

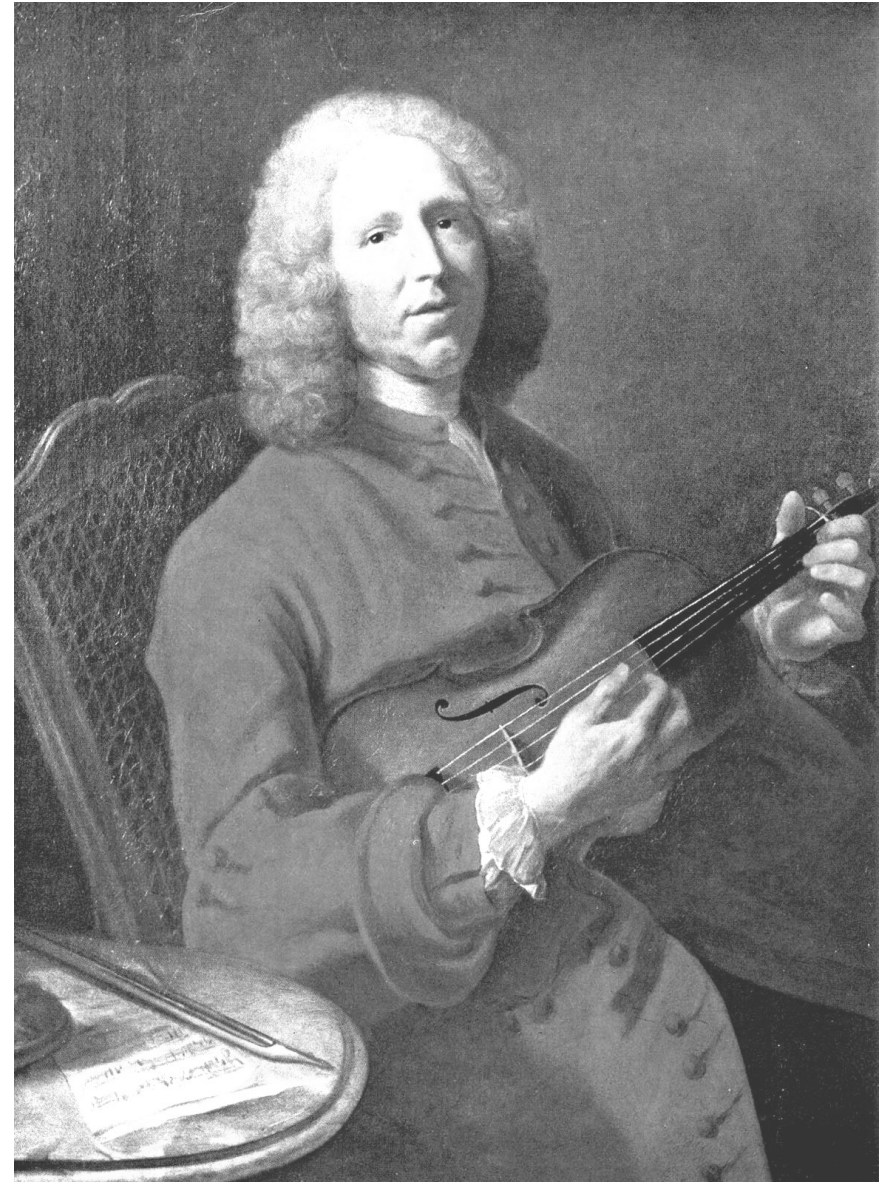
C. HEROIC, POETIC, INTERRACIAL

We watch two scenes from the middle acts of the 2019 production by **Clément Cogitore** and **Bintou Dembélé**, to appreciate their response to Rameau's music and the way they use movement as an integral part of that response. The stories hardly matter. In Act II, Inca princess **Phani** has fallen in love with a young *conquistador*, but she must first escape the unscrupulous Inca priest who has her in his power. Act III, which is set in a harem involves at least one man dressing up as a woman to get in (Rameau wrote several versions), but the clip that we shall play begins after all misunderstandings have been resolved, and the happy couples can go to celebrate at the Flower Festival.

Rameau: *Les Indes Galantes*, Act II aria, "Viens, Hymen" (Paris 2019, as above; Sabine Devielhe, *soprano*; Calvin Hunt, *dancer*)

Rameau: *Les Indes Galantes*, scenes from Act III (Paris 2019, as above)

OPERA PRODUCTION



3. RECLAIMING RAMEAU

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3. RECLAIMING RAMEAU

RAMEAU'S 1736 OPERA-BALLET "LES INDES GALANTES" (the amorous Indes) was intended to celebrate the wide sphere of French influence under Louis XIV, notably in the Americas and Middle East, and to promote the proto-Enlightenment idea that, no matter the color of their skin, human beings everywhere could still feel love, and would end up doing the right thing. Were it not for the quality of the music, it would be hard to see such a piece of blatant colonial puffery having any place in the repertoire today. But Rameau's score is a masterpiece and audiences want to hear it, so what is the poor stage director to do?

We will sample excerpts from three 21st-century productions. The earliest, by **Andrei Serban** (1943–) in 2003, treats the piece as a comic rococo confection, in which the strange ways of other races need be taken no more seriously than the colorful design or antique music. A 2014 production in Bordeaux by **Laura Scozzi** (1964–) ignores the colonial and racial themes completely, to replace them with other issues of the day, such as environmental destruction, mass migration, objectification of women, and rampant consumerism. Finally, a remarkable 2019 production in Paris by **Clément Cogitore** (1983–) and **Bintou Dembélé** (1975–) acknowledges a French colonial history that has left pockets of people of color in housing estates and suburbs all over the city, and addresses it by bringing the people of the streets and their virtuosic dances—break, hip hop, krump—directly onto the venerable stage of the Opéra. Paradoxically, it may also be the one that respects Rameau the most. *rb.*

A. VISITORS TO VERSAILLES

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764) wrote his original harpsichord piece *Les Sauvages* to celebrate the visit to France in 1827 of Chief Chicagou and other native American notables from Illinois. Eleven years later, he used it in the final act of *Les Indes Galantes* for a peace-pipe ceremony between Indians and Europeans. We will compare short clips from the Serban and Cogitore productions.

Rameau: *Les Sauvages*, (Jean Rondeau, *harpsichord*)

Rameau: *Les Indes Galantes*, scene from Act IV (Paris 2003; Andrei Serban, *director*; Blanca Li, *choreographer*; William Christie, *conductor*)

Rameau: *Les Indes Galantes*, scene from Act IV (Paris 2019; Clément Cogitore, *director*; Bintou Dembélé, *choreographer*; Leonardo García Alarcón, *conductor*)

B. COLONIALISM AS SATIRE

Director-Choreographer **Laura Scozzi** treats the entire work as satire, though addressing serious contemporary themes. In her Prologue, for example, the naked innocents in some tropical Eden are invaded by representatives of the Church, the Army, Sport, and Big Business. Searches for less compromised environments in the subsequent acts mostly fail, until we arrive in the American West for Act IV. Scozzi replaces the Native Americans of the original by environmental activists, two of whom fall in love and get married. But even they cannot escape the commercialization of modern domestic life.

Rameau: *Les Indes Galantes*, Prologue excerpt (Bordeaux 2014; Laura Scozzi, *director-choreographer*; Christophe Rousset, *conductor*)

Rameau: *Les Indes Galantes*, Act IV, exc. (Bordeaux 2014, as above)