

OPERAS for MAY 2026

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Stories of the Operas

La Belle Hélène Operetta by Jacques Offenbach

Book by Henri Meilhac & Ludovic Halévy

La belle Hélène, (The Beautiful Helen), opéra bouffe in three acts, is an operetta by Jacques Offenbach to an original French libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy. The operetta parodies the story of Helen's elopement with Paris, which set off the Trojan War.

It was first performed at Paris's Théâtre des Variétés on December 17, 1864, starring Hortense Schneider and José Dupuis.

Hélène	Queen of Sparta	Felicity Lott
Pâris	Son of Priam	Yann Beuron
Menelaus	King of Sparta	Michel Sénéchal
Agamemnon	King of Argos	Laurent Naouri
Calchas	Grand Auger of Jupiter	François Le Roux
Oreste	Son of Agamemnon	Marie-Ange Todorovitch
Achille	King of the Phiotide	Eric Huchet
Ajax 1st	King of the Salamine	Alain Gabriel
Ajax 2nd	King of the Locriens	Laurent Alvaro
Bacchis	Follower of Hélène	Hjordis Thébault
Parthenis	Courtesan	Magali Léger
Léona	Courtesan	Stéphanie d'Oustrac
Philomele	speaking role	José Canalès

The Musicians of the Louvre (Grenoble) & the Choir of the Musicians of the Louvre
Conductor Marc Minkowski

Synopsis by Agathe Mélinand

Act 1. Sparta. The feast of Adonis is being prepared. The people are laying offerings on the altar, but Calchas, the Grand Augur, is disappointed at this cart-load of flowers. He would like oxen and sheep for Jupiter, who is in one of his moods! Meanwhile Venus well, since that Mount Ida affair !... 'Venus's augur will be doing big business'. Enter Helen of Sparta, with women mourning Adonis. On this day, the anniversary of the beautiful young man's death, they implore Venus: 'We must have love. Love is dying! Love is dead.'

Alone with Calchas, Helen confides in him: she is obsessed with the Mount Ida story, and the shepherd, Paris. Didn't Venus promise him the love of the most beautiful woman in the world? And the most beautiful woman in the world... could that be any other than she? Ah, Fate !. That Fate which burdens her and prevents her from having a peaceful bourgeois life with Menelaus! Calchas gets rid of Helen just as her 'darling nephew' Orestes enters.

Accompanied by two girls of dubious morality, he tells us of his steamy time yesterday evening. Calchas sends him packing he has ‘an urgent sacrifice...’ and can’t risk the scandal if the jolly trio should be heard inside the temple. What would people say ?

Alone at last, Calchas is getting ready for the sacrifice when in comes a shepherd who speaks of Venus, and a letter... and lo! ‘Up there, in the blue sky... that little spot which is getting bigger and bigger’ is a carrier-pigeon laden with a letter. Venus writes to Calchas, commanding that Paris must meet Helen. The amazed augur recognises King Priam’s son, who has seen the goddess. The High Priest cannot resist, he asks for ‘a bit of an idea’. Paris replies: ‘Listen to the story!’

Helen now appears and is obviously smitten at first glance with this handsome shepherd. The meeting is cut short, for the festival is beginning. Enter the Kings of Greece, organisers of, and participants in, a ‘day of intelligence’. In search of a strong intellect among those who are just strong, we meet the two Ajaxes, the ebullient Achilles, Menelaus and the bearded King Agamemnon. A charade and a rhyming game are both won by the shepherd, the outright winner of the contest. He reveals who and what he is: ‘the chap with the apple’, who is crowned by a weak-kneed Helen, whilst Menelaus invites him to dinner. At seven, Helen specifies: ‘We eat at seven...’. Paris wants to get her on her own. Calchas fixes it. A fake thunderclap and an improvised prophecy send King Menelaus off ‘to spend a month in the mountains of Crete’. The entire court joins in the divine decree: ‘Go on, may you arrive, Menelaus, at that distant land where, alas! the voice of destiny leads you!’

