

GIRONDINES

An opera in two acts about the women of the French Revolution

For piano, harp, and electronics, with piano reduction also available

Cast:

Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun – Full lyric soprano

Charlotte Corday – Spinto Soprano

Marie-Anne Pierrette Paulze (Pierrette) – Soubrette Soprano

Olympe de Gouges – Dramatic soprano

Madame Roland (Manon) – Lyric mezzo-soprano

Madame de Staël (Germaine) – Dramatic mezzo-soprano/Contralto

Summary: Society of six women, all living during the time of the French Revolution. Together, they are friends, intellectuals, feminists, revolutionaries, and even considered radicals. No one knows they have an association. Through them, important works are written and major events happen – always under the surface. These women are either Girondines or loosely affiliated with the Girondist ideals.

They are...

Three who died during the Reign of Terror:

Charlotte Corday – Revolutionary Girondist who murders Marat in his bathtub after the September Massacres. She is the catalyst for all that befalls the remaining women, and indeed most of the terrors after her own death. She kills Marat to try to save countless others. It fails miserably.

Madame Roland (Manon) - Girondist who hated Robespierre, Danton, Marat. Considered a moderate, she was close to the church. She had to fight off sexual assault young and later became a feminist writer who was quite prolific. She is killed during the Reign of Terror in November.

Olympe de Gouges – Considered a radical feminist Girondist, she wrote Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the [Female] Citizen, which pontificated that all women were equal to men. She was killed for treason during the reign of terror.

Three who lived past the Reign of Terror:

Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun– a famous painter, she was under the patronage of Marie Antoinette and painted over 30 portraits of her, including the most famous ones. Through her, the group has a direct connection to the royal family, and keeps abreast of their actions.

Madame de Staël (Germaine)– political theorist who was extremely anti-Napoleon. The head of the Coppet group after the Reign of Terror, she was instrumental in the downfall of Bonaparte. A proponent of individuality and passion, she was an active writer and conversationalist.

Marie-Anne Pierrette Paulze – a notable chemist, she lived, but had to endure the death of her husband and father during the Reign of Terror. She was bankrupted and eventually regained her property and the works of her husband, thus securing his legacy after the Reign of Terror.

Each character has a Leitmotif that plays in their solo arias, but also is present in small moments of their ensembles. The motives should be truly recognizable, and by the final ensemble, they come together to create the full melody.

ACT I

1. **A** *"We're the ones who lived. We're the ones who tell the stories of those who lost their heads, who lost their lives."*
Introduction – setting up the story and told from the future; Trio **Élisabeth, Germaine, Pierrette**
2. **B** *"You're here early. You came alone?"*
Conversation between **Olympe, Manon**, discussing Charlotte and her recent instability.
3. **C** *Meeting of the minds*
All Six women gather together for a secret salon to discuss the Jacobins and plan of action.
4. **D** *September Massacre* –Aria for **Charlotte**
5. **E** *Reign of Terror* – **Olympe, Germaine, Manon, Élisabeth, Pierrette** watch or reflect on Charlotte's execution.
6. **F** *Rain of Terror* – Death and final aria for **Charlotte**

Intermission

ACT II

G ENTR'ACTE

7. **H** *My Dear Marie-Antoinette* – Aria for **Élisabeth**
Reflecting on her relationship with the Queen of France.
8. **I** *Notes from the Underground* – **Olympe, Germaine, Manon**
Ensemble of the women writing letters to one another after the death of the royals.
9. **J** *I Relinquish My Pen* – Execution Aria for **Olympe**
10. **K** *Am I next? Please let me be last.* – Execution Aria for **Manon**
11. **L** *Home: An Exile Trio* – Aria for **Pierrette**, with **Élisabeth, Germaine**
12. **M** *Bonaparte* – Aria for **Germaine**
13. **N** *Science and Art* – Duet for **Élisabeth, Pierrette**
14. **O** *Life, Death, and Legacy* – Sextet Ensemble for **All Six**

Scene I – *“We’re the ones who lived. We’re the ones who tell the stories of those who lost their heads, who lost their lives.”*
Élisabeth, Germaine, Pierrette introduce the story from the future. This is a very accessible and melodic trio. There are moments of harmony, but it is more focused on melody. It is Romantic and vaguely Impressionist in style.

