

ONE PIANO

FOUR HANDS

anderson & roe  
DUOS DUETS

Ballet

from *Orphée et Eurydice*

**Christoph Willibald Gluck**  
Arranged by Greg Anderson



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## About the Opera

The formation of the Classical style (often associated with the music of Franz Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven) was very much in alignment with contemporary historians' preoccupation with Classical antiquity, a period of history associated with ancient Greece and Rome. Johann Winckelmann, a classical archeologist observed in 1756, "The general eminent characteristic of Greek masterpieces is ultimately a noble simplicity and a calm greatness."<sup>1</sup> Twenty years later, Christoph Willibald Gluck followed suit in the preface to his opera *Alceste*, writing, "I thought that my chief endeavor should be to search for a grand simplicity."<sup>2</sup>

"Noble simplicity" and "calm greatness" are no better heard than in Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice*, an opera based—not surprisingly—on Greek mythology. The opera was the first by Gluck to demonstrate a reformed operatic style, favoring essential dramatic content over abstruse plots and excessively complex music.

The opera tells the poetically tragic story of Orpheus' attempt to retrieve his wife, Eurydice, from the underworld after she dies on their wedding day. Orpheus vows not to look back at Eurydice while guiding her from the underworld, but he is overcome by anxiety and yearning; he gives in, turns and looks back, and Eurydice slips away to die a second time.

## About the Ballet

The original, Italian version of Gluck's opera was published as *Orfeo ed Euridice* in 1762. A decade later, Gluck and a new librettist revised the score and text for a production in Paris, entitled *Orphée et Eurydice*. Act 2, scene 2, takes place in the Elysian Fields and opens with a four-part ballet known as the "Dance of the Blessed Spirits," which features music exclusive to the French version of the opera. This arrangement is based on one section of this dance. In the original, the indescribably beautiful melody is played by a flute and accompanied by strings.

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<sup>1</sup> "Das allgemeine vorzügliche Kennzeichen der griechischen Meisterstücke ist endlich eine edle Einfalt, und eine stille Grösse." Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (Dresden: Im Verlag der Waltherischen Handlung, 1756), 21.

<sup>2</sup> "Ho creduto poi che la mia maggior fatica dovesse ridursi a cercare una bella semplicità." Christoph Willibald Gluck, *Alceste: Tragedi* (Paris: Bureau d'Abonnement Musical, n.d. [1776]), prefatory material.

## About the Arrangement

This small scene from the opera has taken on a life of its own; audiences today are more likely to recognize the tune from its countless arrangements for various instruments than for its part in the original opera. These adaptations, however, are typically known by other names. Giovanni Sgambati first published his famed version for solo piano in 1878 and titled the piece “Melody by Gluck.” The “Melody” designation seems to have stuck in subsequent arrangements, notably those of Fritz Kreisler, Alexander Siloti, and Abram Chasins.

Since the music originates from a ballet in the French version of the opera (rather than the Italian version), I have titled the piece “Ballet from *Orphée et Eurydice*.”

## Performance Suggestions

The music is wonderfully resilient to different interpretations. Elizabeth Joy Roe and I perform the piece slowly and with deep sentiment, but a more fluid and straightforward approach has the potential to work equally well.

The accompaniment played by the *secondo* pianist occasionally interferes with the *primo*'s melody. Rather than rewrite the accompaniment, I ask the *primo* pianist to release the key early, namely in bars 5, 21, 28, 29, and 30. These notes should be played with the *intention* of producing a more sustained duration, even if they are released prematurely to allow the *secondo* pianist to repeat the note. Skillful pedaling will aid the effect.

The eighth-note appoggiaturas found throughout the arrangement are typically played on the beat as sixteenth-notes. The thirty-second-note ornaments, however, can be performed either on the beat or before the beat at the performer's discretion.

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—Greg Anderson

