

## OPERAS for MARCH 2023

<b>1<sup>ST</sup> March</b>	Mozart	The Marriage of Figaro
8	Offenbach	The Tales of Hoffmann
15	Charpentier	Louise
22	Verdi	Aida
29	Braunfels	Die Vögel

### Stories of the Operas

#### The Marriage of Figaro

##### Roles :

Count Almaviva :	baritone	Alessandro Corbelli
Countess Rosina Almaviva:	soprano	Carol Vaness
Susanna, the countess's maid:	soprano	Nuccia Focile
Figaro, personal valet to the count:	bass-baritone	Alastair Miles
Cherubino, the Count's page:	soprano	Suzanne Mentzer
Marcellina:	mezzo-soprano	Suzanne Murphy
Bartolo, doctor from Seville, also a practising lawyer:	bass	Alfonso Antoniozzi
Basilio, music master	tenor:	Ryland Davies
Don Curzio,	judge:	Ryland Davies
Barbarina, Antonio's daughter:	soprano	Rebecca Evans
Antonio, the Count's gardener, Susanna's uncle:	baritone or bass	Alfonzo Antoniozzi
Chorus of peasants, villagers, and servants		
Scottish Chamber Orchestra Chorus / Scottish Chamber Orchestra / Conductor Sir Charles Mackerras		

##### Synopsis

The action of *The Marriage of Figaro* is a continuation of the plot of *The Barber of Seville* several years later, and recounts a single "day of madness" (*la folle giornata*) in the palace of the Count Almaviva near Seville, Spain. Rosina is now the Countess; Dr. Bartolo is seeking revenge against Figaro for thwarting his plans to marry Rosina himself; and Count Almaviva has degenerated from the romantic youth of Barber into a scheming, bullying, skirt-chasing baritone. Having gratefully given Figaro a job as head of his servant-staff, he is now persistently trying to obtain the favours of Figaro's bride-to-be, Susanna. He keeps finding excuses to delay the civil part of the wedding of his two servants, which is arranged for this very day. Figaro, Susanna, and the Countess conspire to embarrass the Count and expose his scheming. He responds by trying to legally compel Figaro to marry a woman old enough to be his mother, but it turns out at the last minute that she really is his mother. Through Figaro's and Susanna's clever manipulations, the Count's love for his Countess is finally restored.

**Place:** Count Almaviva's palace (French: *château*) of Aguas-Frescas, three leagues outside Seville, Spain.

**Act 1:** A partly furnished room, with a chair in the centre.

Figaro is happily measuring the space where the bridal bed will fit while Susanna is trying on her wedding bonnet in front of the mirror (in the present day, a more traditional French floral wreath or a modern veil are often substituted, often in combination with a bonnet, so as to

accommodate what Susanna happily describes as her wedding "capellino"). (Duet: Cinque, dieci, venti, trenta – "Five, ten, twenty, thirty"). Figaro is quite pleased with their new room; Susanna far less so. She is bothered by its proximity to the Count's chambers: it seems he has been making advances toward her and plans on exercising his "droit de seigneur", the purported feudal right of a lord to bed a servant girl on her wedding night before her husband can sleep with her. The Count had the right abolished when he married Rosina, but he now wants to reinstate it. Figaro is livid and plans to outwit the Count (Cavatina: Se vuol ballare, signor contino – "If you want to dance, sir Count").

Figaro departs, and Dr. Bartolo arrives with Marcellina, his old housekeeper. Marcellina has hired Bartolo as her counsel, since Figaro had once promised to marry her if he should default on a loan she had made to him, and she intends to enforce that promise. Bartolo, still irked at Figaro for having facilitated the union of the Count and Rosina (in *The Barber of Seville*), promises, in comical lawyer-speak, to help Marcellina (aria: La vendetta – "Vengeance").

Bartolo departs, Susanna returns, and Marcellina and Susanna share an exchange of very politely delivered sarcastic insults (duet: Via, resti servita, madama brillante – "After you, brilliant madam"). Susanna triumphs in the exchange by congratulating her rival on her impressive age. The older woman departs in a fury.

Cherubino then arrives and, after describing his emerging infatuation with all women and particularly with his "beautiful godmother" the Countess (aria: Non so più cosa son – "I don't know any more what I am"), asks for Susanna's aid with the Count. It seems the Count is angry with Cherubino's amorous ways, having discovered him with the gardener's daughter, Barbarina, and plans to punish him. Cherubino wants Susanna to ask the Countess to intercede on his behalf. When the Count appears, Cherubino hides behind a chair, not wanting to be seen alone with Susanna. The Count uses the opportunity of finding Susanna alone to personally step up his demands for favours from her, including financial inducements to sell herself to him. As Basilio, the slimy music teacher, arrives, the Count, not wanting to be caught alone with Susanna, hides behind the chair. Cherubino leaves that hiding place just in time, and jumps onto the chair while Susanna scrambles to cover him with a dress. Now the Count is behind the chair and Cherubino is on the chair covered by a dress.

