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***Armide,***  
***17th century mind games***



HOUSTON—World's collide as French stage director Pascal Rambert joins [Mercury Baroque](http://www.mercurybaroque.org) to revive Jean-Baptiste Lully's opera *Armide* for its Houston debut May 15 and May 16, 2009 at 8 p.m., at the Wortham Center's Cullen Theater. A pre-concert lecture will be given at 7:15 p.m.

*Armide*, which some consider Lully's finest work, first premiered at the Paris Opéra February 15, 1686. The opera was based on a popular epic poem brought to life by Lully and French dramatist and librettist Philippe Quinault. Unlike most of their operas, *Armide* is particularly compelling because it focuses on the emotional struggles of a single character, the sorceress Armide.

Originally set in Damascus, Armide falls in love with the French Crusader and valiant hero Renaud, her sworn enemy. The drama just begins.

Armide casts a love spell and Renaud is left powerless. Her spell backfires when she realizes that his love for her is insincere. The spell is finally broken when Renaud's fellow knights find him, and he abandons Armide. Finally, Armide's castle is overtaken by demons, and she narrowly escapes in a flying chariot. Armide's internal conflict is at the forefront of a story entwined with heroism, villainy, war, unrequited love, sorcery, hate and duty.

For the Houston premiere of *Armide*, Mercury Baroque has enlisted French director and multi-disciplinary artist [Pascal Rambert](#). Rambert is known for his striking stage pictures and original choreography. With his unique vision, Rambert will bring Lully's masterpiece into a contemporary context.

Rambert discovered his love for the arts early in life. At 20, he began writing and directing his own plays and by age 22 he created his company Side One Posthume Théâtre. From 2004-2006, Rambert was an associate artist with the Scène Nationale d'Annecy. In January 2007, he was appointed Director of Théâtre de Gennevilliers, succeeding founder Bernard Sobel. His plays have been produced throughout Europe, the U.S. and Japan.

Under conductor [Antoine Plante](#), Mercury Baroque lends its enchanting sound to the productions. In contrast to the contemporary staging, the ensemble performs on period instruments. The opera also features the gifted French soprano Isabelle Cals in the role of Armide and Mercury Baroque favorite Zachary Wilder as Renaud.

Mercury Baroque's highly imaginative programming brings music to a variety of audiences and venues. The ensemble does not limit itself to concerts—it presents a fully staged opera such as *Armide* each season.

Tickets for *Armide* are \$20 - \$52. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit [www.mercurybaroque.org](http://www.mercurybaroque.org) or call the ticketing line at 832-251-0706.

Mercury Baroque will perform a concert version Sunday, May 17 at 2 p.m. at The University of Houston, Clear Lake, 2700 Bay Area Blvd., Houston, Texas 77058. For tickets to Sunday's performance, call 281-283-2560.

**Additional photos available upon request. Photo Credit: George Hixson**