

“Divinités du Styx,” (Divine rulers of Hades), ALCESTE, Act I, Cristophe Gluck, 1776 (Gluck wrote an Italian version, which premiered in 1767; the revised French version, which is the one usually performed, debuted in 1776, and contains several plot and character changes.)

SYNOPSIS: Queen Alceste (or Alcestis) is prepared to die for her seriously ill husband, Admetus, following the god Apollo’s order that a human, rather than an animal, be sacrificed in order to save the king’s life. She declares that love, rather than heroism, inspires her courageous act.

ALCESTE

*Divinités du Styx,
ministres de la mort,
*je n’invokerai point
*votre pitié cruelle.

*Divine rulers of Hades,
you ministers of death,
I will not make a plea
for your pity, so cruel .

J’enlève un tendre époux
à son funeste sort,
*mais je vous abandonne
*une épouse fidèle.

I’ll save my dearest man
from his disastrous fate,
but I will let you take
a faithful, loving wife.

*Divinités du Styx,
ministres de la mort,
*mourir pour ce qu’on aime,
est un trop doux effort,
une vertu si naturelle,
Mon cœur est animé
du plus noble transport!
*Je sens une force nouvelle,
*Je vais où mon amour m’appelle.
Mon cœur est animé
du plus noble transport!
*Divinités du Styx, etc.
(*=repeat)

*Divine rulers of Hades,
ministers of death,
*to die for what one loves,
is the sweetest effort,
such a natural virtue.
My heart is swept away
by the noblest transport!
*I feel a newborn force.
I’ll go where my beloved calls me.
My heart is swept away
by the noblest transport!
Divine rulers of Hades, etc.

-From a course for OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learners Institute, UCSC), “Bel canto, the French Connection,” 2011