When Basilio starts to gossip about Cherubino's obvious attraction to the Countess, the Count angrily leaps from his hiding place. Lifting the dress from the chair he finds Cherubino. The young man is only saved from punishment by the entrance of the peasants of the Count's estate, this entrance being a preemptive attempt by Figaro to commit the Count to a formal gesture symbolizing the promise of Susanna's entering into the marriage unsullied. The Count evades Figaro's plan by postponing the gesture. The Count says that he forgives Cherubino, but he dispatches him to Seville for army duty. Figaro gives Cherubino advice about his new, harsh, military life from which women will be totally excluded (aria: Non più andrai – "No more gallivanting").

**Act 2:** A handsome room with an alcove, a dressing room on the left, a door in the background (leading to the servants' quarters) and a window at the side.

The Countess laments her husband's infidelity. (aria: Porgi, amor, qualche ristoro – "Grant, love, some comfort"). Susanna comes in to prepare the Countess for the day. She responds to

the Countess's questions by telling her that the Count is not trying to "seduce" her, he is merely offering her a monetary contract in return for her affection. Figaro enters and explains his plan to distract the Count with anonymous letters warning him of adulterers. He has already sent one to the Count (via Basilio) that indicates the Countess has a rendezvous that evening of her own. They hope that the Count will be too busy looking for imaginary adulterers to interfere with Figaro's and Susanna's wedding. Figaro additionally advises the Countess to keep Cherubino around by dressing him as a girl. Figaro leaves.

Cherubino arrives, eager to be dressed up by the Countess and Susanna. Susanna urges him to sing the song he wrote for the Countess (aria: *Voi che sapete che cosa è amor* – "You ladies who know what love is; is it what I'm suffering from?"). After the song, they proceed to attire him in women's clothes (aria of Susanna: *Venite, inginocchiatevi!* – "Come, kneel down before me"). At this time, the Countess sees Cherubino's military commission, and notes that the Count was in such a hurry that he forgot to seal it with his signet ring (which was necessary to make it an official document). Susanna returns to her room for some clothing in which to dress Cherubino. While the Countess and Cherubino are waiting for Susanna to come back, they suddenly hear the Count arriving. Cherubino hides in the closet. The Count demands to be allowed into the room and the Countess reluctantly unlocks the door. The Count enters and hears a noise from the closet. He tries to open it, but it is locked. The Countess tells him it is only Susanna, trying on her wedding dress. The Count shouts for her to identify herself by her voice, but the Countess orders her to be silent. At this moment, Susanna re-enters unobserved, quickly realises what's going on, and hides behind a couch (Trio: *Susanna, or via sortite!* – "Susanna, come out!"). Furious and suspicious, the Count leaves, with the Countess, in search of tools to force the closet door open. As they leave, he locks all the bedroom doors to prevent the intruder from escaping. Cherubino and Susanna emerge from their hiding places, and Cherubino escapes by jumping through the window into the garden. Susanna then takes his place in the closet, vowing to make the Count look foolish. (duet: *Aprite, presto, aprite* – "Open the door, quickly!").

The Count and Countess return. The Countess desperately admits that Cherubino is hidden in the closet. The raging Count draws his sword, promising to kill Cherubino on the spot, but when the door is opened, they both find to their astonishment only Susanna. The Count demands an explanation; the Countess tells him it is a practical joke, to test his trust in her. Shamed by his jealousy, the Count begs for forgiveness. When the Count presses about the anonymous letter, Susanna and the Countess reveal that the letter was written by Figaro, and then delivered through Basilio. Figaro then arrives and tries to start the wedding festivities, but the Count berates him with questions about the anonymous note. Just as the Count is starting to run out of questions, Antonio the gardener arrives, complaining that a man has jumped out of the window and broken his flowerpots. The Count immediately realizes that the jumping fugitive was Cherubino, but Figaro claims it was he himself who jumped out the window, and fakes a foot-injury. Antonio brings forward a paper which, he says, was dropped by the escaping man. The Count orders Figaro to prove he was the jumper by identifying the paper (which is, in fact, Cherubino's appointment to the army). Figaro is able to do this because of the cunning teamwork of the two women. His victory is, however, short-lived; Marcellina, Bartolo, and Basilio enter, bringing charges against Figaro and demanding that he

honor his contract to marry Marcellina. The Count happily postpones the wedding in order to investigate the charge.

**Act 3:** A rich hall, with two thrones, prepared for the wedding ceremony.

The Count mulls over the confusing situation. At the urging of the Countess, Susanna enters and gives a false promise to meet the Count later that night in the garden (duet: *Crudel, perché finora – "Cruel girl, why did you make me wait so long"*). As Susanna leaves, the Count overhears her telling Figaro that he has already won the case. Realizing that he is being tricked (aria: *Hai già vinta la causa ... Vedrò mentr'io sospiro – "You've already won the case?" ... "Shall I, while sighing, see"*), he resolves to make Figaro pay by forcing him to marry Marcellina.

