

Illustration 10, Act III excerpt

Orfeo's strophic aria "Possente spirto" and the response of Charon

Mighty spirit and fearsome deity,
without whom no soul separated from its body
can presume to gain passage to the other shore,

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I am not living: no, for since my dear wife
is deprived of life, my heart no longer remains with me,
and without a heart, how can it be that I am alive?

To her I have made my way through the turbid air,
yet not to Hades, for wherever
such beauty is found has paradise in it.

I am Orpheus, who follow Eurydice's steps
through these murky deserts
where no mortal man has ever trod.

O serene light of my eyes,
if one glance from you can restore me to life,
ah, who would deny me solace in my anguish?

You alone, noble god, can give me aid,
nor need fear, since I arm my fingers only
with sweet strings on a golden lyre,
against which the most obdurate spirit steels itself in vain.

CHARON

Your lament and your song, inconsolable singer, indeed
somewhat seduce me and delight my heart.
But far, ah far from my breast must pity lie,
a sentiment unworthy of my valour.

ORPHEUS

Ah, hapless lover that I am, may I not then hope that the citizens of Avernus will hear my pleas?
Wherefore, like an unhappy errant shade of an unburied corpse, I am to be deprived of both heaven and hell?
Thus does pitiless destiny will that in this horror of death, far from you, my beloved,
I should call your name in vain and wear myself out in imploring and weeping.
O give me back my love, ye gods of Tartarus!

Sinfonia

He is asleep, and even if my lyre cannot arouse pity in that stony heart, at least his eyes
cannot avoid slumber at my singing. Up then! Why do I tarry longer? It is high time to land on the other shore
if there is no one to prevent it; let courage prevail if my prayers are to be in vain.
Opportunity is a fleeting flower of time that must be plucked at the right moment.
[He enters the boat and crosses over, singing to the sound of an organ.]
Whilst my eyes pour forth streams of bitter tears, give me back my love, ye gods of Tartarus!