

Cendrillon





Welcome!

The State Theatre is proud to present *Cendrillon*, Massenet's charming take on the classic Cinderella tale. Recorded live at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden this HD presentation captures all the grandeur and excitement of the live event.

This *Keynotes* performance guide has been created by the State Theatre Education Department to add to your understanding and enjoyment of the opera. We hope it will encourage you to take advantage of our other HD opera offerings this season.

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Lian Farrer, *Vice President for Education*
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Keynotes for Cendrillon written and designed by Lian Farrer. Edited by Jennifer Cunha.


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Contact: education@StateTheatreNJ.org

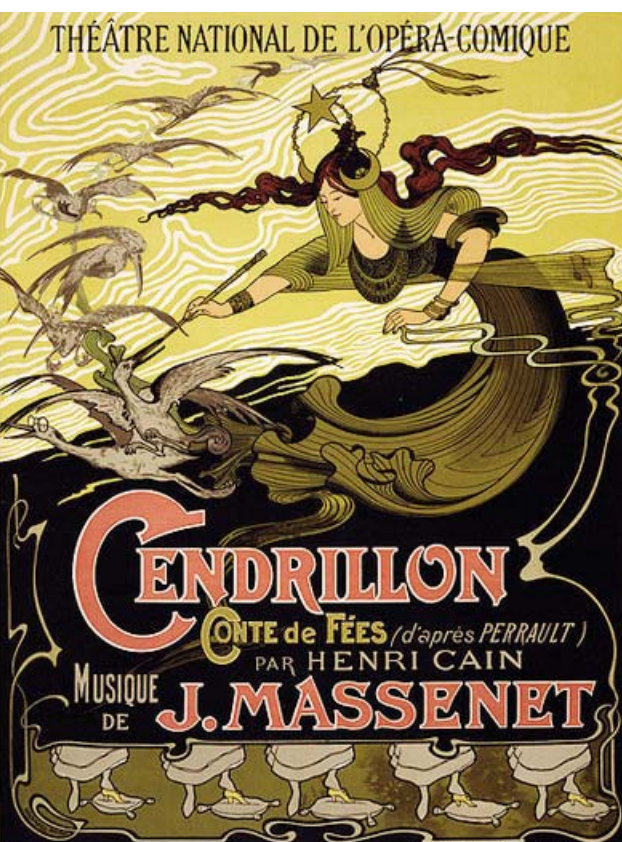
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About the Opera



poster from the original production of *Cendrillon*

Unlike Rossini's 1817 Cinderella opera, *La Cenerentola*, Massenet's *Cendrillon* closely follows the much-loved story of virtue rewarded. Based on Charles Perrault's 1698 version of the story, the opera has a French libretto by Henri Cain. *Cendrillon* premiered at the Opéra-Comique in Paris on May 24, 1899. It was an instant success. Long neglected, *Cendrillon* is getting its first performances at the Royal Opera House.

While composing *Cendrillon*, Massenet found inspiration by immersing himself in the appropriate surroundings: a 17th-century house on the Seine in Normandy that had belonged to the celebrated Duchesse de Longueville. He even bought a large antique table on which to spread the pages of his manuscript.

"Massenet's is the real Cinderella story, unlike Rossini's, which has no fairy godmother. Here there is everything: the dress, the slipper. It's the whole fairy tale thing."

—Eglise Gutiérrez (La Fée)

The Production

"I love [*Cendrillon*]," says director Laurent Pelly. "...it has a very naïve quality, with a lot of humor and poetry and reverie. There's a bit of kitsch in it. It's very 18th-century with a slightly antique charm. It's very French."

Pelly's vision for this production was inspired by a storybook owned by his grandmother. Indeed, books and words are a visual focal point of the set design (by Barbara de Limburg) and costumes (designed by Pelly himself, with Jean-Jaques Delmotte). A large storybook, printed with Perrault's French text, forms the walls, which fold in and out to define the space in each scene. Books feature strongly among the props, too. The palace gates are created from those very words ("Les Portes du Palais") while *Cendrillon* is transported in a vehicle formed from the word "Carrosse" (carriage).