Figaro's trial follows, and the judgment is that Figaro must marry Marcellina. Figaro argues that he cannot get married without his parents' permission, and that he does not know who his parents are, because he was stolen from them when he was a baby. The ensuing discussion reveals that Figaro is the long-lost illegitimate son Rafaello of Bartolo and Marcellina. A touching scene of reconciliation occurs. During the celebrations, Susanna enters with a payment to release Figaro from his debt to Marcellina. Seeing Figaro and Marcellina in celebration together, Susanna mistakenly believes that Figaro now prefers Marcellina over her. She has a tantrum and slaps Figaro's face. Figaro explains, and Susanna, realizing her mistake, joins the celebration. Bartolo, overcome with emotion, agrees to marry Marcellina that evening in a double wedding (sextet: *Riconosci in questo amplesso una madre – "Recognize a mother in this hug"*).

All leave, and the Countess, alone, ponders the loss of her happiness (aria: *Dove sono i bei momenti – "Where are they, the beautiful moments"*). Susanna enters and updates her regarding the plan to trap the Count. The Countess dictates a love letter for Susanna to give to the Count, which suggests that he meet her that night, "under the pines". The letter instructs the Count to return the pin which fastens the letter. (duet: *Sull'aria...che soave zeffiretto – "On the breeze... What a gentle little Zephyr"*).

A chorus of young peasants, among them Cherubino disguised as a girl, arrives to serenade the Countess. The Count arrives with Antonio, and, discovering the page, is enraged. His anger is quickly dispelled by Barbarina (a peasant girl, Antonio's daughter), who publicly recalls that he had once offered to give her anything she wants, and asks for Cherubino's hand in marriage. Thoroughly embarrassed, the Count allows Cherubino to stay.

The act closes with the double wedding, during the course of which Susanna delivers her letter to the Count. Figaro watches the Count prick his finger on the pin, and laughs, unaware that the love-note is from Susanna herself. As the curtain drops, the two newlywed couples rejoice.

**Act 4:** The garden, with two pavilions. Night.

Following the directions in the letter, the Count has sent the pin back to Susanna, giving it to Barbarina. Unfortunately, Barbarina has lost it (aria: *L'ho perduta, me meschina – "I lost it, poor me"*). Figaro and Marcellina see Barbarina, and Figaro asks her what she is doing. When he hears the pin is Susanna's, he is overcome with jealousy, especially as he recognises the pin to be the one that fastened the letter to the Count. Thinking that Susanna is meeting the Count behind his back, Figaro complains to his mother, and swears to be avenged on the Count and Susanna, and on all unfaithful wives. Marcellina urges caution, but Figaro will not

listen. Figaro rushes off, and Marcellina resolves to inform Susanna of Figaro's intentions. Marcellina sings of how the wild beasts get along with each other, but rational humans can't. (aria: *Il capro e la capretta* – "The billy-goat and the she-goat"). (This aria and Basilio's ensuing aria are usually omitted from performances due to their relative unimportance, both musically and dramatically; however some recordings include them.)

Actuated by jealousy, Figaro tells Bartolo and Basilio to come to his aid when he gives the signal. Basilio comments on Figaro's foolishness and claims he was once as frivolous as Figaro was. He tells a tale of how he was given common sense by "Donna Flemma" and ever since he has been aware of the wiles of women (aria: *In quegli anni* – "In youthful years"). They exit, leaving Figaro alone. Figaro muses on the inconstancy of women (aria: *Aprite un po' quegli occhi* – "Open your eyes"). Susanna and the Countess arrive, dressed in each other's clothes. Marcellina is with them, having informed Susanna of Figaro's suspicions and plans. After they discuss the plan, Marcellina and the Countess leave, and Susanna teases Figaro by singing a love song to her beloved within Figaro's hearing (aria: *Deh, vieni, non tardar* – "Oh come, don't delay"). Figaro is hiding behind a bush and, thinking the song is for the Count, becomes increasingly jealous.

The Countess arrives in Susanna's dress. Cherubino shows up and starts teasing "Susanna" (really the Countess), endangering the plan. Fortunately, the Count gets rid of him by striking out in the dark. His punch actually ends up hitting Figaro, but the point is made and Cherubino runs off.

The Count now begins making earnest love to "Susanna" (really the Countess), and gives her a jewelled ring. They go offstage together, where the Countess dodges him, hiding in the dark. Onstage, meanwhile, the real Susanna enters, wearing the Countess' clothes. Figaro mistakes her for the Countess, and starts to tell her of the Count's intentions, but he suddenly recognizes his bride in disguise. He plays along with the joke by pretending to be in love with "my lady", and inviting her to make love right then and there. Susanna, fooled, loses her temper and slaps him many times. Figaro finally lets on that he has recognized Susanna's voice, and they make peace, resolving to conclude the comedy together.

The Count, unable to find "Susanna", enters frustrated. Figaro gets his attention by loudly declaring his love for "the Countess" (really Susanna). The enraged Count calls for his people and for weapons: his servant is seducing his wife. Bartolo, Basilio and Antonio enter with torches as, one by one, the Count drags out Cherubino, Barbarina, Marcellina and the "Countess" from behind the pavilion.

