

T H E

Opera Lover's

C O M P A N I O N



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—Dame Joan Sutherland

C H A R L E S O S B O R N E

The Opera Lover's Companion

The Opera Lover's Companion

CHARLES OSBORNE

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New Haven and London

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For Ken Thomson

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Preface

Dr Johnson, in the eighteenth century, took the idiosyncratic view that opera was ‘an exotic and irrational entertainment’. Opera was certainly that at its inception more than a hundred years before Samuel Johnson’s birth, when a group of noblemen in Florence, intent on reviving the drama of ancient Greece, encouraged into existence a new theatrical art form which combined words and music. In the very first opera, *Dafne*, composed by Jacopo Peri in 1597, although the entire text was sung the words took precedence over the music, not by intention but because the music for the most part followed the inflections of speech, only occasionally broadening into something approaching melody.

With the stage works of Claudio Monteverdi, the first great composer of opera, the division between this heightened speech (recitative) and the quasi-melodic sections of the drama (arioso) became more pronounced. Italian opera developed quickly and was soon being staged by the imperial court in Vienna as well as at smaller princely courts throughout the German-speaking countries. In due course it spread to France and eventually, after the Restoration, to London, where the first real English opera, Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*, was staged in 1689. Early in the eighteenth century, Italian opera established itself in London, and what had begun as an entertainment for aristocratic intellectuals gradually became popular with a wider public.

In Italy opera soon became the most popular form of theatre, remaining so throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. In other European countries, especially Germany and Austria, it often shared the stages of civic theatres with straight plays. Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, there are in the United States of America and Canada more than 140 professional companies staging regular (although, outside the principal cities, not necessarily lengthy) annual seasons of opera, while in Britain there are several well-established companies, ranging from the Royal Opera, English National Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Opera North, Scottish Opera and Welsh National Opera to such smaller-scale companies as English Touring Opera, City of Birmingham Touring Opera and British Youth Opera.

The staples of the operatic diet today are the major works of five great composers – Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, Puccini and Strauss (and one could add Beethoven here for his only opera, *Fidelio*, a masterpiece that I consider *hors concours*) – as well as operas by Handel, Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Bizet, Massenet,

Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky and Britten, and selected works of a large number of other composers, among them Berlioz, Gluck, Gounod, Humperdinck, Janáček, Leoncavallo, Mascagni, Offenbach, Saint-Saëns, Smetana and Weber (in tactful alphabetical order).

I have included nearly two hundred operas in this guide – all of those that are regularly performed today, as well as a good many that one encounters in the opera house less frequently. I have placed each opera in context in its composer's development, and have also discussed the circumstances surrounding its composition and first production. I have followed this with a brief synopsis of the plot, and also my personal assessment of the music, paying particular attention to the most important and significant arias, duets and ensembles.

C.O.

DANIEL-FRANÇOIS-ESPRIT AUBER

(b. Caen, 1782 – d. Paris, 1871)

Fra Diavolo, ou L'hôtellerie de Terracine

(Fra Diavolo, or The Inn of Terracina)

opéra comique in three acts (approximate length: 3 hours)

Fra Diavolo, a bandit chief *tenor*

Lord Cockburn, an English traveller *tenor*

Lady Pamela, his wife *mezzo-soprano*

Lorenzo, an officer *tenor*

Matheo, an innkeeper *bass*

Zerline, his daughter *soprano*

Giacomo, a bandit *bass*

Beppo, a bandit *tenor*

LIBRETTO BY EUGÈNE SCRIBE; TIME: 1830; PLACE: THE COUNTRYSIDE NEAR ROME;
FIRST PERFORMED AT THE OPÉRA-COMIQUE, PARIS, 28 JANUARY 1830

The composer of forty-eight operas, most of them in a light vein and written in collaboration with the librettist Eugène Scribe, Auber was one of the leading figures in the development of nineteenth-century French opera. His *Gustav III* (1833) is the work whose libretto Verdi made use of for *Un ballo in maschera* twenty-six years later. *Le Domino noir* (The Black Domino, 1837) has one of Auber's most elegant scores, and a performance in Brussels in 1830 of *La Muette de Portici* (The Mute Girl of Portici) is said to have sparked off the Belgian revolution.

