



Favorite musician of the Louis XIV, Le Roi Soleil, artist of a thousand resources as ambitious as talented, Jean-Baptiste Lully - born Giovanni Battista Lulli - was destined to leave an indelible mark on the history of French music, becoming one of its greatest exponents. In fact, he was responsible for the creation of the *tragédie en musique*, also known as *tragédie lyrique*, a genre of musical theater comparable to contemporary Italian serious opera. In 1671, thanks to the esteem and support of King Louis XIV, Lully had obtained the monopoly of national musical performances at the Académie royale de musique, a place that would become the temple of tragédies lyrique for the decades to come. Performed for the first time on 15 February 1686 at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal in Paris, *Armide* is a *tragédie en musique* to a libretto by Philippe Quinault, a man of letters with whom Lully had established a long and fruitful artistic partnership. Considered a masterpiece of French Baroque opera, *Armide* is based on Torquato Tasso's *La Gerusalemme liberata* and tells the story of the unrequited fall in love of the sorceress Armida with the Christian warrior Rinaldo. Among the most famous pieces of this work there is undoubtedly the *Passacaille*, a touching and engaging page built on a series of variations above a descending bass. After a long instrumental section the solo voice and the choir intervene declaiming verses on the transience of life, amplifying the solemn tone of the composition. But Lully was not only a theater composer but also sacred music and his catalog includes more than a dozen petits-motets and grands-motets, polyphonic compositions typical of the French Baroque period. The petits-motets were small chamber pieces for one or two solo voices with the accompaniment of the continuo and an instrument, such as the violin, called upon to play short solo passages. *Omnes gentes*, petit motet for two sopranos, solo bass and continuo shows the usual nobility of tone typical of Lully's style, as well as his ability to convey affection. The *Te Deum* is instead a triumphal page as required by the genre of the grand motet itself, which involved the use of double choirs and a large orchestra. Written for soloists, small choir, large chorus and orchestra, the *Te Deum* was composed in 1677 by order of the king and performed on his birthday at Versailles and Fontainebleau. Ten years later, to celebrate the sovereign's recovery after a delicate operation, the *Te Deum* was revived and conducted by the same author at the Chapelle Royale with a huge orchestral staff. However, by a strange twist of fate, during the direction Lully injured himself with the stick with which he beat time, causing a wound in his foot that would soon be fatal. Considered a monument of seventeenth-century sacred music, Lully's *Te Deum* is striking for its most touching moments, such as the *Miserere* for example, and for the sumptuousness of the instrumental writing.