Act 2 Helen’s quarters. Her attendants show her some marvellous gowns for the grand soirée for the kings. Marvellous, but revealing. Helen declines them: she would like something to ‘hide my grace and beauty’ so as to make it easier to resist falling in love with Paris. Better still, when he is announced, she tells her attendant Bacchis to ask him to wait, and retires for a moment to contemplate the portrait of her parents. After an invocation to Venus, who delights in ‘bringing about the downfall of virtue’. Helen feels better and has Paris shown in. When she resists him, despite his attempts at the two usual ways of seducing a woman, he leaves her, promising her there’s a Third Way: ‘by cunning’. The Kings enter, engrossed in their favourite pastime, the Great Goose Game, in the course of which Calchas is caught with his hand in the till: ‘The Grand Augur is cheating’.

The desperate Helen has had the number of slaves guarding her chamber doubled. She asks Calchas for a private audience. She will not go to the dinner: she fears her own weakness and is afraid of seeing Paris again. Only solitude and sleep will be her allies. She asks Calchas for a dream, ‘a sweet dream in which I see him, this Paris I’m running away from, this Paris I adore’. The queen falls asleep, a slave enters the chamber; it is Paris in disguise. Since it’s ‘Fate’, Calchas leaves him alone, taking Bacchis to dinner.

Enchanted by Helen, Paris quivers with passion, and when the beauty awakens and sees him she thinks she is still dreaming - the dream which Calchas promised her... The love duet which follow is not taboo, because ‘it’s only a dream’! Alas, Menelaus, returning inopportunately from Crete, interrupts the sweet dream of love and, mad with rage, has the other kings brought in. In vain do they tell him a husband just doesn’t come back home without warning; he won’t listen. To calm him down, Agamemnon sends ‘the vile seducer’ back to Troy. But Paris threatens to come back, since ‘Every shepherd must have his day’.

Act 3 A beach at Nauplia. Venus has had her revenge putting the people of Greece in the grip of an erotic mania. ‘Husbands are leaving their wives, wives are leaving their husbands’ and those who do not agree can only go off to Leucadia and throw themselves over a cliff. Agamemnon and Calchas, embarrassed and freezing in their bathing costumes, are devastated. Enter Helen. She had come to this beach ‘out of season’ to look for peace and has grown heartily sick of the question Menelaus continually asks: why did she say ‘it was only a dream ? Helen issues a threat of something even worse: ‘I’ll make you cry over the real thing ‘ Agamemnon and Calchas, seeing that Menelaus doesn’t care about his country’s woes’, say he should forget about being a husband and attend to being a king. The orgy must be stopped, Menelaus must ‘sacrifice himself’ and give up his wife, humbly accepting the decree of the gods. Menelaus refuses; he has a better idea. Despite Calchas’s tantrums, he announces the arrival of a parallel augur, the Grand Augur of Venus, who is from Cythera. The disguised Paris (for it is he!) now puts in to shore unrecognised, aboard a flower-decked galley. He first demands some jollity in their reception, then the sacrifice of a hundred white heifers, and finally the departure of Helen on a little voyage ‘to a very pretty little island... Cythera!’ Menelaus agrees: it’s not much to ask. Helen recognises Paris, she ‘resists’, and only finally goes on board the galley which ‘is leaving for Cythera’ when everyone says she must. Once away from the shore, the Grand Augur reveals his identity. It is Paris; he is carrying Helen off. Now she is his.

Die schweigsame Frau (The Silent Woman), Op. 80, is a 1935 comic opera in three acts by Richard Strauss with libretto by Stefan Zweig after Ben Jonson's *Epicoene, or the Silent Woman*.

Since *Elektra* and *Der Rosenkavalier*, with only the exception of *Intermezzo*, all previous operas by Strauss were based on libretti by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who died in 1929. Stefan Zweig, who was then a celebrated author, had never met Strauss, who was his senior by 17 years. In his autobiography *The World of Yesterday*, Zweig describes how Strauss got in touch with him after Hofmannsthal's death to ask him to write a libretto for a new opera. Zweig chose a theme from Ben Jonson. Because Zweig was Jewish, his name was not used in most productions of the opera in Germany & Austria until after the fall of the Nazi regime in 1945.