Fra Diavolo, the most successful of Auber's operas when it was first staged in 1830, had by 1907 been performed more than nine hundred times at the Opéra-Comique in Paris. Alessandro Bonci and, later, Tito Schipa were famous Diavolos. The opera is still to be encountered, especially in France, Germany and Italy, and in 1969, making his San Francisco debut, the Swedish tenor Nicolai Gedda was a greatly admired Diavolo. In 1933 those great comedians Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy starred in *Fra Diavolo*, a highly amusing movie burlesque of the opera, with its principal numbers retained. Laurel and Hardy played Stanlio and Olio, two wandering vagrants who become accomplices of Diavolo (performed by Dennis King, a popular American operetta tenor of the day). The film turns up occasionally on TV and still retains its ability to entertain.

Act I. A tavern. The bandit Fra Diavolo, calling himself the Marquis of San Marco, is involved in a plan to steal money and jewels from two English travellers, Lord and Lady Cockburn. (Diavolo was based by Scribe on a real-life bandit, Michele Pezze, who flourished in southern Italy around 1810.) At the inn where the English couple are staying, in the vicinity of Terracina, Diavolo contrives to remove Lady Pamela's diamond necklace while she is wearing it. A sub-plot involves Zerline, the innkeeper's daughter. She is in love with Lorenzo, a poor officer in the Roman dragoons, but is being forced by her father to marry Francesco, a rich farmer.

Act II. Zerline's bedroom. Diavolo, still posing as the Marquis, enters Zerline's room, hoping to gain access from it to the rooms occupied by the English couple, and is joined by his fellow bandits, Beppo and Giacomo. When his presence is discovered he pretends to have been summoned by Zerline to a rendezvous, thus arousing Lorenzo's jealousy.

Act III. The mountains nearby. Fra Diavolo conceals his instructions to Beppo and Giacomo in a hollow tree. The wedding procession of Zerline and Francesco appears, and Diavolo's two followers find their instructions and mingle with the guests, among them Lorenzo who is in despair at having lost his Zerline. Betraying themselves by talking carelessly, the two bandits are arrested and forced to give their chief the signal to appear. When Diavolo suddenly emerges on the rocky hillside he is shot by Lorenzo's dragoons and falls to his death. (In Auber's original ending Diavolo is merely taken prisoner.) But the opera ends satisfactorily for Lorenzo and Zerline, who are allowed to marry.

The most attractive numbers in Auber's light, tuneful and, in places, Rossinian score include a rousing drinking song at the beginning of the opera and, later in Act I, a charming aria, 'Voyez sur cette roche', in which Zerline describes to the supposed Marquis the exploits of the bandits. An Act I duet for the aristocratic English couple is amusing, and so is the quintet that follows it. Diavolo's aria at the beginning of Act III is a real *tour de force*, giving the tenor fine opportunities for vocal display. Throughout this comic opera Auber's delightful melodic facility is well in evidence.

Recommended recording: Nicolai Gedda (Diavolo), Mady Mesplé (Zerline), Jane Berbie (Lady Pamela), Thierry Dran (Lorenzo), Remi Corazza (Lord Cockburn), Jules Bastin (Matheo), Michel Hamel (Beppo), Michel Marimpouy (Giacomo), with the Jean Laforge Chorale Ensemble, and the Monte Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Marc Soustrot. EMI CDS7 54810–2. Nicolai Gedda brings his lyrical

charm and high-ranging tenor to Diavolo, Mady Mesplé is a faultless Zerline, and Remi Corazza a delightful Lord Cockburn, though his English accent comes and goes.