ALL THREE: We’re the ones who lived. We’re the ones who tell the stories of those who lost their heads, who lost their lives.

ÉLISABETH: In France, we set the scene.

GERMAINE: The French Revolution has copious stories.

PIERRETTE: You know of some. The Reign of Terror took too many lives.

ÉLISABETH: You have heard the names Marat and Robespierre.

GERMAINE: But, do you know the rest?

PIERRETTE: Not Louis the Sixteenth and Marie-Antoinette.

GERMAINE: Not the Carmelite Nuns.

ÉLISABETH: Not Danton and Desmoulins.

PIERRETTE: There are many, many more.

ÉLISABETH: Some were our family.

GERMAINE: Some were our friends.

ALL THREE: We will tell our story. The story of the women, whose names you may have heard. The story of the women who changed the course of history.

PIERRETTE: Through science.

ÉLISABETH: Through art.

GERMAINE: Through philosophy

PIERRETTE: Through publication.

ÉLISABETH: Through discourse.

GERMAINE: Through murder.

ALL THREE: It is our duty to tell their story. To tell you of those who lived and died. We tell it to you urgently, so you won’t forget. Their names are half hidden in history, but today we make it plain...

PIERRETTE: We’re the ones who lived.

GERMAINE: We’re the ones who tell the stories of those who lost their heads.

ÉLISABETH: Who lost their lives...

Scene II - *Conversation between Olympe and Manon – “You’re here early. You came alone?”*

This is an accompanied recitative that is intimate and between friends. It is simple, but has moments of pretty, melodic line.

MANON: You’re here early. (*Looking around*). You came alone?

OLYMPE: Yes, of course. I have to talk to you before the others arrive.

MANON: Why, what happened?

OLYMPE: Much has happened, but nothing to cause major alarm yet. I wanted to talk to you about Charlotte.

MANON: Charlotte? Is she well? Is she hurt?

OLYMPE: No, not to my knowledge. But I’m worried. She is growing increasingly unstable.

MANON: It’s the Montagnards. She’s a firm Girondine, but she’s become more vocal since meeting more of us in Caen.

OLYMPE: You are the most moderate of all of us, Manon... at least publicly. Perhaps you can make her see reason. No one knows about our meetings... at least I don’t think they do. If we speak with her, she must not feel as though she is being judged. We need her.

MANON: I worry that she will draw attention to us. Not just Girondins, but aristocratic women in general. It is not good for us to be noticed right now.

OLYMPE: It’s a fine line. We must be vocal enough to incur change, but not so vocal to attract negative attention from the Jacobins.

MANON: This is my home. These are my salons. If Charlotte is to be a Girondine, then she must listen to rational thought. It does not matter how much we attempt to improve the role of women in France if the wrong side comes to power. We are thoughtful, considerate, intelligent women – free thinkers, all. If Charlotte is as unpredictable as you say, we must encourage her to be calm and careful, or else it could be the downfall of all of us.

OLYMPE: That is my fear, as well. Let us see if she is of sound mind today, before we intervene. Look – the others are here!

Scene III – Meeting of the Minds

Ensemble with the feeling of urgency, featuring all six women. They do not want to linger, and the music reflects that.

MANON: Hello, ladies! How lovely of you to come for tea. I'm so delighted you could all attend. I cannot wait to hear the news of your children! (*Sotto voce*) Hurry, before anyone questions all of your presence.

GERMAINE: Oh yes! How delightful to see you, Madame Roland. Thank you so much for inviting us to your home. But you know, I much prefer coffee, as I am a lady of the people.

ÉLISABETH: I cannot wait to share all the latest fashion trends from Versailles!

PIERRETTE: Oh, and I want to tell you all about the latest party Élisabeth hosted. It was so amusing!

CHARLOTTE: (*pushing past all of them to enter quickly*) I refuse to play along with this charade.