Who Wears the Pants?

Massenet wrote the role of Prince Charming for a mezzo-soprano, following a longstanding opera tradition of female singers (usually mezzo-sopranos) playing adolescent boys or young men. These roles are known—for obvious reasons—as 'trouser' roles, 'pants' roles, or 'breeches' roles. Some well-known trouser roles are Cherubino in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, Octavian in Richard Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*, Hansel in Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, and Siebel in Gounod's *Faust*.

It was not unheard of in past decades for trouser parts to be reassigned to male singers. (In fact, the one recording of *Cendrillon* currently available features a tenor Prince Charming.) This practice has largely been abandoned, as opera companies increasingly seek to remain faithful to the composers' original intentions.



Mezzo-soprano Alice Cooate as Prince Charming



Act I: Madame de la Haltière's house

Cendrillon's father, Pandolfe, hears the servants complain about his demanding second wife, Madame de la Haltière. His own daughter, Lucette, is neglected in comparison with Noémie and Dorotheé, his wife's two daughters from a previous marriage, but he is too timid to intervene.

Pandolfe, his wife, and stepdaughters all get ready for a grand ball that night at the king's palace. When they set off, poor Lucette is left alone to do the chores.

Lucette—who is nicknamed Cendrillon (Cinderella)—bewails her lot, and then falls asleep. Suddenly her fairy-godmother appears, and conjures up fine clothes and a carriage to take her to the ball. She wakes up, to be sent off in splendor, with a pair of magic glass slippers that will make her unrecognizable to her family. Her fairy-godmother warns that she must be home by midnight.

Act II: The royal palace

At the ball, the eternally morose Prince Charming is too lonely to enjoy himself. He is not pleased when the king advises him to choose a bride at the ball.

Madame de la Haltière and her daughters arrive, but are afraid to approach the prince. Cendrillon then makes her grand entrance, resplendent. Her stepmother and sisters are eaten up with jealousy for the unknown beauty.

Alone with Cendrillon, the prince declares his love and she responds with tenderness. Midnight then strikes and Cendrillon rushes away, leaving behind her beautiful glass slipper.

Act III, scene 1: Madame de la Haltière's home

Cendrillon is safely back home, though minus one of her magical slippers. Her family return, arguing about the mystery guest at the ball. Pandolfe declares her quite delightful while Madame de la Haltière and her daughters say how much they despised the shy, unknown woman.

Cendrillon nearly faints when she hears herself described so disapprovingly—believing that the prince must have looked down on her for the same reasons. Pandolfe comforts Cendrillon and suggests they both go back to the country, where they were once so happy. When he retires to bed, Cendrillon is overcome with despair and runs away to the country on her own.

Act III, scene 2: The fairy's magic domain

Cendrillon's fairy-godmother intervenes to help the two lovers. In a magic vision, she brings them together to declare their love.

Act IV, scene 1: The terrace of Cendrillon's home

Discovered unconscious beside a stream, Cendrillon has been taken home and slowly nursed back to health by her father. He recalls to her the dreams she has spoken of in her sleep: the ball, the prince, and the glass slipper.

Madame de la Haltière describes how the prince is earnestly seeking the owner of the glass slipper. Cendrillon quietly asks the Fairy to assist her once again.

Act IV, scene 2: The royal palace

Young women suitors gather before the prince to try on the glass slipper, but he does not recognize Cendrillon among them. Suddenly, the Fairy brings in Cendrillon, whose arrival delights the prince. As the two are reunited, Madame de la Haltière rushes over to embrace Cendrillon, pushing her husband out of the way as she does so.

The Music



In *Cendrillon*, Massenet creates distinct musical textures to evoke the different worlds of the story. This device lends a great deal of variety and interest to the score, showing off Massenet's ability to evoke the styles of other composers and other ages. The court music, full of pomp and formality, hearkens back to the French Baroque era of Rameau and Lully. The world of the fairies, light and airy, brings to mind both Mendelssohn and Richard Strauss. The third style is the most simple and straightforward, reflecting the down-to-earth virtues of Cendrillon and her father. The music for Mme. de la Haltière and her daughters is appropriately silly and pretentious. Massenet reserved his most purple writing for the love music; the lush, chromatic melodies conjure up both Wagner and Massenet himself. The overall effect is a Shakespeare-like balance between the contrasting elements of comedy and sentiment.

