



## SAMSON ET DALILA

Camille Saint-Saëns  
*Libretto by F. Lemaire*

**Sunday, January 15, 2017 @ 12pm**

**Tuesday, January 17, 2017 @ 7pm**

Opera in three acts  
*Sung in French*

**From Opéra de Paris (Opéra Bastille)**  
Recorded October 2016

Running Time: Approximate 2h 05min  
Detailed running time: TBA

### CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor	Philippe Jordan
Staged by	Damiano Michieletto
Sets designs	Paolo Fantin
Costumes designs	Carla Teti
Lighting design	Alessandro Carletti
Chorus Master	José Luís Basso

Orchestra and Chorus of the Opéra de Paris

### ARTISTIC TEAM

Dalila	Anita Rachvelishvili
Samson	Aleksandrs Antonenko
Le Grand Prêtre de Dagon	Egils Silins
Abimélech	Nicolas Testé
Un vieillard hébreu	Nicolas Cavallier
Un messenger philistin	John Bernard
Premier philistin	Luca Sannāi
Deuxième philistin	Jian-Hong Zhao

### PRESENTATION

Lightning streaks through the skies as Dalila declares her love to Samson in one of the finest arias of romantic opera. "My heart awakens to your voice like a flower to the kiss of dawn." An enchanting yet treacherous beauty... When the thunder at last rumbles, Dalila betrays Samson and offers him up to his enemies: "Come up, for this time he has shown me all his heart", she whispers to them in the night (The Old Testament, Book of Judges). Based on a violent and erotic biblical story, Saint-Saëns's opera – composed in 1877, much to Liszt's insistence – would not be performed at the Palais Garnier until fifteen years later. This first Parisian performance in 1892 included the hitherto unperformed "Dance Of The Priestesses". Nevertheless, it became one of the most performed French

operas in the world, together with Faust and Carmen. Conducted by Philippe Jordan, this new production brings back a repertoire masterpiece that has not been performed at the Paris Opera for twenty-five years. Ever sensational as a femme fatale, Anita Rachvelishvili plays the murderous Priestess in a production staged by Damiano Michieletto.

## **SYNOPSIS**

### **Act I**

#### *A square in Gaza at night*

In a square outside the temple of Dagon, a group of Hebrews begs Jehovah for relief from their bondage to the Philistines in a melancholy chorus in a rousing aria set against the chorus's continuous prayer. Abimelech, the Philistine governor, appears and taunts the Israelites, saying that they are helpless because their god has abandoned them. He further states that his god, Dagon, is far superior. The Hebrews cower in fear before Abimelech until Samson incites them into defiant action. Enraged, Abimelech attacks an unarmed Samson with his sword. Samson manages to wrest the sword from Abimelech and kills him.

Afraid of what might now happen, the Hebrews flee, abandoning Samson. The High Priest of Dagon comes from the Philistine temple and curses the Hebrews and Samson's prodigious strength. A messenger arrives and informs the High Priest that the Hebrews are destroying the harvest. He responds with a further curse that alludes to his plot to utilize Delilah's beauty to outwit Samson's strength.

As dawn breaks the Hebrews lift up a humble prayer to God in a style reminiscent of plainchant. Out of the temple emerges Dalila along with several priestesses of Dagon. As they walk down the temple steps, they sing of the pleasures of spring. Dalila engages seductively with Samson proclaiming that he has won her heart and bids him to come with her to her home in the valley of Sorek. As she tries to charm him, a trio forms as an old Hebrew warns of the danger this woman presents and Samson prays for God's protection from Dalila's charms. In an attempt to seduce Samson away from his leadership of the Israelite uprising, Dalila and the priestesses begin a sexually charged dance for him accompanied by a tambourine. After the dance, Dalila sings how spring is blossoming all around her yet, in her heart, she feels like it is still winter. As Samson struggles with his desire for Dalila, the old Hebrew repeats his cautionary plea. His warning, however, is made in vain and the curtain closes as Samson meets Delilah's gaze with every intention of going to her nearby dwelling.

### **Act II**

#### *Delilah's retreat in the Valley of Sorek*

Dalila knows that Samson is entranced with her and will come to her instead of leading the revolution against the Philistines. Sitting on a rock outside the entrance to her retreat, she sings triumphantly about her power to ensnare Samson. She says that all of his strength is hopeless to withstand love's onslaught.

Distant lightning is seen as the High Priest arrives to report that Samson and the Hebrews have conquered the Philistines. He attempts to achieve Samson's capture by offering Dalila gold, but she refuses saying she cares not for money but only for revenge. Her desire to hurt Samson is motivated solely by her loyalty to her gods and her hatred for the Hebrews. Dalila and the High Priest sing a duet expressing their mutual abhorrence for Samson and the Hebrews. Dalila vows to discover the secret of Samson's strength.

Now alone, Dalila contemplates her chances of success. Samson, intent on taking his place as the leader of the Hebrew revolt, emerges to say his last farewell as distant lightning is once again seen. In an attempt to close the trap which she has set for Samson, Dalila tells Samson seductively that she is completely his if he wants her. She begs him to respond to her caresses, hoping that he will finally let go of all other things and concentrate completely on her. Now that Dalila has him in her power, she feigns disbelief in his constancy and demands that he show his love by confiding in her the secret of his strength. Samson hears rolling thunder again which now seems like a warning from God and refuses. Dalila weeps and scorns Samson and runs into her dwelling. Samson is momentarily torn but then follows Dalila inside. Not long afterward, having finally learned that the secret of Samson's strength is his long hair, she calls to hidden Philistine soldiers, who rush in to capture and blind Samson.

### **Act III**

#### *The city of Gaza*

His hair shorn and now blind and shackled, Samson is turning a mill-wheel and praying for his people, who will suffer for his sin. He hears their voices, echoing the Hebrews' lament from act 1. Overcome with remorse, Samson offers his life in sacrifice, while the Hebrews are heard in the distance lamenting his fate.

A musical interlude is played as the scene changes to the temple of Dagon, where the Philistines are preparing a sacrifice to commemorate their victory. The priests and priestesses of Dagon sing softly, reprising the song to spring from act 1. The music turns savage as the priests dance a wild Bacchanale. Following the dance, Samson enters led by a boy. He is ridiculed by the High Priest and the crowd. Dalila taunts Samson further by recounting to him the details of her devious plot in a variant of her love song. When the priests try to force him to kneel before Dagon, he asks the boy to lead him to the two main pillars of the temple. Samson prays to God to restore his strength, and pulls down the pillars and the temple with them, crushing himself and his enemies. The curtain falls.