OLYMPE: Charlotte, this charade is the only reason that we are able to meet.

GERMAINE: Yes, Charlotte. Please. I may be outspoken, but I would like to keep the Jacobins at bay.

PIERRETTE: Don't upset her. She's already on edge.

CHARLOTTE: JACOBINS! They infuriate me!

OLYMPE: We have much to discuss today, but I think we can all agree that the tides are turning in France. We are going to have to figure out how to proceed.

ÉLISABETH: I'm worried they are coming after the royal family. I have been to paint the queen often, as of late. They know that tensions are high, but I don't think they have any idea how intense the situation has become with the "citizens of France."

MANON: Please ladies, I think we must consider not just ourselves, but our families. The men in our lives are already the subject of much scrutiny. Most are known Girondins. It is assumed we are, as well. If not Girondines, specifically, then at least Girondin sympathizers. I think we need to stay quiet, observe from as far as possible, and only speak when necessary.

CHARLOTTE: NO! That's what they want us to do! And by doing so, they will take our lives!

OLYMPE: Charlotte, stay calm. We need to all agree, because we are much stronger united.

PIERRETTE: The science community is already being attacked. If you are not one of them, you are against them.

GERMAINE: You all know that I do not believe in censorship, but I do believe in choosing our words carefully. Manon has a good point, and I think that we need to look ahead. It is possible we will need to flee to keep our lives. I think we should all be prepared to leave on a moment's notice, and have good excuses ready.

ÉLISABETH: Where would we go? I couldn't leave with my husband. He would never come with me. But I won't leave my daughter behind.

CHARLOTTE: You're all ludicrous! We need to stand firm to our ideals. We must strike while the iron is hot and attack the Jacobins before they attack us.

OLYMPE: How do you propose to do that without endangering our own lives, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE: I don't care if I lose my life, if it saves infinite others.

GERMAINE: Charlotte Corday, the eternal martyr.

CHARLOTTE: And Madame de Staël, who can talk all day long and weave a delightful conversation, but when the danger is at her own door, she talks of fleeing.

ÉLISABETH: My dear friends, please let us not fight among us. It does not become us, nor is it helpful.

PIERRETTE: Élisabeth is right, ladies. We have suggestions of attack, lying low, and leaving France. What else? None of those options appeal to me. Do they to you?

OLYMPE: I think we should carry on our individual works. I will continue to write, as will most of you. Élisabeth, keep painting at Versailles - we need to stay abreast of the situation at court. I do not see myself fleeing France, but if it comes to that, and you can go, go.

MANON: I also will not leave France. This is my home, and I choose to stay quiet. Although, perhaps we should no longer convene here for salons. I will discuss with my husband if we should keep his going or not.

PIERRETTE: I have much to consider. They talk of treason, when we talk of logic. It makes no sense to my mind. I like numbers and order, not politics and tempers.

GERMAINE: Élisabeth is right. Charlotte, I apologize. You are vitally important to us and the cause of the Girondines.

CHARLOTTE: I must think. I must plan. I don't know if I should be here.

MANON: Charlotte, you belong here. You belong with us. Please friends, let us all agree to support one another, no matter what.

OLYMPE, then ÉLISABETH, PIERRETTE, GERMAINE, MANON: I promise... to support you all.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, I promise to support you all. And if I must, I will save you.

OLYMPE: Let us be finished for today. If we must meet again, we will find another place.

MANON: Yes, it is safest. Thank you for understanding.

GERMAINE: Ladies, I will leave first, but I promise you will hear from me, even if I leave.

ÉLISABETH: I will send news from our Queen.

PIERRETTE: You can find me at the lab or at my home. If not there, I will be with my father.

CHARLOTTE: Goodbye, my friends. I will not fail you. Goodbye.

All: Goodbye

Scene IV – *September Massacre*

Aria for Charlotte - Similar to a Mad Scene, but quite sane

CHARLOTTE:

Marat. Massacre.

The massacre of September came about because of Marat. The innocents all now dead, and all because of him.

Who murders prisoners? Only the most vile and corrupt of men... The sans culottes were armed. The bloodshed... palpable.

