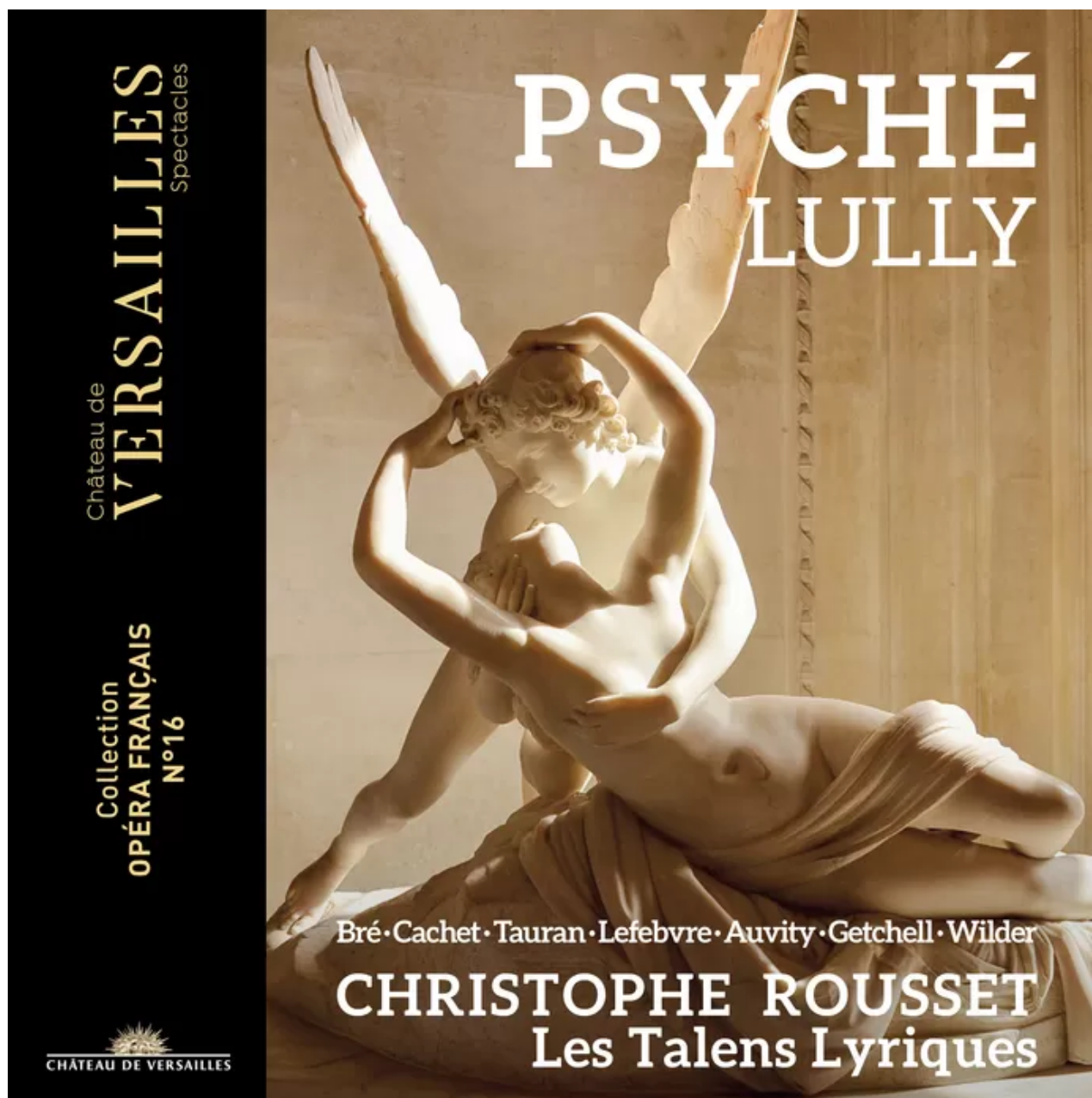


# An exuberant hymn to feminine beauty

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PREMIUM

Christophe Rousset © pr

Like many of his colleagues, conductor Christophe Rousset has traditionally been a busy bee after the pandemic. Last month he toured our country with his orchestra Les Talens Lyriques and the Nederlands Kamerkoor to perform Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* and now his latest double album is on the shelves. As an acclaimed expert in French court music, Rousset leads an excellent cast for the prestigious Château de Versailles Spectacles label

in Lully's tragédie lyrique *Psyché* from 1678, the year of the Peace of Nijmegen. An exuberant hymn to feminine beauty, which was not lacking in the royal castle of Versailles at the time.

Maarten-Jan Dongelmans 28-01-23, 09:00



Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687) takes his inspiration, as usual, from Greek mythology. Psyche, the incredibly beautiful beauty that enchants entire tribes, arouses the jealousy of the goddess Venus. He sends Amor to her with the intention of putting the fire to the cutie. Psyche asks him the forbidden question, becomes mortal, but fortunately Jupiter intervenes.

## Dance moments

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For the composer it was the second time that he devoted himself to this fable. In 1671 he worked for the playwright Molière on music for the latter's *Psyché*. But that collaboration collapsed.

The libretto of the tragédie lyrique, meanwhile, comes from other playwrights. One of them bears a well-known surname: Thomas Corneille. This younger brother of the famous dramaturge Pierre Corneille provided his story with beautiful texts and scenes, plus the necessary dance moments. After all, opera and dance were two hands on one stomach at the time.

## Toppers

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In the first act that follows the prologue, we hear a beautiful lamentation in Italian (lamento) at the beginning. This is a relic of the stage version of 1671. It rivals Purcell's famous *Dido's Lament* and is here sung incredibly beautifully by the title role singer, the soprano Ambrosine Bré.

She gives the beleaguered beauty an enchanting portrayal, but also knows how to deepen her role emotionally. The cast really only knows top performers. I mention here Deborah Cachet as Amor, Robert Getchell and Bénédicte Tauran as the gods couple Vulcain and Vénus. Driven, they give baroque music the full pound, including the necessary decorations and further frills.

## Hell rumbling

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The share of Les Talens Lyriques is also special. The orchestra members indulge themselves in the many *divertissements*, in the instrumental introductions, but also in the accompaniment of the voices. A find is the music during the construction of a new palace in the beginning of the second act. In it we hear percussion sounds as a precursor to Wagner's subterranean Nibelheim (from the opera *Siegfried*). Very strange.

The instruments are also used effectively when it comes to supporting moments of triumph (trumpets at the rise of Mars at the end of the play) or describing infernal rumbles (act four). Finally, a compliment to the choir, which joyously and very committedly lets the baroque polyphony shine to the fullest.