Roles

Sir Morosus, a retired admiral	bass	Theo Adam
Widow Zimmerlein, his housekeeper	contralto	Annelies Burmeister
Schneidebart, a barber	high baritone	Wolfgang Schöne
Henry Morosus, nephew of the admiral	high tenor	Eberhard Buchner
Aminta, his wife	coloratura soprano	Jeanette Scovotti
Isotta, opera singer	coloratura soprano	Carola Nossek
Carlotta, opera singer	mezzo-soprano	Trudeliene Schmidt
Morbio, opera singer	baritone	Klaus Hirte
Vanuzzi, opera singer	deep bass	Werner Hazeleu
Farfallo, opera singer	deep bass	Helmut Berger Tuna
The parrot	spoken	Johannes Kemter
Other actors, neighbours		

Chorus of Staatsoper Dresden Staatskapelle Dresden

Conductor Marek Janowski

Synopsis

Setting: a room in Sir Morosus' house in a London suburb, around 1760.

Act 1: Retired naval captain Sir John Morosus is very intolerant of noise after having survived an explosion on his ship. For some years he has been retired and living with his housekeeper who looks after him well, although he finds her chatter annoying. His barber arrives and after an argument with the housekeeper that disturbs Morosus, tries to calm down the Captain. He tells Captain Morosus that he should take a quiet young woman. At first Morosus is sceptical: is not a quiet woman like sea without salt? The barber assures him that he knows a dozen "quiet doves" who would want to marry an honourable man like him. Morosus starts to warm to the idea, when suddenly his long-lost nephew Henry appears. He is warmly welcomed: Morosus dismisses the idea of marriage and makes Henry his "son and heir". However, when Henry reveals that he, his wife Aminta and his friends are an opera troupe, Morosus reacts in horror particularly to the idea that Aminta is an opera singer. The captain throws the opera troupe out of his house and disinherits Henry. He instructs the barber to seek a silent woman for him to be his wife the very next day and then retires to bed. The barber reveals to the troupe how rich Morosus is ("sixty, seventy thousand pounds"). Aminta says that she will not come between Henry and his inheritance and offers to leave Henry. Henry tells Aminta that he cannot live without her even if it means losing his inheritance. The Barber has an idea. What if the opera troupe acts out a drama in which the ladies of the troupe have the roles of the prospective brides and they enact a sham marriage? The Bride will then become very noisy and they will act out the divorce. Henry likes the idea: his uncle has insulted the troupe, so they will show him their abilities "and who is the fool shall be fooled". The scene ends with a glorious celebration of the wonderful plan.

Act 2: The housekeeper helps Morosus put on his finest dress-jacket. The Barber arrives and reassures the captain that he has arranged all of the details for the marriage ceremony. He then introduces the three potential brides. Carlotta stands forward acting as "Katherine" a simple country girl. Morosus is not keen: she has spent too much time with calves and become one herself. The Barber next introduces Isotta, playing the role of noble lady educated in a wide range of subjects. Morosus is not impressed by this and is suspicious of her ability to play the lute. Lastly, the Barber introduces Aminta acting as the modest and shy "Timidia". Morosus is quite captivated by "Timidia" and tells the barber "she is the one" and orders him to get the priest and notary for the marriage ceremony. Vanuzzi and Morbio act out the roles of parson and notary and the sham marriage takes place. Farfallo arrives with the rest of the troupe playing sailors who have come to celebrate the marriage, making a lot of noise. Morosus is driven mad by the noise and ejects them from the house. Aminta has become quite touched by the genuine love of Morosus, who wants to know why she seems troubled. Eventually, she has to carry out the barber's plan and starts shouting at Morosus in feigned anger. She wreaks havoc in the house pulling down the curtains and throws some of the captain's most precious possessions onto the floor ("away with this junk"). Then Henry arrives to save the day. He forcefully deals with Timidia, and assures his uncle that he will deal with everything. A grateful Morosus thanks Henry: he has survived many sea battles and hurricanes, but would not stand a chance against someone like Timidia. Henry sends the

captain off to bed, where he dozes off. Now alone, Aminta and Henry then sing of their love for each other. Morosus awakes and calls down: is everything all right? Yes says Henry. Morosus falls back asleep with a deep sigh which counterpoints with Aminta's sighs of love as the scene closes.