SAMUEL BARBER

(*b. West Chester, PA, 1910 – d. New York, 1981*)

Vanessa

opera in four acts (approximate length: 2 hours)

Vanessa *soprano*

Erika, her niece *mezzo-soprano*

The Old Baroness, her mother *contralto*

Anatol *tenor*

The Doctor *baritone*

Nicholas *bass*

Footman *bass*

LIBRETTO BY GIAN CARLO MENOTTI, BASED ON A STORY BY ISAK DINESEN; TIME: AROUND 1905; PLACE: AN UNSPECIFIED NORTHERN COUNTRY; FIRST PERFORMED AT THE METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE, NEW YORK, 15 JANUARY 1958

A nephew of the famous contralto Louise Homer, and himself a baritone (taught by his aunt), Barber began composing while still a child, and later studied at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. He showed a particular interest in vocal music throughout his career, and an early work, his setting for voice and string quartet of Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach* in 1931, made his name known outside the United States. It was, however, not until the 1950s that he composed his first opera. He was a friend of the opera composer Gian Carlo Menotti, and it was to a large extent at the instigation of Menotti that he composed *Vanessa*, for which Menotti wrote the libretto, based on a story in *Seven Gothic Tales* by the Danish short-story writer Isak Dinesen (published in 1934). *Vanessa* was staged at the old Metropolitan Opera House, New York, in 1958, and later in the same year at the Salzburg Festival. A revised version in three acts had its premiere at the old Met in 1964, but it is the original four-act opera that is now usually performed. When the Metropolitan Opera moved to its new home at Lincoln Center in 1966,

Barber was commissioned to compose the opening opera, *Anthony and Cleopatra*. Unfortunately, it was generally considered a failure.

The entire action takes place at Vanessa's country manor house.

Act I. Vanessa, her mother the Baroness and her niece Erika are awaiting the return of Anatol, Vanessa's lover who left her twenty years ago. The Anatol who arrives, however, is the son of Vanessa's lover who is no longer alive. Mistaking the young man for his father, Vanessa asks if he still loves her and is devastated when she realizes her mistake. Her niece Erika entreats Anatol to leave, but he refuses.

Act II. A month later. Erika confesses to the Baroness that Anatol seduced her on the night of his arrival, and that she refused his offer of marriage. Vanessa and Anatol return from ice-skating, and announce plans for a splendid ball on New Year's Eve. Erika realizes that her aunt is in love with Anatol.

Act III. New Year's Eve. At the ball, Anatol and Vanessa pledge their love in public. Erika, carrying Anatol's child, stumbles out into the cold towards the lake.

Act IV. Erika is recovering after having attempted suicide. Anatol and Vanessa, now married, are about to depart for Paris, while Erika prepares to withdraw from the world.

Barber's late Romantic style is agreeable and assured, and the score of *Vanessa* is rich in harmony and melodically generous, though not strongly individual. The opera is composed as individual numbers linked by arioso or recitative, and the finest number is a dramatic quintet in Act IV ('To leave, to break, to find, to keep').

BÉLA BARTÓK

(b. Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary, 1881 – d. New York, 1945)

Duke Bluebeard's Castle

(A kékszákallú herceg vára)

opera in one act (approximate length: 1 hour)

Duke Bluebeard *bass*

Judith, his wife *mezzo-soprano*

Prologue *spoken role*

LIBRETTO BY BÉLA BALAZS; TIME: THE LEGENDARY PAST; PLACE: A ROOM IN DUKE BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE; FIRST PERFORMED AT THE OPERA HOUSE, BUDAPEST, 24 MAY 1918 (IN A DOUBLE BILL WITH BARTÓK'S 1917 BALLET *The Wooden Prince*)

Most of the major works of Bartók, the foremost Hungarian composer of the twentieth century, are orchestral or instrumental. Of his three pieces for the stage, all of which date from the early part of his career, two – *The Wooden Prince* and *The Miraculous Mandarin* – are ballet scores. The one-act *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, composed to a libretto in Hungarian, is his only opera.

The character of Bluebeard is taken from the fairy tale 'La Barbe-bleue' in Charles Perrault's 1697 collection *Les Contes de ma Mère l'Oye* (Tales of Mother Goose). The symbolism of Balazs's text is open to more than one interpretation, but the work is generally understood as an allegory on the essential loneliness of the human condition. This short opera, lasting less than an hour, was composed in 1911. However, it had to wait until 1918 for its first production, after which it was not performed again in Hungary for nearly twenty years, because the country's reactionary regime would not allow the librettist's name to be credited since he was a socialist, and Bartók would not allow performances if it were not.