In my head, I hear the screams. In my blood, I feel their agony. Terror. Knowing they were next to die... and why... ?

Because of a sham trial. Because they refused to accept the Revolutionary Church reorganization. Because they were born at the wrong time to the wrong people.

Marat will burn in hell, but that cannot wait. If he lives, more will suffer. So, so many more will suffer.

The screams. The blood. The death and destruction. Families no more. Anguish. Terror. TERROR.

It takes a brave woman to stand up against death. And I will die, but it is absolutely worth it if Marat dies first.

They think I am unstable. They think I will cause more destruction. They think. They think. They don't know what he is capable of doing.

To murder in cold blood, while the man is in the bath... My legacy will be that of a murderess, but so be it. I will kill one man to save one hundred thousand.

Scene V – Reign of Terror

Olympe, Germaine, Manon, Élisabeth, Pierrette watch Charlotte's execution. This is an epic ensemble – dissonant and disturbing, full of electronics and unexpected chaos. The only consonant place is at "to watch Charlotte die." This is always unison, until the last time, where it goes into a long, drawn out harmony with moving parts throughout the quintet.

ÉLISABETH: Today I was to paint another portrait of the Queen. I had grand plans to add chiaroscuro in ways never before seen on canvas. But not today, because Madame Guillotine must claim my friend. Today I come to *watch Charlotte die*.

MANON: Today, I listen from my prison cell. In the future we will write about his day. In the future, things will change. In the future, in the future. But today, all of Paris comes out to *watch Charlotte die*.

OLYMPE: "Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne." Where are the rights of women now, in a France that I do not recognize? The citizens of France make their presence known today to *watch Charlotte die*.

PIERRETTE: What is science without life? What can Lavoisier and I do, if science and reason are gone with no regard to humanity? I hesitate to leave my lab, to go outside and show my face, but if ever there is a time to be brave, it is today, to *watch Charlotte die*.

GERMAINE: I never hide my flair. I never try to blend in. I celebrate passion and intellect. I'm already gone, but today, although away, I tone down my garb and avoid the spotlight, to honor her as my friends gather to *watch Charlotte die*.

The women all choose a separate place on the stage, spaced apart, but singing together, one mind, one "voice." This becomes interjections over a frenzied accompaniment of electronics and piano.

MANON: It's hot.

GERMAINE: So hot.

PIERRETTE: July in Paris.

OLYMPE: No escape into the Seine.

ÉLISABETH: Too many bodies.

PIERRETTE: Too much rabble.

MANON: The air is heavy.

OLYMPE: You can taste the sweat.

PIERRETTE: The stench of dirty bodies.

GERMAINE: Flies.

ÉLISABETH: Blood.

MANON: Don't cry.

PIERRETTE: No tears.

OLYMPE: Hold back now, for my dear friend.

ÉLISABETH: For my caring friend.

GERMAINE: For my passionate friend.

PIERRETTE: For my good friend.

MANON: For my friend in the right.

ALL: The murderess. (*Repeated in an overlapping fugue style*).

Together, yet apart, we support her, (*into an open chordal ending*) and watch Charlotte die.

Scene VI – Rain of Terror
Charlotte's Death and Goodbye Aria

Charlotte climbs the scaffold and has this inner monologue before her final declaration and death. This is harp and piano – calm and beautiful. It contrasts completely with the “Reign of Terror” in the previous scene. Charlotte is calm, collected, and unashamed.

CHARLOTTE:

They dressed me in red, the color of a traitor. I embrace it. If traitor I am, to save lives of others, then traitor I'll be.

I've suffered indignities that would never befall man. They asked if I am a virgin, and told me of plans to check my headless body after death. How disappointed they will be to see that no man has had me nor influenced me.

They want me to show shame. They want me to embrace the Jacobins and beg forgiveness.

I savor the last few moments before the blade. I fill my lungs with hot, July air. The cause is good. My reason just. I know that although the knife was in my hand, God was with me, and will carry me home.

I regret nothing.