All beg him to forgive Figaro and the "Countess", but he loudly refuses, repeating "no" at the top of his voice, until finally the real Countess re-enters and reveals her true identity. The Count, seeing the ring he had given her, realizes that the supposed Susanna he was trying to seduce, was actually his wife. Ashamed and remorseful, he kneels and pleads for forgiveness himself (*Contessa, perdono* – "Countess, forgive me"). The Countess, more kind than he (*Piú docile io sono* – "I am more kind"), forgives her husband and all are contented. They celebrate as the opera ends, vowing to party all night.

### **The Tales of Hoffmann [Offenbach]**

Born in Cologne in 1819, Jakob Offenbach went to Paris in 1833 to train as a cellist. Not long afterwards, he changed his name to Jacques and made his name firstly as a cello virtuoso and then as a composer. In 1855 he opened his first small theatre, the Bouffes-Parisiennes, where government rules limited the number of players on the stage to three and the audience was about 300. Despite this, Offenbach soon established a reputation as a composer of witty and tuneful parodies on French society. In 1858 the limitations on cast size were lifted and with a winter season in a more substantial theatre complemented by a London season, Offenbach became [in Rossini's words], "the Mozart of the Champs-Élysées". But Offenbach was extravagant in his productions as well as in his personal life and the 1870 war between France and Germany saw his reputation destroyed as well as the audience for his satires on the Second Empire of Napoleon III. By 1872, things were back to normal and the merry life of Offenbach continued. But Offenbach always wanted to write a serious opera and he worked on adapting the stage play of *The Tales of Hoffmann* by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré. Now in failing health, he hoped to live long enough to finish it and when he died in 1880, the work needed additional orchestration and sung recitatives to complete it. He was given a state funeral and *Hoffmann* in its almost complete state was in February 1881. Since then many producers and composers have meddled with the order of the acts, whole scenes have been removed, restored or added later. Despite all this, the work has entered the repertoire of major opera companies and is recognised as a masterpiece. This is to take nothing away from the masterly operettas with which Offenbach had made his name.

#### **Roles:**

Hoffmann; a poet:	tenor	Placido Domingo
Olympia / Antonia / Giulietta	soprano	Edita Gruberova
Nicklausse / La Muse	mezzo soprano	Claudia Eder
Lindorf	baritone	Andreas Schmidt
Coppelius	bass-baritone	Gabriel Bacquier
Miracle	bass-baritone	James Morris
Dapertutto	bass-baritone	Justino Diaz
Cochenille / Pitichinaccio	tenor	Paul Crook
Frantz	tenor	Michel Sénéchal
Voice of Antonia's mother	mezzo	Christa Ludwif
Nathanael	tenor	Robin Leggate
Spalanzani	tenor	Gérard Friedmann
Hermann	baritone	Urban Malmberg
Schlémil	baritone	Richard van Allen
Luther	baritone	Kurt Rydl
Crespel	baritone	Harald Stamm
A bass voice		Paul Mahé

Choir of Radio France / Orchestre Nationale de France / Conductor Seiji Ozawa

The opera is in a Prologue, three Acts and an Epilogue. In the theatre, it is common to have a different leading soprano for each of the three acts.

**Prologue:** A tavern in Nuremberg. The Muse appears and reveals to the audience that her purpose is to draw Hoffmann's attention to herself, and to make him abjure all other loves, so

he can be devoted fully to her: poetry. She takes the appearance of Hoffmann's closest friend, Nicklausse. The prima donna Stella, currently performing Mozart's Don Giovanni sends a letter to Hoffmann, requesting a meeting in her dressing room after the performance. The letter, and the key to the room, are intercepted by Councillor Lindorf who is the first of the opera's incarnations of evil, Hoffmann's nemesis. Lindorf intends to replace Hoffmann at the rendezvous. In the tavern students are waiting for Hoffmann. He finally arrives and entertains them with the legend of Zaches [Kleinzack] the dwarf and is coaxed by Lindorf into telling the audience about his life's three great loves.

**Act 1 (Olympia):** Hoffmann's first love is Olympia, an automaton created by the scientist Spalanzani. Hoffmann falls in love with her, not knowing that Olympia is a mechanical doll. Nicklausse, who knows the truth about Olympia, sings a story of a mechanical doll that looked like a human to warn Hoffmann, but is ignored by him. Coppélius, Olympia's co-creator and this act's incarnation of Nemesis, sells Hoffmann magic glasses which make Olympia appear as a real woman.

Olympia sings one of the opera's most famous arias, "Les oiseaux dans la charmille" ("The Doll Song"), in which she periodically runs down and needs to be wound up before she can continue. Hoffmann is tricked into believing that his affections are returned, to the bemusement of Nicklausse, who subtly tries to warn his friend. While dancing with Olympia, Hoffmann falls on the ground and his glasses break. At the same time, Coppélius appears and tears Olympia apart, in retaliation for having been tricked out of his fees by Spalanzani. With the crowd laughing at him, Hoffmann realizes that he was in love with an automaton.

This act is based on a portion of "Der Sandmann" (The Sandman).