A speaker introduces the action, which takes place in the vast windowless hall of a Gothic castle with seven huge doors leading from it. Through a smaller door, Duke Bluebeard enters with his new wife Judith, whom he leads by the hand. She seems nervous of him, but when he gives her a chance to reconsider her decision to share his life she insists that she will stay with him for ever. As she begins to regain her courage, she asks that the seven doors be opened to allow light and air into the hall.

Bluebeard refuses, but Judith persuades him to give her the key to the first door. The castle seems to emit a sigh as she opens the door to reveal a torture chamber, graphically conjured up by a beam of red light from beyond the door and, in the orchestra, harsh scale passages from the woodwind and xylophone. On the walls of the chamber there is blood, but Judith, undeterred, interprets the red as being the colour not of blood but of dawn. She reaffirms her love for Bluebeard and demands the remaining keys.

The second key unlocks the door to Bluebeard's bronze-coloured armoury, its weapons bloodstained. When Judith opens the third room, a golden treasury, she enters it and emerges with a jewelled robe and a crown. The fourth door opens to reveal the bluish light of a garden on whose flowers there is blood, and the fifth opens on the dazzling white light of Bluebeard's kingdom. But there is blood even here, in the clouds hanging over the kingdom.

Although warned by Bluebeard not to continue, Judith next opens the sixth door, to the accompaniment of harp and clarinet arpeggios, revealing a lake which Bluebeard tells her contains the water of tears. He takes her in his arms and attempts to dissuade her from opening the seventh and last door. Judith asks him if he has loved other women before her. When he evades her question, she demands the key. As she opens the seventh door, the light in the hall becomes dimmer, and three beautiful women, Bluebeard's former wives, step forth. Bluebeard addresses them as his loves of the morning, noon and evening of his life, and assures Judith that she, the most beautiful of them all, is his last love, the love of his night-time. Judith follows the other wives back through the seventh door, which closes behind them leaving Bluebeard finally alone to face eternal darkness.

Bartók's powerful score, with its wide range of colour and its voice parts written in an expressive arioso, is intensely dramatic – the magnificent C-major blaze of sound from the orchestra when the fifth door is opened is a superb moment.

Recommended recording: Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (Bluebeard), Julia Varady (Judith), with the Bavarian State Orchestra, conducted by Wolfgang Sawallisch. DG 2531 172. 'The passionately insistent voice of Varady and the sad, foredoomed tones of Fischer-Dieskau carry the drama', wrote Arthur Jacobs in Opera. Wolfgang Sawallisch brings out superbly the inner richness of the score.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(b. Bonn, 1770 – d. Vienna, 1827)

Fidelio

opera in two acts (approximate length: 2 hours, 15 minutes)

Florestan, a prisoner *tenor*
 Leonore, his wife, alias Fidelio *soprano*
 Rocco, a gaoler *bass*
 Marzelline, his daughter *soprano*
 Jacquino, assistant to Rocco *tenor*
 Don Pizarro, governor of the prison *baritone*
 Don Fernando, minister of state *bass*

LIBRETTO BY JOSEPH VON SONNLEITHNER AND GEORG FRIEDRICH TREITSCHKE, BASED ON JEAN-NICOLAS BOUILLY'S *LÉONORE, OU L'AMOUR CONJUGAL*; TIME: THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY; PLACE: A PRISON NEAR SEVILLE; FIRST PERFORMED IN ITS FINAL FORM, AS *FIDELIO*, AT THE KÄRNTNERTORTHEATER, VIENNA, 23 MAY 1814 (TWO EARLIER VERSIONS, BOTH ENTITLED *LEONORE*, FIRST PERFORMED AT THE THEATER AN DER WIEN, VIENNA, 20 NOVEMBER 1805 AND 29 MARCH 1806)

Beethoven, generally regarded as one of the greatest composers, concentrated on symphonic, orchestral and chamber music, producing nine symphonies, sixteen string quartets, thirty-two piano sonatas, five piano concertos and a violin concerto which are central to the experience of most music lovers. Less at ease with vocal music, in which it seems his imagination was hampered by the physical limitations of the human voice, he completed only one opera, *Fidelio*, at a period in his life when he had already composed his third symphony and his first group of six string quartets.