I feel my hair on face and on my arms. My red blouse rustles as they walk me to the scaffold. I see the enormity of the crowd, but I cannot hear them. At this moment, I feel only peace.

I have no fear. I asked them to paint my portrait before I die. They granted me one last grace in that, for my legacy...all while threatening me with plans to slap my decapitated head once it is severed.

I see the executioner. He looks quite gleeful. Probably a brother of Marat, or a friend. I close my eyes, take a deep breath, then walk.

Forgive me, Papa. Not for my actions, but for making you lose your daughter. My life has had purpose, and one worth living.

From out of nowhere, the skies open and rain pours down. The heavens have spoken. I am in the right. Heaven favors me. I am at peace.

The beauty of a postlude reflects the walk to a scaffold, glorious harmonies, and then, right before resolution, the sound of a guillotine.

INTERMISSION

ACT II

Scene VII – My Dear Marie-Antoinette

Aria for Élisabeth, wherein she reflects on her past with the Queen of France. This is your quintessential Romantic style soprano aria, full of sweeping legato lines and rubato.

ÉLISABETH:

The gift of portraiture is mine, a special gift that has given me an invigorating and luxurious lifestyle. I made friends with Queen Marie-Antoinette, as her personal artist of choice. When I began painting her, she invited me to sing with her after I was finished for the day. The queen loves music, and I always aimed to please. How blessed I am to have had these joys – to be chosen by such a lovely soul. And now there is so much to be lost.

My dear Marie-Antoinette, my liege, my Queen, has lost her husband, the King. Forced from Versailles to the Tuileries, King Louis XVI was murdered by the guillotine. My dear Marie-Antoinette, the Widow Capet, had her children stolen from her and she lingers in the Temple Tower. She attempted escape, but now she has been sentenced to death for high treason. They treat her worse than an animal, and still she says nothing.

My dear Marie-Antoinette held lavish parties, much like I. She loved her children, desperately and ferociously, just as I do my dear Julie. She has talent and charm, and never really had a say in her destiny. The stories circle around Paris, and so many of them are false. She is the most hated woman in France. She is abhorred and abused, and now she will soon die.

I mourn my friend, and I know more are going to be joining her. I knew that I must leave France. I hope it will not be for long. I have watched my Charlotte die, and I could not wait to be with my dear Marie-Antoinette in her final moments. I fled in darkest night, and took with me my darling daughter. I hope my husband and patrons understand. If I stayed, I would lose my life, if only because of my association, my friendship...with my dear Marie-Antoinette.

Scene VIII – Notes from the Underground

This is a trio featuring Olympe, Germaine, and Manon. It is full of understanding and resolution that they will probably never see each other again. Each line of the last overlaps with the first line of the next, until the end. It is a tentative and pensive ensemble. There is an underlying uncomfortableness to it – perhaps a subtle electronic drone.

MANON:

I've been imprisoned for some time. It doesn't get any easier. I don't know how long they will keep me here, but I am beginning to believe *I will never leave*.

OLYMPE:

I will never leave France. They have tried me and sentenced me to death. They meant to kill me today, but I told them *I was pregnant*.

GERMAINE:

I was pregnant with my son Albert when the tides slowly began to turn. I knew that I would have to leave, but that never changed my drive or *my words*.

MANON:

My words don't matter now, although still I write. I hear the Queen has lost her head, so there is not much hope for mine. I tried to stay quiet, out of scrutiny, but perhaps that was unrealistic, since Jean-Marie was such *an important Girondin*.

OLYMPE:

An important Girondine, they could not let me live. The midwife came and said it was too early to tell if I am with child or not. They take no prisoners – they only take lives. I will die tomorrow, but *tonight I will write*.

GERMAINE:

Tonight I will write, stories that could rival those of Goethe and Schiller. Olympe says that women deserve the same rights as men. Through me, her ideals and legacy will continue. This is the *the idea which came to my mind*.

MANON:

The idea which came to my mind was a salon for women - a place where women could speak freely and without interference from men. I do not know if anyone will remember me for that, since they do not believe I am a feminist. *They do not understand me*.