**Act 2 (Antonia):** After a long search, Hoffmann finds the house where Crespel and his daughter Antonia are hiding. Hoffmann and Antonia loved each other, but were separated when Crespel decided to hide his daughter from Hoffmann. Antonia has inherited her mother's talent for singing, but her father forbids her to sing because of the mysterious illness from which she is suffering. Antonia wishes that her lover would return to her. Her father also forbids her to see Hoffmann, who is encouraging Antonia in her musical career, and is therefore a danger to her without knowing it. Crespel tells Frantz, his servant, to stay with his daughter and when he leaves.

When Crespel leaves his house, Hoffmann takes advantage of the occasion to sneak in, and the lovers are reunited. When Crespel comes back, he receives the visit of Dr Miracle, the act's Nemesis, who forces Crespel to let him heal Antonia. Still in the house, Hoffmann listens to the conversation and learns that Antonia may die if she sings too much. He returns to her room to make her promise to give up her artistic dreams. Antonia reluctantly accepts her lover's will. Once she is alone, Dr Miracle enters Antonia's room and tries to persuade her to sing and follow her mother's path to glory, stating that Hoffmann is sacrificing her to his brutishness and loves her only for her beauty. With mystic powers, he raises a vision of Antonia's dead mother and induces Antonia to sing, causing her death. Crespel arrives just in time to witness his daughter's last breath. Hoffmann enters the room and Crespel wants to kill him, thinking that he is responsible for his daughter's death. Nicklausse saves his friend from the old man's vengeance.

This act is based on "Rath Krespel".

**Act 3 (Giulietta):** Venice. The act opens with the barcarolle "Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour". Hoffmann falls in love with the courtesan Giulietta and thinks his affections are returned. Giulietta is not in love with Hoffmann but only seducing him under the orders of Captain Dapertutto, who has promised to give her a diamond if she steals Hoffmann's reflection from a mirror. The jealous Schlemil, a previous victim of Giulietta and Dapertutto (he gave Giulietta his shadow), challenges the poet to a duel, but is killed. Nicklausse wants to take Hoffmann away from Venice and goes looking for horses. Meanwhile, Hoffmann meets Giulietta and cannot resist her: he gives her his reflection, only to be abandoned by the courtesan, to Dapertutto's great pleasure. Hoffmann tells Dapertutto that his friend Nicklausse will come and save him. Dapertutto prepares a poison to get rid of Nicklausse, but Giulietta drinks it by mistake and drops dead in the arms of the poet.

This act is very loosely based on *Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht* (A New Year's Eve Adventure).

**Epilogue:** The tavern in Nuremberg. Hoffmann, drunk, swears he will never love again, and explains that Olympia, Antonia, and Giulietta are three facets of the same person, Stella. They represent, respectively, the young girl's, the musician's, and the courtesan's side of the prima donna. When Hoffmann says he doesn't want to love any more, Nicklausse reveals himself as the Muse and reclaims Hoffmann: "Be reborn a poet! I love you, Hoffmann! Be mine!" The magic of poetry reaches Hoffmann as he sings "O Dieu! de quelle ivresse" once more, ending with "Muse whom I love, I am yours!" At this moment, Stella, who is tired of waiting for Hoffmann to come to her rendezvous, enters the tavern and finds him drunk. The poet tells her to leave ("Farewell, I will not follow you, phantom, spectre of the past"), and Lindorf, who was waiting in the shadows, comes forth. Nicklausse explains to Stella that Hoffmann does not love her any more, but that Councillor Lindorf is waiting for her. Some students enter the room for more drinking, while Stella and Lindorf leave together.

## Louise

Louise is an opera in four acts by Gustave Charpentier to an original French libretto by the composer, with some contributions by Saint-Pol-Roux, a symbolist poet and inspiration of the surrealists.

The opera depicts Parisian working-class life. However the city itself is in many ways the true star of this very atmospheric work – invoked at various points during the opera. A French example of verismo opera, it tells the story of the love between Louise, a seamstress living with her parents in Paris, and Julien, a young artist. It is the story of a young girl's desire for freedom (associated in her mind with her lover and the city of Paris).

## Principal Roles

Julien	tenor	Placido Domingo
Louise	soprano	Ileana Cotrubas
Mother	mezzo-soprano	Jane Berbié
Father	bass-baritone	Gabriel Bacquier
The Noctambulist	tenor	Michel Sénéchal

The Ambrosian Opera Chorus / New Philharmonia Orchestra / Conductor Georges Prêtre

## Synopsis

**Act 1:** The Parisian home of Louise's parents



Louise has fallen in love with her neighbour, Julien. At the opening of the opera, they recall how they met. Louise's mother interrupts them and vocally expresses her disapproval of Julien. The exhausted father comes home from work and his wife and daughter implore him to quit the taxing job. However, he feels that it is his responsibility to provide for his family. At supper, he reads a letter that Julien left in which he proposed marriage to Louise. He is indifferent, but the mother is livid and, when Louise stands up for Julien, she slaps Louise across the face. The peaceful father asks his daughter to sit with him and read the paper. As she reads about springtime in Paris, she breaks down and cries.

