland

Cello

Kelvin Guillen

Cecilia Grossman

Valentina Zavala Corona

Bass

JP Bernabe

Niles Scott

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE & DANCE

Donna Scro Samori, Choreographer

DANCERS

Bear/Rehearsal Assistant - Alyssia Farias

Nymphs - Laura Aglione, Delise Fusaro, Caroline Murray, Jordon Woolridge

Satyrs - Kamila Lemus, Cailey Spence, Vanessa Martinez, Mo Spiecker

Understudy - Melodi Williams

Content Advisory: This production contains theatrical haze, depictions of smoking use, sexual harassment/assault, violence/staged unarmed combat

SYNOPSIS

PROLOGUE The immortal Goddesses Natura (Nature) and L'Eternità (Eternity) tend to the stars in the heavens and describe the difficult but rewarding path that souls take to arrive there. Il Destino (Destiny) enters and asks that they add Calisto to the names of those who may ascend. They question this new addition, but Destino shows them a great secret - a Divine Crown which Calisto has broken - shunning the power of Giove (Zeus) himself. This is the story of Calisto and how she earned herself a place in the stars.

ACT ONE Giove, accompanied by Mercurio (Mercury), has descended from Olympus to restore nature after destroying the earth in flames. His attention is diverted by Calisto, a nymph and follower of the virgin Goddess Diana (Artemis), who laments the death of nature and begs for a fountain to be restored so she can quench her thirst. Giove restores the fountain then encourages Calisto to bestow him with "rewards". Calisto denounces Giove and Mercurio as lechers and leaves while maintaining her commitment to virtue. Mercurio suggests that, since Calisto is a devout follower of Diana, Giove should transform himself into the appearance of Diana and enjoy his pleasures with Calisto in that form. Calisto returns and sings about her love of freedom, after which Giove appears, now looking like Diana. He easily convinces Calisto to leave with him for some private enjoyment while Mercurio, left alone, divulges his observations about the benefits of deceit in seduction.

Endimione, a young shepherd boy, attracted by the blossoming of nature, laments his unfulfilled love for the goddess Diana. He hides when he sees the real Diana appear, herself torn between her desire

to love fully and her duties as a chaste Goddess. Another follower of Diana, Linfea, arrives while on the hunt and discovers Endimione. Diana, who also secretly pines for the shepherd boy, speaks to him but cannot show her affection, and Linfea chases the young man away. Calisto re-enters, giddy from her amorous encounter, and seeing Diana, expresses her passion which causes great indignation to the real Goddess who expels her from the order for indecency and departs in a rage. Calisto, not understanding, is heartbroken by the apparent change in affection, while Linfea is left to ponder her own romantic impulses which arise from time to time.

A mischievous satyr, Satirino, has been listening to Linfea and offers himself to her should she decide to give in to her impulses. Linfea, repulsed, insults the young woodland creature about his looks and his birth; she rejects him and they part on the worst of terms. Deeper in the blooming forest, the demigod Pane also declares his passion for the Goddess Diana and wishes she would return his affections, as he imagined she did once a century ago. He also suspects that he may have a rival for her love, and his fellow satyr, Silvano, agrees to go hunt the potential scoundrel after comforting Pane by the fire to a chorus of other dancing spirits.

ACT 2 On Mount Lycaeus, Endimione sings to the moon, symbolizing Diana, and falls asleep. Diana admires him while he sleeps and they sing together before finally confessing their love, though they cannot be together due to her vow of chastity. Satirino, witnessing this, criticizes Diana's romantic interest in a mortal while rejecting Pane. Satirino complains how all women are fickle and not to be trusted.

Giunone (Hera) comes down from Olympus to search for her unfaithful husband, Giove, and encounters Calisto, who reveals her rejection by Diana. Giunone suspects that Calisto might be her husband's latest conquest, at which point Giove (disguised as Diana) and Mercury return. Giove convinces Calisto into thinking she's won Diana's favor again and Calisto leaves, elated, to meet again with Diana in private. Giunone confronts her husband dressed as Diana and almost exposes Giove's disguise but leaves quietly. Giove, enraged, criticizes men who let their wives control them.

Endimione, writing love poetry, is discovered by Giove and Mercurio and Endimione once again thinks this is his love, Diana. The group is interrupted by Pane, Silvano, and Satirino, who capture Endimione, believing he is involved with Diana. Giove, still in disguise, leaves. The satyrs mock Endimione and drag him away.

Linfea, preparing for her imaginary wedding, encounters Satirino, who tricks her into dancing as a revenge for past insults. They incite a battle between nymphs and satyrs to avenge each party. Meanwhile, Calisto, awaiting Diana, is transformed into a bear by the Furies sent by Giunone to torment her. Feeling satisfied by the punishment, she laments men's unfaithfulness and toys with the bear as a symbol of that adultery.