OLYMPE:

They do not understand me. They think I am one and the same as Marie-Antoinette. They even put me in her cell at the Conciergerie, from after her attempted escape. The world will never know the life that is within me, who could have been a mere citizen of France or *one who would bring great change to the world*.

GERMAINE:

One who would bring great change to the world? Is that me? Could it be? I hope it will be. I miss my friends, *my Girondines*.

ALL THREE: *My Girondines*. I wonder where they all are now. Forever more apart, but always together, within my heart.

Scene IX – I Relinquish My Pen

Olympe's execution aria. She is alone. She is calm, but dumbfounded. This is a reflection, but not sorrowful.

OLYMPE:

Treason. Isn't that funny? After all this time, treason. I should laugh, while I still have a mouth that can smile.

They never tell you that at the end you will be alone with your thoughts. Here I am, and even though I've fought my whole life for women, for equal rights, for art, and fulfillment of what I deemed to be obvious, all I can think about is legacy.

I just want my legacy to be worth my head. My head, which gave me reason and creates supposed treason.... I want to be remembered and respected. I'm fairly certain that I am proud of myself. I guess that I am proud.

I challenged Rousseau – contested his notions in "Emile" of women being raised to fulfill the pleasure and needs of men. I challenged Beaumarchais – he who tried to ban my play. I even challenged Robespierre – and that's what landed me here. A man for the people. I hope it comes back to bite him, since he never truly practiced that which he preached.

I declare that women are equal. Women must be equal. I am yet another scapegoat for a cause beyond my experience. I'm neither aristocrat, nor royal, but philosophy is threatening when it comes from a woman. How droll. If I'd kept my mouth shut, I could have kept my head. But the pen must write and I must be heard.

In my words, I will be given a legacy. My head leaves my body, but not in vain. It is corporeal. Words linger. Words last. Words mean something.

I am at peace, and I am ready. I could have done more. I could have said more. But, there is only so much time on this Earth. What a gift it was to be given any time at all, and to have had a voice, though it be cut in half, now at the moment of my prime.

(Brief smile – resignation).

Let me go now. I relinquish my pen.

Scene X – Am I Next? Please Let Me Be Last.

Manon's execution aria. Manon is in her prison cell. Unlike Charlotte, she is completely introspective. She is writing her memoirs. We get the impression she has been doing this for quite some time and it has become habitual. She has moments where she breaks from the writing and speaks her true thoughts, the instrumentation changes from "for the record" to "true self" and vice versa.

MANON:

(For the record) I am much like most women of today. I am special only in that I have ended up in this cell. I admire political discourse, but I enjoy hearing men speak of their opinions. It is not a woman's place to have a firm stance on politics. Women must listen, quietly, and let men decide such things.

(Break to true self) Am I next? Please let me be last... I've heard news of them, all of my close women friends who attended my secret salon, all gone in one way or another. For four days a week, I held my salons for my husband and his friends. One day, when no one would notice, my ladies would gather. To an outside eye, it might look like tea, but to us, it was a chance to discuss politics, the aristocracy, and our lives. It was not gossip. It was how to handle the Jacobins and the ever changing France. I hope I am the last.

(For the record) Rousseau was brilliant and quite right. Men and women must live in separate spheres. There are roles for women and roles for men. Women must be virtuous and stay outside of public politics. I tried to showcase for women the ideals of Rousseau in "Julie," and I hope that this work outlives me.

(Break to true self) Like Julie, I loved a man... a man who was not my husband. Isn't that silly to be of concern now? I was arrested before Charlotte. I, the moderate... the calm one. The one who obeyed the rules and followed expectations. I petitioned for Jean-Marie's innocence eight times. That was how they claimed I was not a citizen of the people. They claimed he committed treason. And I, although often arrested, was always able to convince them of my innocence. And yet, here I am... waiting for my walk to the scaffold. In another time, perhaps my loyalty would have been rewarded. Perhaps. I wish I could write my true legacy.