**Act 2: Scene 1:** A street in Paris

It begins with a prelude that suggests dawn in Paris. The curtain rises to a bustling scene where people go about their daily routines and comment about life in general. The Noctambulist enters and calls himself the spirit of the Pleasure of Paris, and then leaves with the daughter of a ragman. Julien appears with a group of fellow bohemians to show them where Louise works. He tells them that if her parents do not consent to marriage, he will carry the girl off. Julien and his companions go off and he sings that the medley of sounds around him is the voice of Paris itself. Louise and her Mother arrive at the dressmaking store where Louise works (her mother brings her to work everyday). When the mother leaves, Julien returns. Louise tells him she loves him, but she loves her parents too much to leave them. He tries to persuade her to run off with him and she finally agrees to do so soon.

**Scene 2:** Inside Louise's place of work

Louise is being teased by the other seamstresses for being in love. A band is heard outside and Julien sings a serenade. The girls admire him for his looks and voice. Louise quietly slips away – to run off with Julien.

**Act 3:** A cottage overlooking Paris

The act opens with the opera's most well-known aria, "Depuis le jour"; the lovers have moved into a cottage overlooking Paris and in the aria she sings of her happiness with her new existence and with her lover. A long love duet ensues in which they sing of their love for each other and Paris. Many Bohemians enter and crown Louise Queen of Montmartre. The Noctambulist presides as the King of the Fools. Louise's mother appears and the festivities end. She tells Louise of her father's illness and that her father creeps into Louise's room in the middle of the night, even though they agreed to regard her as dead. Even Julien is moved, and he lets Louise leave on the promise she will return whenever she wishes.

**Act 4:** The Parisian home of Louise's parents

The father has regained his health and spirits. He is working again, but has come to accept poverty in a philosophical way. His recovery can be attributed to the return of Louise, whom he takes into his arms and sings a lullaby. She is not comforted and longs to be with Julien again. A merry waltz is heard outside and Louise takes it up, singing madly of love and freedom. Her parents are shocked and her father becomes increasingly angry. He shouts at Louise and demands that she leave; if that is what she wants, let her go and dance and laugh! He begins to attack her, but the mother stands in the way. Louise runs from the room to go back to Julien. Only then does the father realise what he did. "Louise, Louise!" he calls. She is gone and in despair he shakes his fist at the city that stole his daughter, "Paris!" he moans and the opera closes.

## **Aida**                      **Giuseppe Verdi**

Aida is an opera in four acts by Giuseppe Verdi to an Italian libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni. Set in Egypt, it was commissioned by and first performed at Cairo's Khedivial Opera House on 24 December 1871.

### **Roles**

Aida, an Ethiopian princess	soprano	Renata Tebaldi
The King of Egypt	bass	Fernando Corena
Amneris, daughter of the King	mezzo-soprano	Giulietta Simionato
Radamès, Captain of the Guard	tenor	Carlo Bergonzi
Amonasro, King of Ethiopia	baritone	Cornell MacNeil
Ramfis, high Priest	bass	Arnold van Mill
A messenger	tenor	Piero da Palma
Voice of the High Priestess	soprano	Eugenia Ratti

Priests, priestesses, ministers, captains, soldiers, officials, Ethiopians, slaves and prisoners, Egyptians, animals and chorus

Singverein der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde / Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Herbert von Karajan

### **Synopsis**

Antecedent: The Egyptians have captured and enslaved Aida, a Nubian princess. An Egyptian military commander, Radamès, struggles to choose between his love for her and his loyalty to the Pharaoh. To complicate the story further, the Pharaoh's daughter Amneris is in love with Radamès, although he does not return her feelings.

**Act 1: Scene 1:** A hall in the King's palace; through the rear gate the pyramids and temples of Memphis are visible

Ramfis, the high priest of Egypt, tells Radamès, the young warrior, that war with the Nubians seems inevitable, and Radamès hopes that he will be chosen as the Egyptian commander (Ramfis, Radamès : Sì, corre voce l'Etiope ardisca / "Yes, it is rumoured that Ethiopia dares once again to threaten our power").

Radamès dreams both of gaining victory on the battlefield and of Aida, the nubian slave, with whom he is secretly in love (Radamès: Se quel guerrier io fossi! ... Celeste Aida / "Heavenly Aida"). Aida, who is also secretly in love with Radamès, is the captured daughter of the Nubian King Amonasro, but her Egyptian captors are unaware of her true identity. Her father has invaded Egypt to deliver her from servitude.

Amneris, the daughter of the Egyptian King, enters the hall. She too loves Radamès, but fears that his heart belongs to someone else (Radamès, Amneris: Quale insolita gioia nel tuo sguardo / "In your looks I trace a joy unwonted").

Aida appears and, when Radamès sees her, Amneris notices that he looks disturbed. She suspects that Aida could be her rival, but is able to hide her jealousy and approach Aida (Amneris, Aida, Radamès: Vieni, o diletta, appressati / "Come, O delight, come closer").