The satyrs return with Endimione, demanding he renounce his love for Diana. He refuses, and they tie him to a tree, but Diana rescues him. They reaffirm their love with a kiss.

In the final scene, Giove offers Calisto a crown and divine power, but she rejects him, breaking the crown and ascending as a star, leaving the gods and earth behind.

PROGRAM NOTES

by Rebecca Jo Loeb

La Calisto is a dazzling example of Italian Baroque opera, composed by Francesco Cavalli (1602–1676) with a libretto by Giovanni Faustini (1615–1651). Premiering in 1651, the opera intertwines two classic Greek myths, blending love, deception, and divine mischief in a way that could easily be described as “Greek Mythology Fan Fiction”—a phrase one of the clever students used to capture the spirit of the work. In mid-1600s Venice, where Cavalli composed *La Calisto*, the operatic world was undergoing a major shift. Opera, once an exclusive entertainment for the aristocracy, was beginning to be performed in public theaters, opening the art form to a wider, burgeoning middle class. Cavalli was at the forefront of this transformation, helping to establish opera as a form of popular public entertainment.

At the heart of the opera is the story of *Calisto*, a nymph who, having sworn chastity to the goddess Diana (Artemis), becomes the victim of Giove (Zeus), who disguises himself as Diana in order to seduce her. When the real Diana discovers this betrayal, she expels Calisto from her circle of nymphs. Further wrath is heaped upon Calisto by Giove's wife, Giunone (Hera), who transforms her into a bear. Eventually, Giove takes pity on Calisto, raising her to the heavens as the constellation Ursa Major after she pledges her devotion to him. This myth is intertwined with the story of Diana's own romantic entanglement with the shepherd Endimione, who, like Calisto, falls prey to the whims of the gods. The opera also features a colorful array of lustful nymphs, playful satyrs, and capricious gods, creating a rich tapestry of humor, fantasy, and sensuality.

The charm of *La Calisto* lies in its reimagining of familiar myths, infusing new life and backstories into classic characters. Much like

the modern musical *Wicked* where we explore the untold stories of well-known characters like the Wicked Witch of the West and Glinda, we can similarly imagine Cavalli's opera containing a similar pull. As *Calisto* reveals the hidden motivations and complex relationships of its mythological characters we are offered new perspectives on ancient tales.

Cavalli's music, written for lighter voices and small ensembles, is particularly well-suited for student productions. The opera's intimate scale allows young singers to explore the expressive world of Baroque opera without the overwhelming forces of larger orchestras or more grandiose operatic styles. The structure of *La Calisto* is built on *recitativo*—a form of sung speech that propels the plot forward—giving it a theatrical quality that is more akin to a play than later operas. This flexibility in pacing allows directors and performers to deeply explore the characters and the drama, making it an ideal canvas for students learning both their musical and acting craft.

I was initially drawn to *La Calisto* by its intriguing, complex characters, its comedic buffo elements, and the beauty of Cavalli's music. However, I was also challenged by the opera's conclusion. After Calisto's transformation back into a human, she pledges her faithfulness to Zeus—the very god who deceived her and brought about her suffering—and is then rewarded by being turned into a constellation. This moment left a bad taste in my mouth, raising deeper questions about the nature of the character. What makes Calisto so special? From what I could tell, she was simply a beautiful nymph who, through no fault of her own, became a pawn in the games of the gods. So why write an opera about her?

I also thought about the concept of being turned into a constellation of stars; a state of being which feels above both the chaos of the divine *and* the mortal. I wondered if we

could find a way for the character of Calisto to somehow *choose* a life of peace where the strains of both the mortal and divine could not touch her.

I decided to add in a concept of the Crown, in this production a symbol of divinity, which every God wears. The Goddesses Nature and Eternity introduce this new plot element during the Prologue when Destiny suggests to them that they admit a young Nymph, Calisto, into the firmament. When asked what Calisto has done to earn this, Destiny says that it is “a part of a secret” and then reveals a broken crown, suggesting that it was Calisto who had broken this treasure. We understand, then, that somehow in breaking this crown Calisto has accomplished something special and unique, meriting her a place among the stars. We don't learn more about this until the end of the show when Giove and Mercury present Calisto with that very same crown from the Prologue, pushing her to accept it so she can join them in Olympus. Calisto is then faced with the choice of enjoying all the Godly pleasures of Olympus with her aggressor and the source of all her pain, or something else...

In the end, *La Calisto* invites us into a world where gods and mortals are tangled in webs of love and deceit, where beauty is both a gift and a curse, and where the stories we think we know are ripe for new interpretations. Through its playful remixing of classic myths, Cavalli's opera continues to captivate audiences today, reminding us of the enduring power of storytelling.

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