(Complete break from writing and now just having her moment of truth) I am a Girondist. I am a Brissot. I am a woman of France. I believe in freedom and liberty. I believe in what I have not. I miss my life, I miss my friends. I miss all that I could have been. Am I next to the scaffold? Am I the last of my friends? Marat was my undoing, along with all of his supporters. Charlotte, rest her soul, thought she was right to kill him. Perhaps she was. I carried messages to my husband from so many. I loved another, but he was mine and I supported him. I was his wife. I just want my life back. Am I next? Please, let me be last...

Scene XI – Exile – Home

This is a trio between Pierrette, Élisabeth, and Germaine, but it serves as Pierrette's moment to shine. Élisabeth and Germaine chime in, but it is, in essence, Pierrette's aria. She has sweeping melodies throughout the piece, along with frequent moments of coloratura.

PIERRETTE: There comes a time to leave. It's no longer a decision, it's a need. It was never my desire to leave my beloved France, but when it's life or death, you have to go. Exile becomes a reality. You escape under cover, you leave in the dark of night. But not me. I did not go. Instead I stayed to fight for my husband and my father.

ÉLISABETH: I went to Italy, France, and Russia. I left in disguise. But, I continued to paint and be in demand throughout Europe. I would not let them forget me.

PIERRETTE: It became a problem, a crime, to be affiliated with the Ferme-Générale. They arrested the men in my life. I came to their aid. I explained the chemistry and the importance of their work. It didn't matter. They yelled treason, and I was a widow... but I would not lose Lavoisier's legacy.

GERMAINE: I went to Coppet, Switzerland. Élisabeth visited me. We talked of wonderful days of old. We agreed on politics and enjoyed each other's company.

PIERRETTE: Exile was not for me. I am French. I live and die in France. They call women like me patriots, or perhaps fools. I miss my family. I miss my friends... Ah!

ÉLISABETH & GERMAINE: Living our lives abroad, hoping to come home. But when will it be safe? When will we be welcome? We need to stay alive to ensure our voices be heard. But what does that mean, if we cannot even go home? We miss our families. We miss our friends. We miss our lives.

PIERRETTE: The chemistry is always there. I keep his name, and insist on it for life. It seems wrong to give up his name when he was stolen from me. His legacy is mine... I don't feel as feminist as Olympe or as radical as Charlotte. But, I am true to myself, and that's all that matters.

ÉLISABETH & GERMAINE: When can we come home? We want to come home.

PIERRETTE: They took my money. They took my property. But I will prevail... I am home. Home.

(The final word is on an extended cadenza).

Scene XII – Bonaparte

An aria for Germaine, this is a jump in time. This is lighter, more fun than the other arias. Syncopated rhythms abound, and Germaine almost is gleeful.

GERMAINE:

They said, Germaine, what will you do? Switzerland is just not for you!

How silly is that? I'm from Geneva, or at least I was!

I said, how wrong you are – I'll find my tribe. If not my old friends, then I will make new. Regardless, people will always come to you!

It's true, they do! People love to hear what I have to say. I'm witty, and smart - a dazzling conversationalist, and with a kind heart.

They say I'm a woman of letters, whatever that means! They say that I have more friends than the Queen! *(As an aside)* Well, I should hope so... that didn't work out too well for her.

I like my clothes, I like to shock. I'm a moderate, but I so appreciate a bold frock!

I'm loads of fun, but don't mess with me. I'm smarter and wiser than you know – you don't want an enemy.

The one I couldn't stand was he, the Emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte his name. A Machiavelli, he told me I should stick to knitting – ME!

He exiled me because I scared him, exiled without trial. I kept on writing, never losing my flair for cunning and guile.

I led the Coppet group with gusto. He had so much gall. My friends said of me, "three great powers struggling against Napoleon for the soul of Europe: England, Russia, and Madame de Staël."

He kept me running – to Russia and Sweden – so many places. I kept good company, my legacy belongs with many faces.

I wrote my "Ten Years Exile," and thought I'd be free, but fled again to Coppet when Bonaparte chose Côte d'Azur. I knew that if he could, he would come after me.

I hoped to outlive him, and thought I might, his exile to Elba was a bright shining light.