“Massenet’s *Cendrillon* has never gotten a strong foothold in the repertoire, but it’s a real charmer that reveals Massenet at his most inventive and highlights his gift as a comic composer. Massenet’s music is consistently elegant, and when necessary, goofy in a way that recalls the best of Arthur Sullivan, with some delectable ensembles. “

—Allmusic

Musical Highlights

“Ah! douce enfant” (“Ah! sweet child”)

The Fairy Godmother’s ethereal aria from Act I is a dazzling coloratura* showstopper.

Ball music

For the arrival of the ball guests, Massenet composed a series of orchestral dances in Baroque style.

Duets for the Prince and Cendrillon

Here is Massenet at his most lyrical and romantic.

“Enfin je suis ici” (“At last I am here”)

In Cendrillon’s aria at the beginning of the third act, she recalls her terror as she fled the palace and ran home, terrified, through the dark night.

* ‘Coloratura,’ which in Italian means ‘coloring,’ is a flashy style of singing that features elaborate runs, trills, stratospheric high notes, and other embellishments that show off a singer’s vocal range and agility. The style reached its zenith during the 18th and 19th centuries with composers such as Handel, Mozart, Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti. Most people associate coloratura with the soprano voice, but coloratura music has been written for all vocal ranges.



JOYCE DiDONATO (Cendrillon) has soared to international prominence in operas by Rossini, Handel, and Mozart, as well as in world premiere works. The Kansas-born mezzo-soprano has performed on the world's major opera stages, among them the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, Deutsche

Oper, Teatro Real, Chicago Lyric Opera, Houston Grand Opera, San Francisco Opera, Santa Fe Opera, and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.



EGLISE GUTIÉRREZ (La Fée) has performed with the foremost opera companies in Rome, Zurich, Trieste, Florence, Tel Aviv, Hamburg, Athens, and Seattle; with The Royal Opera, Santa Fe Festival, Savonlinna Festival, Opera, and at Carnegie Hall. The Cuban-American soprano's roles have

included Gilda in *Rigoletto*, Elvira in *I puritani*, Violetta in *La traviata*, Amina in *La sonnambula*, and the title roles in *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Lakmé*.



ALICE COOTE (Le Prince Charmant), the British mezzo-soprano, has sung with Stuttgart Opera, Théâtre du Chatelet (Paris), English National Opera, San Francisco Opera, and the Salzburg Festival, among others. She made her debut at Royal Opera Covent Garden as Cherubino in Mozart's

Nozze di Figaro, a role she has also performed at the Metropolitan Opera. Coote made her U.S. debut as Hänsel in Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* at Lyric Opera of Chicago.



EWA PODLEŚ (Madame de la Haltière), the Polish contralto, recently sang the title role in Rossini's *Tancredi* at the Caramoor Festival—a role she has also sung for the Teatro alla Scala, Staatsoper Berlin, and Teatro Real in Madrid. She performed the role of La Cieca in Ponchielli's *La gioconda*

at the Metropolitan Opera. Additional credits include San Francisco Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Canadian Opera Company, and Carnegie Hall.



JEAN-PHILIPPE LAFONT

(Pandolphe) has performed throughout his native France and at the principal opera houses in Rome, New York, Vienna, Chicago, Milan, Barcelona, Madrid, and Florence; at Carnegie Hall, the

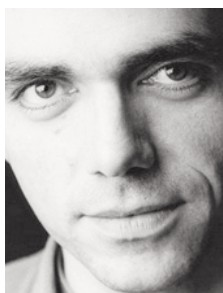
Arena di Verona and at the Bayreuth and Salzburg festivals. The baritone has also appeared in films including *Babette's Feast* and *Lacombe Lucien*.