When, during the winter of 1803–4, his attention was drawn to a libretto, *Leonore, ou L'Amour conjugal*, by Jean-Nicolas Bouilly, which had been set by French composer Pierre Gaveaux and performed with great success in Paris in 1798, Beethoven abandoned his opera *Vestas Feuer*, of which he had written no more than the first scene. He had Bouilly's libretto translated into German and revised by the Viennese court secretary Joseph von Sonnleithner, and by the end of January 1804 he was at work on his *Leonore*.

On 20 November 1805, when Vienna was under the occupation of Napoleon's troops, the opera was given its premiere at the Theater an der Wien. (Not the Theater auf der Wieden. These two Viennese theatres are frequently mistaken for each other by writers.) *Leonore* achieved only three performances. After Beethoven had revised it, reducing its three acts to two, the opera was staged again at the Theater an der Wien on 29 March 1806, with only one further performance several days later. By the time it was next seen, at the Kärntnertortheater on 23 May 1814, it had progressed to its third and final version, with its libretto revised by Georg Friedrich Treitschke, the theatre's resident poet, and it was now called *Fidelio* (though Beethoven continued to prefer its earlier title). Three overtures composed for the earlier Vienna performances and for a planned production in Prague are now known as the *Leonore* overtures nos 1, 2, and 3. The overture to *Fidelio* dates from 1814.

Florestan has been unjustly imprisoned by his enemy the prison governor Don Pizarro. Florestan's wife Leonore, determined to find him and secure his release,

disguises herself as a young man, Fidelio, and takes employment at the prison as assistant to the gaoler Rocco, whose daughter Marzelline falls in love with the supposed youth.

Act I, scene i. A room in Rocco's quarters. The gaoler's young assistant, Jacquino, who is in love with Marzelline and has until now had reason to think his affection was reciprocated, is attempting to persuade her to name a date for their wedding ('Jetzt, Schätzchen, jetzt sind wir allein'). Interrupted by a knocking at the door, he goes off to investigate, leaving Marzelline to reflect that, although she was once in love with him, since the arrival of Fidelio she has been able to think only of her father's new young assistant ('O wär ich schon mit dir vereint').

Rocco and Fidelio enter with Jacquino, and Rocco makes it clear that he would be more than willing to accept his new young helper as a son-in-law. All express their feelings inwardly ('Mir ist so wunderbar'), and Rocco then offers Fidelio and Marzelline practical advice on the need for money as well as love ('Hat man nicht auch Gold beineben'). Fidelio asks to be allowed to help Rocco look after all of the prisoners, but he tells him there is one, incarcerated in a dungeon, whom he cannot let him see. The poor man, he says, will in any case not survive for long, as he is being starved on the orders of the governor. Leonore fears that the prisoner may be her husband, Florestan.

Act I, scene ii. The courtyard of the prison. A platoon of guards marches in, followed by Don Pizarro, the prison governor, who calls for his despatches. He reads one that warns him that the minister of state has been apprised that some of the prisons under Pizarro's jurisdiction contain victims of injustice, and that he intends to surprise Pizarro with an inspection. Pizarro decides to have Florestan killed immediately, to prevent his being found ('Ha! Welch' ein Augenblick'). Ordering a trumpeter to mount the tower, keep a close watch on the road to Seville, and give a signal as soon as a coach with outriders appears, Pizarro then tries to bribe Rocco into murdering the prisoner in the dungeon. Failing in this, he resolves to kill his enemy himself. He orders Rocco to precede him into the dungeon and dig a grave. Leonore, who has overheard them, is strengthened in her resolve to save Florestan ('Komm, Hoffnung').

Fidelio persuades Rocco to allow the prisoners out into the courtyard, since the weather is so beautiful. Rocco reluctantly agrees but, when the prisoners emerge into the sunlight ('O welche Lust'), Leonore is disappointed not to find Florestan among them. Rocco promises to allow Fidelio to help him dig the grave of the unfortunate wretch in the dungeon, and Leonore now feels certain that this must be Florestan. As they are about to descend to the dungeon, Pizarro returns.

