

Massenet

THAÏS

Saturday, December 20

Conductor
Jesús López-Cobos

Production
John Cox

Ms. Fleming's Costumes by
Christian Lacroix

Lighting Designer
Duane Schuler

Choreographer
Sara Jo Slate

The Met: Live in HD series is made possible by a generous grant from the Neubauer Family Foundation.

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in order of appearance

CENOBIITE MONKS

Daniel Clark Smith

Roger Andrews

Kurt Phinney

Richard Pearson

Craig Montgomery

PALÉMON **Alain Vernhes**

ATHANAËL **Thomas Hampson**

GUARD **Trevor Scheunemann**

NICIAS **Michael Schade**

CROBYLE **Alyson Cambridge**

MYRTALE **Ginger Costa-Jackson**

THAÏS **Renée Fleming**

LA CHARMEUSE **Leah Partridge**

ALBINE **Maria Zifchak**

COMING SOON!

January 10 **La Rondine**

January 24 **Orfeo ed Euridice**

February 07 **Lucia di Lammermoor**

March 07 **Madama Butterfly**

March 21 **La Sonnambula**

May 09 **La Cenerentola**

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ACT I Palémon and his fellow monks await the return of Athanaël, one of their brothers. He enters and tells them how he found the city of Alexandria in a state of sin and under the influence of the courtesan Thaïs, whom he remembers seeing once in his youth before he joined the order. Athanaël believes her behavior is an affront to God. Despite Palémon's warnings not to interfere with the secular world he is determined to convert her to a Christian life. That night, Athanaël has a vision of Thaïs. He prays for strength and, as dawn breaks, says goodbye to his brothers and leaves to walk back through the desert to Alexandria.

Athanaël arrives in the city of his birth, whose luxury and learning he left behind to pursue a spiritual life ("Voilà donc la terrible cité"). He comes to the house of the wealthy Nicias, a friend of his youth, who tells him that Thaïs is his mistress of the moment. Athanaël replies that he has come to convert Thaïs. Nicias laughs at this, but agrees to introduce Athanaël to her. Thaïs enters, and Athanaël confronts her, declaring that he intends to make her give up her sinful life. She dismisses the idea and asks why he denies his true nature and doesn't give in to love. As she is about to take off her clothes, Athanaël leaves in horror, telling her he will wait for her at her palace.

ACT II Alone in her bedroom, Thaïs suddenly realizes the superficiality of her life and asks herself what will happen once her beauty fades ("Dis-moi que je suis belle"). Athanaël enters, and she warns him not to fall in love with her. He replies that there is another kind of love that leads to eternal life. The voice of Nicias, heard from outside, reminds Thaïs of her past. Rejecting both her life of luxury and God, she collapses in despair.

After a night of soul-searching (Orchestral interlude: "Méditation"), Thaïs tells Athanaël that she is ready to follow him. He explains that he will take her to a convent, but before they leave she must burn her palace and all her belongings. She agrees, and Athanaël leads her back into the house. Nicias enters with his friends and a group of citizens. When Thaïs and Athanaël reappear from the palace and the monk announces her conversion, the crowd threatens to stone him for taking Thaïs away. Nicias distracts them and Athanaël and Thaïs escape as her palace goes up in flames.

ACT III Thaïs and Athanaël rest at an oasis. She is exhausted and feels unable to continue, but Athanaël demands that she ignore her physical weakness. Only when he sees that her feet are bloody does he feel pity. Thaïs thanks him for having brought her to salvation (Duet: "Baigne d'eau mes mains"). At the convent, the nuns welcome Thaïs. When she says goodbye to Athanaël, he realizes with horror that he will never see her again.

Back at the monks' retreat, Athanaël confesses to Palémon that, in spite of all his fasting and prayer, he is still haunted by the image of Thaïs's beauty. Palémon repeats his warning not to get involved with the affairs of the outside world. That night, Athanaël again has a vision of Thaïs, first as a temptress, then as a saint about to die in the monastery. Waking, he cries he must go to her and runs off into the desert.

After three months of penance, Thaïs is at the end of her strength. The distraught Athanaël arrives, and Thaïs gratefully remembers how he saved her. The monk replies that she has converted him to worldly love. Thaïs, in a trance, doesn't understand his passionate confession and dies with a vision of angels greeting her in heaven. Athanaël, shattered, is left alone, begging God for mercy.

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