After that, I became paralyzed and could not run, my body was finished, but my thoughts lived on.

I had a great life, full of passion and drive. Through Romanticism my thoughts did thrive.

I chose to run, I chose to go.

Regret is not mine, I will not feel it. I spend my days now, full of thoughts, but I just sit.

It's a new world, a new day. How I wish he would have just gone away.

Scene XIII – Science and Art

In this duet, Pierrette expounds on her life's work of science, while Élisabeth tells of her life through art. They are intrinsically related, while completely separated. They are not together and they do not interact. This is a reflection and unrelated to the Revolution.

PIERRETTE: I use my words to explain the math, to put the pieces together. I use them to explain the cause and the reactions. My work is that of my husband, but someday, perhaps they will remember me for my contributions to science.

ÉLISABETH: The art of portraiture is women's work. How I longed to be like David and paint heroic scenes. I hinted at them, but it was not the same. I used to make them all avert their eyes so that they wouldn't look at my while I painted. I did that with the men who would ogle, but then the women, too. I started trends, and even in exile, women wanted to dress and paint like me.

PIERRETTE: I will be remembered for the hypothetical understanding of fire. My documents disprove that oxidation is the liberation of phlogiston, but will anyone who is not a chemist care? That is not for me to say. My life's work is vital, not just because of Lavoisier. He, who is gone, like my father, cannot share his work any longer. His legacy is also mine, and mine is his.

ÉLISABETH: I longed for France for so long, but in St. Petersburg found my home. I miss my Brunette, she who shares my blood and was my muse. But she is long gone, too.

PIERRETTE: Science is mine. Chemistry is mine. Perhaps I am the founder, the mother of chemistry. What a legacy that would be? It's a pity I won't live long enough to see.

ÉLISABETH: Will anyone remember my 600 and more portraits? Will anyone remember my friendship with the queen? She who picked up my brushes when I was too pregnant to bend?

PIERRETTE: Numbers, logic, math, science. While others fight for words, I fight for what makes sense in my mind. Chemistry knows no boundaries or genders. It cares not for one's sex. It is clean and uncompromising. It either is right or wrong.

ÉLISABETH: Art is subjective, beauty changes from one to the next. But, I hope that my realism and subtlety will be appreciated long after I am gone.

PIERRETTE: Science and Art.

ÉLISABETH: Art and Science

PIERRETTE: Two halves of a whole.

ÉLISABETH: A whole picture from parts.

PIERRETTE: Women and men.

ÉLISABETH: Necessity and compromise.

PIERRETTE: Life and legacy.

ÉLISABETH: Creation and demise.

TOGETHER: Science and art, discipline meets design. Together they are essential, together they are... divine.

Scene XIV – *Life, Death, and Legacy*

Final sextet – all six women are onstage, together, side by side. This features no one. It is a moment of pure ensemble – beautiful, elegant, and clean. It is the antithesis of the chaos of the Revolution. It is a celebration of an unknown sisterhood.

ALL:

Our words, our thoughts, our dreams all woven together.

We had ideals, we shared them with one another.

We agreed, and we didn't. We argued, and we fought.

Ultimately, we cared and loved one another, fiercely, deeply, and never spared a thought.

We were willing to die for our cause. Some went, but some chose to stay. All dreamed of a better day.

Death for treason. Death for murder. Death for spite. Death and dying, without respite.

The times are done, our lives long gone, but not forgotten... Our legacy lives on.

We paved the way for later women, for writers and for artists.

We set the standard for new aspirations and hardships.

We made a difference, to one another, and far beyond our friends,

Throughout it all, we were of one mind, supporting each other, our troubles we would mend.

Our lives were briefly intertwined, our thoughts and minds were one.

Our stories are intense and heavy, but our legacy lives on.

We are beautiful souls, who fought for right. We knew the future needed us, through the darkest night.

Ideals and dreams we shared. Perhaps we saved a few. Our lives had purpose, more than we ever knew.

We could not stop or give up. We gave all we had and more.

France lives on, and our names are there, etched in history forevermore.