Furious at finding the prisoners allowed out into the courtyard, he orders them to be herded back into their cells.

Act II, scene i. A dungeon cell. Florestan, fettered to the wall by a long chain, muses on his fate and imagines he is visited by an angel in the form of his wife, who has come to lead him to heaven ('In des Lebens Frühlingstagen'). As he sinks exhausted into sleep, Rocco and Fidelio enter, carrying a jug of wine, tools for digging, and a lamp. They begin to clear out an old cistern as a grave for the prisoner, but Leonore, who cannot see his face, expresses her determination to save the poor man, whoever he might be. When Florestan awakens, Leonore recognizes her husband. Florestan asks Rocco the name of the governor of the prison. When told it is Pizarro, whose crimes he has dared to reveal, he begs Rocco to send a message to his wife in Seville. Rocco answers that he dare not, and that it would in any case be to no avail. Florestan asks for water, and Rocco lets him have the dregs of the wine in his jug and allows Fidelio to give the prisoner a piece of stale bread ('Euch werde Lohn').

At a signal from Rocco, Pizarro descends into the dungeon. He draws a dagger and is about to kill Florestan when Leonore springs forward to shield him. She draws a pistol, aiming it at Pizarro with a cry of 'First kill his wife!' A trumpet sounds from the tower, heralding the arrival of the minister of state. When it sounds a second time, Jacquino appears at the top of the stairs, announcing that the minister and his retinue are already in the prison yard. Pizarro hurries out, followed by Rocco, while a joyous Leonore and Florestan embrace ('O namenlose Freude').

Act II, scene ii. The parade ground of the prison. The minister, Don Fernando, addresses a crowd of citizens who have rushed in to petition him, and assures them that he has come to free them from tyranny. Rocco leads Leonore and Florestan forward, and the minister, shocked to see his old friend in chains, orders Pizarro to be led away by guards and allows Leonore to remove her husband's chains ('O Gott! O welch' ein Augenblick!'). Marzelline is disconcerted to find her beloved Fidelio revealed to be the wife of Florestan, but all join in singing a hymn of praise to the woman who has saved her husband's life ('Wer ein holdes Weib errungen').

The form of Beethoven's opera, which is that of a French *opéra comique* with spoken dialogue separating the musical numbers, is thought by some to be inappropriate to its subject matter, and indeed it has to be admitted that, formally, *Fidelio* is unsatisfactory. But Beethoven, moved by the story of a woman's heroism in rescuing her husband, has composed a work that can be said to transcend

opera and its forms; a work that is a magnificent hymn to the human spirit, to love and to the concept of freedom.

Fidelio begins conventionally enough with the music of Marzeline and Jacquino, but as early as the deeply moving quartet 'Mir ist so wunderbar', in canon form, the drama moves on to a higher plane. This is one of the most beautiful numbers in the score. Rocco's cynical little song 'Hat man nicht auch Gold beineben' is a return to a more mundane level (and could be omitted with impunity), but from that point onward the music represents Beethoven at his greatest. The final chorus, in a triumphant C major, is a glorious expression of universal love, while the hushed prisoners' chorus ('O welche Lust') and the ecstatic duet for Leonore and Florestan ('O namenlose Freude') are other highlights of Beethoven's divine score. Leonore and Florestan are each given an imposing aria preceded by expressive recitative. Leonore's profoundly moving 'Komm, Hoffnung' beautifully conveys the power of love and hope, while the mood of Florestan's 'In des Lebens Frühlingstagen' moves from resignation to joyous anticipation.

Great interpreters of the leading roles, within living memory, have included Birgit Nilsson, Christa Ludwig, the incomparable Lotte Lehmann (whose recording of Leonore's aria on a 78 rpm disc can be found on CD) and Julius Patzak, the Viennese tenor whose Florestan in the years following World War II has surely remained in the memory of all who saw him in the role. His opening cry of 'Gott! Welch' Dunkel hier' must still be ringing in the rafters of the opera houses of Vienna and London.