BERTRAND DE BILLY (Conductor)

is a native of Paris. He has served as Principal Conductor at the Vienna Volksoper and General Music Director of the Gran Teatro del Liceu in Barcelona. He works with major ensembles around the

world, including the state operas of Vienna, Berlin, Hamburg, and Munich; the Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Salzburg Festival, la Monnaie in Brussels, the Opera National de Paris, and the Washington and Los Angeles operas.



LAURENT PELLY (Director) is a sought-after director and costume designer for both theater and opera. His current productions include Massenet's *Manon* (Royal Opera House, Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, and Théâtre du Capitole,

Toulouse), Massenet's *Cendrillon* (Royal Opera House, Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, Teatro del Liceu Barcelona), and *L'enfant et les Sortilèges/L'heure espagnol* (Glyndebourne Festival). A native of France, Pelly is Director of Théâtre National de Toulouse.

Meet the Composer

“To be an artist is to be a poet; to be touched by all the revelations of art and nature; to love, to suffer—in one word, to live!”

—Jules Massenet

Jules Massenet (1842-1912) was the leading French opera composer of his generation, immensely prolific and capable of tackling a wide range of subjects and operatic genres with fluency and skill. His musical style—often emotional and sentimental—is characterized by sweet melodies set to shimmering and sparkling harmonies. While best remembered for the compelling musical and dramatic intimacy of just two of his nearly 30 operas (and also the famous “Meditation” violin solo from *Thaïs*), his huge output extended to works conceived on a grand scale and involving vast forces. In addition to his operas, he wrote ballet and sacred music, songs, incidental music, and orchestral compositions.

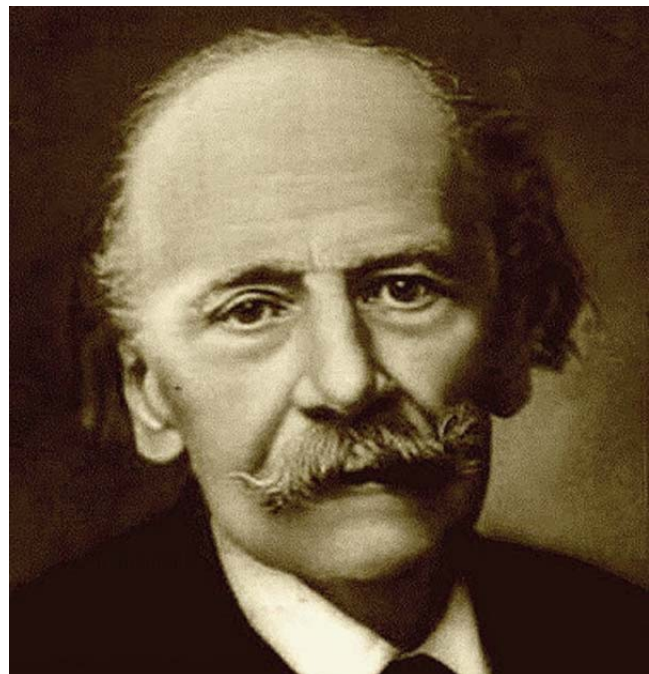
Born into a respectable middle-class family in provincial France, Massenet showed an early talent for music that was encouraged by his pianist mother. He was admitted to the prestigious Paris Conservatoire at the age of 11. At 17, he won the institution’s premier prize for piano, and four years later its celebrated composition prize, the Prix de Rome.

Massenet’s first opera, the one-act comedy *La grand’Tante*, was positively received at the Opéra-Comique in its premiere in 1867. He quickly established himself as a composer with outstanding technical skills and a gift for atmosphere. In 1877 he scored a major hit with the colorful spectacle *Le Roi de Lahore*.

By now Massenet was producing a steady stream of operas. In 1884, *Manon* premiered at the Opéra-Comique, to enormous acclaim. *Werther* made its debut at the Vienna Court Opera in 1892 and later joined *Manon* as fixtures of the operatic repertory. Subsequent successes included *La Navarraise* (1894), *Sapho* (1897), and *Cendrillon* (1899), *Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame* (1902), and *Chérubin* (1905).