Act 3: The next day Aminta has hired "craftsmen" who make noises as they hammer nails and slam doors. There is a noisy parrot who squawks. In addition, she has appointed a pianist (Farfallo) and a singing teacher (Henry) who practice Monteverdi's "L'incoronazione di Poppea" with her. The captain appears and is completely devastated. The Barber walks in and introduces a "Lord Chief Justice" (Vanuzzi) and "Two lawyers" (Morbio and Farfallo) who discuss the prospective divorce. However, "Timidia" contests the divorce and they reject every case for divorce. The barber argues that she has had relations before the marriage to Sir John and the two "honourable ladies" (Isotta and Carlotta) attest to this. The Barber also introduces a "witness" (Henry) who attests that he has had carnal relations with Timidia. Morosus scents victory and is about to celebrate when the lawyers raise a further barrier to divorce: the marriage agreement did not stipulate the virginity of the bride, so "you will have to keep her now". Morosus is close to a nervous breakdown. Henry calls an end to the charade and all stop acting and all are revealed as their true characters. Aminta asks the captain's pardon. After the captain realizes he has been fooled his initial anger turns to laughter as he sees the funny side of a troupe of actors outwitting him. Overjoyed, he makes peace with the troupe of actors as they leave and gives his blessing to Henry and Aminta's union and proclaims Henry again as his heir. He is pleased with himself and the world after his narrow escape and has at last found the peace he has longed for. The opera ends with a monologue of Morosus: " A rare delight it is to find a silent, beautiful girl, but it is more delightful when she belongs to another man".

Johann Strauss, jnr. Jabuka (The Apple Festival)

Jabuka (The Apple Festival) is Johann Strauss Junior's 14th stage work. Its premiere took place on 12th October, 1894 during a very special week when Vienna was celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Strauss's artistic debut. The premiere was the crowning jewel of that week and a triumph for the composer. Despite the initial success and enthusiasm, however, the weaknesses of the libretto were obvious. Jabuka had two librettists, Max Kalbeck and Gustav Davis. Kalbeck was a journalist and this was the first time he had written for the stage. Gustav Davis, on the other hand was an experienced librettist. They soon came into conflict and the libretto suffered. On the other hand, it was very interesting musically, part opera and part operetta. Prof Christian Pollack, the conductor of this recording, considers it to be an excellent work, with great ensembles and the finest choruses Strauss ever wrote. In 2003 the Czech Johann Strauss Society decided to stage a rare Strauss operetta and Jabuka because an obvious choice for its musicality and Slavic flavour. Christian Pollack used the original score for this recording.

Cast

Mirko von Gradinaz	Thomas Tischler
Vail fon Gradinaz	Wolfgang Veith
Mischa, a rich farmer	Michael Schober
Jelka, his daughter	Veronika Groiss

Petrija, her aunt Elisabeth Wolfbauer

Bambora, a factory owner Helmut Josef Ettl

Annita, his daughter Elisabeth Wolfbauer

Joschko, a court bailiff Franz Foedinger

With the Gaudeamus Choir Brno & the European Johann Strauss Orchestra

Conducted by Christian Pollack.

The Operetta takes place in 19th century Serbia.

Act 1.

Local people are meeting at Staklo's country inn on their way to Jabuka, the annual apple festival. It's time for future brides and grooms to meet. When a boy is interested in a girl, he bites an apple and gives it to her. If the girl likes him she also takes a bite. If she returns the apple without a bite, it means no. Impoverished noblemen Mirko and Vasil arrive in their carriage. They're hoping to solve their financial woes by selling their dilapidated castle to Bambora, a rich factory owner. If that doesn't work out, then they hope to find themselves rich brides. They're so short of money they have to convince the innkeeper Staklo that they are able to pay. He tells them about Jelka, the beautiful daughter of a rich farmer Mischa, who will surely appear at the festival.

Joschko, a court Bailiff, arrives with his helper Franjo. He complains about his hard life as a bailiff and tells Staklo all about his difficult day in which he seized nothing except a few old costumes. Joschko meets Vasil & Mirko who are worried that he may take their property before they have a chance to sell it to Bambora who has just arrived with his daughter Annita. Bambora brags about his business, Vasil about his castle and the long line of distinguished ancestors. The men begin to play cards, all of them cheating, while Annita expresses her wish for a castle & coat of arms to add to the factory's business. Mischa arrives with his daughter Jelka and her aunt Petrija. He's upset as their carriage has broken down and they can't get to the festivities – indeed Jelka was expecting to be the beauty queen at the apple festival. Mirko likes Jelka but she's not interested. He offers to lend her his carriage in return for a kiss, but she refuses, though he continues to flirt with her. Joschko arrives with a carriage and offers Jelka a ride, with her father walking behind. All leave, looking forward to the festival.