The King enters, along with the High Priest, Ramfis, and the whole palace court. A messenger announces that the Nubians, led by King Amonasro, are marching towards Thebes. The King declares war and proclaims that Radamès is the man chosen by the goddess Isis to be the leader of the army (The King, Messenger, Radamès, Aida, Amneris, chorus: Alta cagion v'aduna / "Oh fate o'er Egypt looming"). Upon receiving this mandate from the King, Radamès proceeds to the temple of Vulcan to take up the sacred arms (The King,

Radamès, Aida, Amneris, chorus: Su! del Nilo al sacro lido / "On! Of Nilus' sacred river, guard the shores").

Alone in the hall, Aida feels torn between her love for her father, her country, and Radamès (Aida: Ritorna vincitor / "Return a conqueror").

**Scene 2:** Inside the Temple of Vulcan

Solemn ceremonies and dances by the priestesses take place (High Priestess, chorus, Radamès: Possente Ftha ... Tu che dal nulla / "O mighty Ptah"). This is followed by the installation of Radamès to the office of commander-in-chief (High Priestess, chorus, Radamès: Immenso Ftha .. Mortal, diletto ai Numi / "O mighty one, guard and protect!"). All present in the temple pray for the victory of Egypt and protection for their warriors (Nume, custode e vindice/ "Hear us, O guardian deity").

**Act 2: Scene 1:** The chamber of Amneris

Dances and music to celebrate Radamès' victory take place (Chorus, Amneris: Chi mai fra gli inni e i plausi / "Our songs his glory praising"). However, Amneris is still in doubt about Radamès' love and wonders whether Aida is in love with him. She tries to forget her doubt, entertaining her worried heart with the dance of Moorish slaves (Chorus, Amneris: Vieni: sul crin ti piovano / "Come bind your flowing tresses").

When Aida enters the chamber, Amneris asks everyone to leave. By falsely telling Aida that Radamès has died in the battle, she tricks her into professing her love for him. In grief, and shocked by the news, Aida confesses that her heart belongs to Radamès eternally (Amneris, Aida: Fu la sorte dell'armi a' tuoi funesta / "The battle's outcome was cruel for your people ").

**Act 2, scene 2.** This confession fires Amneris with rage, and she plans on taking revenge on Aida. Ignoring Aida's pleadings (Amneris, Aida, chorus: Su! del Nilo al sacro lido / "Up! at the sacred shores of the Nile"), Amneris leaves her alone in the chamber.

Radamès returns victorious and the troops march into the city (Chorus, Ramfis: Gloria all'Egitto, ad Iside / "Glory to Egypt, to Isis!"). The Egyptian king decrees that on this day the triumphant Radamès may have anything he wishes. The Nubian captives are rounded up, and Amonasro appears among them. Aida immediately rushes to her father, but their true identities are still unknown to the Egyptians, save for the fact that they are father and daughter. Amonasro declares that the Nubian king (he himself) has been slain in battle. Aida, Amonasro, and the captured Ethiopians plead with the Egyptian King for mercy, but the Egyptians call for their death (Aida, Amneris, Radamès, The King, Amonasro, chorus: Che veggo! .. Egli? .. Mio padre! .. Anch'io pugnai / "What do I see?.. Is it he? My father?").

Claiming the reward promised by the King, Radamès pleads with him to spare the lives of the prisoners and to set them free. Gratefully, the King of Egypt declares Radamès to be his successor and to be his daughter's betrothed (Aida, Amneris, Radamès, The King, Amonasro, chorus: O Re: pei sacri Numi! .. Gloria all'Egitto / "O King, by the sacred gods ..."). Aida and Amonasro remain as hostages to ensure that the Ethiopians do not avenge their defeat.

**Act 3:** On the banks of the Nile, near the Temple of Isis

Prayers are said (Chorus, Ramfis, Amneris: O tu che sei d'Osiride / "O thou who to Osiris art") on the eve of Amneris and Radamès' wedding in the Temple of Isis. Outside, Aida waits to meet with Radamès as they had planned (Aida: Qui Radamès verra .. O patria mia / "Oh, my dear country!").

Amonasro appears and makes Aida agree to find out the location of the Egyptian army from Radamès (Aida, Amonasro: Ciel, mio padre! .. Rivedrai le foreste imbalsamate / "Once again shalt thou gaze."). When he arrives, Amonasro hides behind a rock and listens to their conversation.

Radamès affirms that he will marry Aida (Pur ti riveggo, mia dolce Aida .. Nel fiero anelito; Fuggiam gli ardori inospiti... Là, tra foreste vergini / "I see you again, my sweet Aida!"), and Aida convinces him to flee to the desert with her.

In order to make their escape easier, Radamès proposes that they use a safe route without any fear of discovery and reveals the location where his army has chosen to attack. Upon hearing this, Amonasro comes out of hiding and reveals his identity. Radamès feels dishonored. At the same time, Amneris and Ramfis leave the temple and, seeing Radamès with their enemy, call the guards. Amonasro and Aida try to convince Radamès to escape with them, but he refuses and surrenders to the imperial guards.