Massenet taught composition with distinction at the Paris Conservatoire for 18 years. He married a former pupil, Louise-Constance de Gressy (‘Ninon’), in 1866; their apparently happy union survived his attachments to some of his leading ladies. The first of these was the American beauty Sybil Sanderson, who served as the inspiration for Massenet’s *Esclarmonde* (1889) and *Thaïs* (1894). He composed roles for another inamorata, mezzo-soprano Lucy Arbell, in *Ariane* (1906), *Thérèse* (1907), *Bacchus* (1909), *Don Quichotte*, and *Roma* (both 1912).

Massenet was much honored in his lifetime, being named the youngest member of the French Academie in 1879, and eventually becoming its President. He died in Paris in 1912, following a long bout with cancer, and is buried in the village of Égreville, where he had his country house. Soon after his death, Massenet’s sentimental style went out of fashion, and many of his operas fell into near total oblivion. Beginning in the 1970s, however, a number of his works—such as *Thaïs*, *Esclarmonde*, *Cendrillon*, and *Don Quichotte*—received new attention and now enjoy periodic revivals.



In the Mood

Massenet preferred to work in the same setting as his operas. For *Cendrillon*, he stayed in a 17th-century house on the Seine in Normandy that belonged to the Duchesse de Longueville. He even bought a large antique table on which to spread his manuscript as he worked.

Opera Voices

Opera is a form of theater in which the performers sing all or most of the words. Though it may seem odd at first, opera's distinctive style of musical expression creates an extra level of meaning and emotion. If you're not used to listening to operatic voices, you may at first find it strange or even unpleasant. Chances are, however, that if you keep listening, you'll eventually be hooked.

Singing opera is a skill that requires many years of special training. An opera singer has to learn the special vocal techniques that make it possible to be heard in a large concert hall, with a large orchestra playing—and no microphone!

Opera voices are divided into different categories, depending on whether it is a woman's or a man's voice, and how high or low it is. The types of opera voices are listed in order from highest to lowest:

- **SOPRANO** - the highest female voice
- **MEZZO-SOPRANO** - the middle-range female voice ('Mezzo' means 'middle.')
- **CONTRALTO** - the lowest female voice
- **TENOR** - the highest male voice
- **BARITONE** - the middle-range male voice
- **BASS** (pronounced 'base') - the lowest male voice

In an opera, the composer tries to match the sound of the voice to the character. For that reason, you'll usually find the soprano playing parts such as a young woman or a princess, while the mezzo-soprano might be her mother or even a witch. The hero is usually a tenor, while the bad guy almost always has one of the lower men's voices—a baritone or a bass.

The Voices in Cendrillon

Cendrillon	mezzo-soprano
La Fée	soprano
Le Prince Charmant	mezzo-soprano
Madame de la Haltière	contralto
Pandolphe	baritone
Noémie	soprano
Dorothée	mezzo-soprano



Good Vibrations

The human voice is an instrument that creates sound through vibration—just like a violin or drum. Our instrument consists of vocal folds (sometimes called vocal cords), two small membranes that are stretched horizontally across the larynx, or voicebox. When we talk or sing, air passes over the vocal folds, causing them to vibrate, which produces the sound. It's easy to feel the vibration: just place your fingers lightly on your throat and say, "Aaaaah!"

Breathing is the most important part of singing correctly—especially in opera, where the ability to sing long, uninterrupted phrases is highly prized. Opera singers work extensively to master proper breathing. In learning a new role, they carefully study the score to decide where in the music they will take each breath.

One thing that gives opera singing its distinctive and expressive sound is the use of vibrato, a small and steady change of pitch that creates a pulsating or 'vibrating' sound. (You can see a violinist or cellist create vibrato by wiggling the fingers against the neck of the instrument while playing a note.) For an opera singer, part of preparing for a role is deciding how much vibrato to use and where to use it. They may even choose to vary the amount of vibrato they use on a single note!