Act 2.

At Mirko & Vasil's castle, the servants are angry as they haven't been paid. Mirko arrives and invites all to enjoy festivities there. Bambora arrives with his daughter Annita and Mirko plans to decorate the castle so as to look like an inn, to bamboozle Jelka when she arrives. Meanwhile Vasil and Annita sing of their love for each other. The others enter, including Jelka who is surprised by the unusual look of this inn and by seeing Mirko there. She demands a room and he takes her to his bedroom. Joschko has put on the costume of a magnate and he's introduced to everyone as the brothers' uncle, a nobleman, who's also an antiques expert. He acts the part, claiming that the portraits on the walls are of famous family members.

Bambora gets the idea that if his daughter marries Vasil he could gain a castle and title out of it. Various country people arrive and there seems to be plenty of free food and drink on offer and there's general dancing and enjoyment while Joschko declares that Jabuka, the Apple Festival has begun and hands out apples to the boys. Jelka comes from her room and while

apples are being bitten and exchanged by the boys and girls only Mirko gives one to Jelka. After a brief hesitation, Jelka throws her apple at Mirko's feet. He's offended but is still still interested in her. The others all laugh.

Act 3.

Jelka's rich father enters and discovers that she was in Mirko's bedroom and that she's in the brothers' castle instead of the town where the Apple Festival is actually being held. Bambora tries to calm things down, Joschko gets drunk and admits who he really is, a court bailiff and no nobleman, and says there are no riches to be found at the castle. Bambora, upset, looks for his daughter to get her away from Vasil. Joschko is happy as he can seize as much as he wants from the two brothers who are in real financial difficulties. In the end, Mischa decides that Jelka and Mirko should get together while the other girls laugh at her for ending up with a poor man, but she decides she's in love with Mirko after all. All join in to start another festivity – everyone is happy and, as expected, the story ends in a great waltz.

The Italian Girl in Algiers. Rossini

Cast:

Mustafa	bey of Algiers	bass	Wladimiro Ganzarolli
Elvira	his wife	soprano	Jeanne Marie Bima
Zulma	her confidante	contralto	Lucia Rizzi
Haly	servant of the bey	bass	Alessandro Corbelli
Lindoro	Italian in love with Isabella	tenor	Francisco Araiza
Taddeo	an old Italian	baritone	Enzo Dara
Isabella	Italian girl	mezzo soprano	Lucia Valentini Terrani

Male Voice Choir of West German Radio Chorus Master Gottfried Ritter

Georg Fischer, Fortepiano

Cappella Coloniensis on period instruments

Conductor: Gabriele Ferro

Place: Algiers 18th century

Part 1: In Algiers, at the seaside palace of the bey Mustafà, his wife, Elvira, complains that her husband no longer loves her; her attendants reply there is nothing she can do. Mustafà himself bursts in. Asserting he will not let women get the better of him, he sends Elvira away when she complains. Mustafà says he has tired of his wife and will give her to Lindoro, a young Italian at the court, to marry. Then he orders Haly, a captain in his service, to provide an Italian woman for himself-someone more interesting than the girls in his harem, all of whom bore him. Lindoro longs for his own sweetheart, Isabella, whom he lost when pirates captured him. Mustafà tells him he can have Elvira, insisting she possesses every virtue that Lindoro, in his attempt to escape Mustafà's connubial trap, has listed.

Elsewhere along the shore, a shipwreck is spotted in the distance, and Haly's pirates exult in the catch. Isabella arrives on shore, lamenting the cruelty of a fate that has interrupted her quest for her lost fiancé, Lindoro. Though in danger, she is confident of her skill in taming men. The pirates seize Taddeo, an aging admirer of Isabella's, and attempt to sell him into slavery, but he claims he is Isabella's uncle and cannot leave her. When the Turks learn that both captives are Italian, they rejoice in having found the new star for their leader's harem.

