



LA FLAMBEAU is a chamber opera for string orchestra, maracas, and four (4) singers, composed in 2020 by **David Bontemps**, based on the play of the same name by Haitian playwright **Faubert Bolivar**.

Duration: 1 hr 20 min

Language: Sung in French, with two short passages in Haitian Creole.

Roles: Mademoiselle, *soprano*; Madame, *alto*; Monsieur, *tenor*; l'Homme, *bass*.

The music is woven from accessible melodies and is imbued with Afro-Haitian musical idioms. It features an interplay of cyclical themes that intensifies as the plot progresses.

The action is set in Haiti and is divided into seven (7) scenes preceded by an overture.

LA FLAMBEAU was composed in 2020 by David Bontemps, based on the play of the same name by Haitian playwright Faubert Bolivar. The play earned Bolivar the *Prix Spécial* from the Lucienne Deschamps Foundation in 2013 Haiti. The Orchestre classique de Montréal is presenting the world premiere performance on February 7th, 2023.

La Flambeau tells the story of a dysfunctional couple, Monsieur (a narcissistic and ambitious intellectual obsessed with the ideals of the republic) and Madame (who talks to her dead parents), and their working-class housekeeper, Mademoiselle. Violating his own principles and in an act of deceitful manipulation, Monsieur rapes Mademoiselle. After a surreal judgment scene in which he confesses his crime to l'Homme, Monsieur is subjected to a kind of mob justice and is turned into a zombie in service to his community.

Steeped in Haitian lore, *La Flambeau* draws on rich Yoruba mythology as preserved in Haitian Vodou traditions. It depicts the fantastical trial of a corrupt elite who cloaks himself in virtue to subjugate the disadvantaged, while offering a stark condemnation of psychological and physical abuse perpetrated against women. Its final verdict denounces the commodification, manipulation and oppression of human beings, serving a subtle yet intense character study that "*inflames passions*." It is an ode to the persistence of empathy and compassion in a world full of madness and violence.

Above all, *La Flambeau* is a compelling story with universal appeal that challenges audiences to rethink their assumptions, thanks to its topical and powerful subject matter.



SYNOPSIS

OVERTURE. Instrumental music featuring some of the opera's main themes.

SCENE 1. Monsieur is working on a speech about the republic that he is about to give. Madame, who seems touched by madness, serves him coffee and converses with her dead mother about her dead uncle. Monsieur remains obsessed with the *res-publica*.

SCENE 2. Monsieur is annoyed at Mademoiselle (the housekeeper) for being late on her first day of work. He lectures her on the virtues of punctuality and the republic. He quickly becomes enamoured with Mademoiselle, who reveals that the ring she wears signals her devotion to Ogou¹ La Flambeau. Monsieur ridicules her throughout the scene, finally ordering her to keep the house spotless "*from morning till night.*"

SCENE 3. Mademoiselle is doing housework. Although she is happy to be earning a living and provide for her mother, she senses that her rights and dignity are under threat in the house, where even a "*clay pot is more important than me.*" Madame and Mademoiselle console each other. Mademoiselle calls upon Ogou for courage, "*because misery is a war.*"

SCENE 4. Rehearsing his self-glorifying speech, Monsieur is interrupted by a distraught Mademoiselle, who reveals that "*someone has stolen her ring.*" Mademoiselle is reassured by Monsieur, who declares his love for her. She rebukes him but cannot escape. Monsieur rapes her, cautioning her to be "*more civilized next time.*" She flees the house, as Madame begs her not to leave.

SCENE 5. Having fallen asleep on his speech, Monsieur is paid a late-night visit by a stranger. It is l'Homme, who has come "*on behalf of the La Flambeau society to pass judgment on him.*" A surreal trial ensues and Monsieur confesses his crime. The tables have turned and he is now subjected to fear and oppression. Monsieur is condemned to become a zombie, at the service of Mademoiselle and the community.

SCENE 6. Monsieur has died. Madame no longer hears her mother's voice and decides to flee the house. Monsieur's body is lying on the sofa where Madame places his speech, his rosary and Mademoiselle's ring on top of him.

SCENE 7. Because zombies have no free will, Monsieur has been liberated from his demons. His neighbours are now appreciative of him since they are to receive the books from his library. Mademoiselle is haunted by the memory of Madame. But the story is not over: Mademoiselle reveals a surprise at the end of the story.

¹ Ogou is a deity in Yoruba mythology and Haitian Vodou. Revered among blacksmiths, he is associated with justice and war. Ogun is also a state in present-day Nigeria.