**Act 4: Scene 1:** A hall in the Temple of Justice. To one side is the door leading to Radamès' prison cell

Amneris desires to save Radamès (L'abborrita rivale a me sfuggia / "My hated rival has escaped me"). She calls for the guard to bring him to her.

She asks Radamès to deny the accusations, but Radamès refuses. Certain that, as punishment, he will be condemned to death, Amneris implores him to defend himself, but Radamès firmly refuses. He is relieved to know Aida is still alive and hopes she has reached her own country (Amneris, Radamès: Già i Sacerdoti adunansi / "Already the priests are assembling"). His decision hurts Amneris.

Radamès' trial takes place offstage; he does not reply to Ramfis' accusations and is condemned to death, while Amneris, who remains onstage, pleads with the priests to show him mercy. As he is sentenced to be buried alive, Amneris curses the priests while Radamès is taken away (Judgment scene, Amneris, Ramfis, and chorus: Ahimè! .. morir mi sento / "Alas ... I feel death").

**Scene 2:** The lower portion of the stage shows the vault in the Temple of Vulcan; the upper portion represents the temple itself

Radamès has been taken into the lower floor of the temple and sealed up in a dark vault, where he thinks that he is alone. As he hopes that Aida is in a safer place, he hears a sigh and then sees Aida. She has hidden herself in the vault in order to die with Radamès (Radamès and Aida: La fatal pietra sopra me si chiuse. / "The fatal stone now closes over me"). They accept their terrible fate (Radamès: Morir! Si pura e bella / "To die! So pure and lovely!") and bid farewell to Earth and its sorrows. Above the vault in the temple of Vulcan, Amneris weeps and prays to the goddess Isis. In the vault below, Aida dies in Radamès' arms.

## **Die Vögel      The Birds**

Lyric Fantasy in two acts by Braunfels after Aristophanes. Walter Braunfels [1882 – 1954]

### **Roles:**

Nachtigall [Nightingale]	High Coloratura Soprano	Helen Kwon
Hoffegut [Good Hope]	Lyric Tenor	Endrik Wottrich
Ratefreund [Good Friend]	Buffo Bass	Michael Kraus
Zaunschlupfer [Wren]	Soprano	Marita Posselt

Wiedhopf [Hoopoe]	Baritone	Wolfgang Holzmaier
Prometheus	Baritone	Matthias Görne

Radio Choir Berlin / Deutsches Symphonie-orchester Berlin / Conductor Lothar Zagrosek

In 1920, the year of the opera's first performance in Munich, its audience was lifted out of its post-war misery. Bruno Walter, who conducted that performance, described it in his memoirs 'as an inspired and intelligent operatic metamorphoses of Aristophanes' comedy' and as one of the great life enhancing experiences in the bleak period after World War 1.

### Synopsis

**Overture and Prologue:** After a short orchestral introduction, the audience is welcomed by the Nightingale into the happy and untroubled realm of the birds. Here there are no cares, no pain and no hatred: only happiness and true, tender love, but with the sweet torment of longing.

**Act One:** Two travellers have left the city in search of the land of their dreams, the realm of the birds. Ratefreund (Loyal Friend), led by a crow, wants to get away from the decadence of Art; Hoffegut (Good Hope), carrying a jackdaw on his wrist, wishes to forget his aching heart. They encounter Zaunschlupfer (Wren), who calls Wiedhopf (Hoopoe), the king of the birds, over to join them. Wiedhopf, who was once a man himself, laments the fact that the birds no longer have any kingdom of their own. Ratefreund has a solution ready: the birds should build their own citadel between heaven and earth and starve the gods out by imposing a heavy tax on the smoke from the sacrifices that men offer, on which the gods rely for nourishment. Delighted with this plan, Wiedhopf has the Nightingale call all the birds together. These fall upon the two humans with their sharp beaks; but Wiedhopf calls on them to stop and makes them listen to Ratefreund's suggestion: that by building a citadel they might regain their power over earth and sky. The birds are filled with enthusiasm at the thought of ruling over the universe once more, and set to work immediately.

**Act Two:** On the moonlit heath, by bubbling springs, Hoffegut lies asleep. There the Nightingale's song of longing reaches his ear. He awakes and manages to woo the little bird into his arms. She kisses him, and the two of them listen blissfully to the voices of the night. Overwhelmed by this extraordinary moment of fulfilment, Hoffegut falls to the ground in a faint. At daybreak the Nightingale flutters off back into the forest. The splendid walls of the citadel are gleaming in the morning sunlight. The birds are merrily celebrating the wedding of a pair of doves. Then Prometheus appears and warns the birds not to oppose the will of Zeus, as he once did. But the proud birds will not listen to his warning; they prepare themselves for war. In a terrible storm, the whole city of the birds is destroyed. The birds acknowledge their sinful arrogance and, full of repentance, pay homage to the omnipotent god. The two humans return chastened to their city. Ratefreund finds contentment in the pleasures of domesticity; Hoffegut feels that the Nightingale's kiss has eternally, beautifully transformed him.