Taddeo is aghast at the aplomb with which Isabella takes his news, but after a quarrel about his jealousy, they decide they had better face their predicament together.

Elvira's slave, Zulma, tries to reconcile Lindoro and her mistress to the fact that Mustafà has ordered them to marry. Mustafà promises Lindoro he may return to Italy -- if he will take Elvira. Seeing no other way, Lindoro accepts, making it clear he might not marry Elvira until after they reach Italy. Elvira, however, loves her husband and sees no advantage in aiding Lindoro's escape. When Haly announces the capture of an Italian woman, Mustafà gloats in anticipation of conquest, then leaves to meet her. Lindoro tries to tell Elvira she has no choice but to leave her heartless husband.

In the main hall of his palace, hailed by eunuchs as "the scourge of women," Mustafà welcomes Isabella with ceremony. Aside, she remarks that he looks ridiculous and feels certain that she will be able to deal with him; he, on the other hand, finds her enchanting. As she seemingly throws herself on his mercy, the jealous Taddeo starts to make a scene and is saved only when she declares that he is her "uncle." Elvira and Lindoro, about to leave for Italy, come to say good-bye to the bey, and Lindoro and Isabella are stunned to recognize each other. To prevent Lindoro's departure, Isabella insists that Mustafà cannot banish his wife, adding that Lindoro must stay as her own personal servant. Between the frustration of Mustafà's plans and the happy but confused excitement of the lovers, everyone's head reels.

Part 2: Elvira and various members of the court are discussing how easily the Italian woman has cowed Mustafà, giving Elvira hope of regaining his love. When Mustafà enters, however, it is to declare he will visit Isabella in her room for coffee. She comes out of her room, upset because Lindoro apparently broke faith with her by agreeing to escape with Elvira. Lindoro appears and reassures her of his loyalty. Promising a scheme for their freedom, Isabella leaves him to his rapturous feelings. After he too leaves, Mustafà reappears, followed by attendants with the terrified Taddeo, who is to be honoured as the bey's Kaimakan, or personal bodyguard, in exchange for helping secure Isabella's affections. Dressed in Turkish garb, he sees no choice but to accept the compulsory honour.

In her apartment, Isabella dons Turkish clothes herself and prepares for Mustafà's visit, telling Elvira that the way to keep her husband is to be more assertive. As she completes her toilette, Isabella, knowing she is overheard by Mustafà in the background, sings a half-mocking invocation to Venus to help conquer her victim. To make him impatient, she keeps him waiting, as her "servant" Lindoro acts as go-between. At length she presents herself to the bey, who introduces Taddeo as his Kaimakan. Mustafà sneezes -- a signal for Taddeo to leave-but Taddeo stays, and Isabella invites Elvira to stay for coffee, to Mustafà's displeasure. When Isabella insists that he treat his wife gently, Mustafà bursts out in annoyance, while the others wonder what to make of his fulminations.

Elsewhere in the palace, Haly predicts that his master is no match for an Italian woman. As Lindoro and Taddeo plan their escape, Taddeo says he is Isabella's true love. Lindoro is amused but realizes he needs Taddeo's help in dealing with Mustafà, who enters, still furious. Lindoro says Isabella actually cares very much for the bey and wants him to prove his worthiness by entering the Italian order of Pappataci. Believing this to be an honour, Mustafà asks what he has to do. Simple, says Lindoro: eat, drink, and sleep all you like, oblivious to anything around you. Aside, Haly and Zulma wonder what Isabella is up to.

In her apartment, Isabella readies a feast of initiation for the Bey, exhorting her fellow Italians to be confident. Mustafà arrives, and Lindoro reminds him of the initiation procedure. After he is pronounced a Pappataci, food is brought in, and he is tested by Isabella and Lindoro, who pretend to make love while Taddeo reminds Mustafà to ignore them. A ship draws up in the background, and the lovers prepare to embark with other Italian captives, but Taddeo realizes that he too is being tricked and tries to rally Mustafà, who persists in keeping his vow of paying no attention. When Mustafà finally responds, the Italians have the situation under control and bid a courteous farewell. Mustafà, his lesson learned, takes Elvira back, and everyone sings the praises of the resourceful Italian woman.