Recommended recording: Christa Ludwig (Leonore), Jon Vickers (Florestan), Gottlob Frick (Rocco), Walter Berry (Don Pizarro), Gerhard Unger (Jacquino), Ingeborg Hallstein (Marzeline), Franz Crass (Don Fernando) and the Philharmonia Chorus and Orchestra, conducted by Otto Klemperer. EMI CDS 5 55170–2. By common consent, Klemperer was regarded as the greatest of Beethoven conductors in the second half of the twentieth century. He conducts a most moving performance of Beethoven's marvellous score, and has the advantage of a superb cast, all of whose members are fully in accord with his authoritative approach to the work. Christa Ludwig brings Leonore vividly to life, Jon Vickers is an eloquent Florestan, and Gottlob Frick successfully conveys Rocco's ambiguous personality.

VINCENZO BELLINI

(b. Catania, Sicily, 1801 – d. Puteaux, near Paris, 1835)

I Capuleti e i Montecchi

(The Capulets and the Montagues)

lyrical tragedy in two acts (approximate length: 2 hours, 20 minutes)

Giulietta (Juliet), a Capulet *soprano*Romeo, a Montague *mezzo-soprano*Tebaldo (Tybalt), a Capulet *tenor*Capellio (Capulet), Giulietta's father *bass*Lorenzo (Friar Laurence), a physician *baritone*

LIBRETTO BY FELICE ROMANI; TIME: THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY; PLACE: VERONA;
FIRST PERFORMED AT THE TEATRO LA FENICE, VENICE, 11 MARCH 1830

Bellini's first opera, *Adelson e Salvini*, was produced in 1825 at the Naples Conservatorium while the composer was still a student there. Its success led to his being commissioned to write an opera for the Teatro San Carlo in Naples, where *Bianca e Gernando* (its title later changed to *Bianca e Fernando*) was successfully premiered the following year. After this, the young composer's future was assured.

The libretto of his next opera, *Il pirata* (The Pirate; 1827), was provided by Felice Romani, the most famous librettist of his day, who went on to collaborate with Bellini on all but one of his subsequent operas. The first of these, *La straniera* (The Stranger; 1829), was enthusiastically received, but *Zaira* (also 1829) was a failure, so Bellini withdrew his score and used nearly half of it again in his next opera, *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, composed for the Teatro La Fenice in Venice, where it was staged in 1830.

Romani's libretto, a version of the Romeo and Juliet story, was an adaptation of the libretto he had written five years earlier for Nicola Vaccai's *Giulietta e Romeo*. It is based not on Shakespeare but on Giuseppe Maria Foppa's libretto for another operatic version of the story, Niccolò Zingarelli's *Giulietta e Romeo* (1796), whose ultimate derivation was a fifteenth-century novella by Masuccio Salernitano. (The immediate source of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in 1594 was a narrative poem published thirty years earlier, *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* by Arthur Brooke, which in turn was based on a sixteenth-century French version of the story.)

Bellini's opera was enthusiastically received at its premiere and was performed eight times within the ten days remaining before the end of the opera season. After the third performance, the composer was accompanied to his lodgings by a huge crowd of admirers and a military band playing excerpts from his other operas. (Bellini later said '*Zaira* got its revenge with *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*.)' The new opera remained popular in Italy and abroad until the end of the nineteenth century, and Wagner acknowledged its influence on Act II of *Tristan und Isolde*.

In recent years *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* has been frequently revived, though not always authentically. In the nineteenth century a practice arose, begun by the singer Maria Malibran in 1832, of substituting the final scene from Vaccai's *Giulietta e Romeo* for Bellini's final scene. This no longer happens, but in 1966 Claudio Abbado conducted at La Scala, Milan, his own adaptation of Bellini's score, with the mezzo-soprano *travesti* role of Romeo rewritten for the tenor voice and sung by Giacomo Aragall.

Act I, scene i. A gallery in Capellio's palace. In the warfare between the Guelphs and Ghibellines, the Capulet family are supporters of the Guelphs, while the Montagues are on the side of the Ghibellines. Tebaldo, who is in love with his cousin Giulietta, tells his fellow Capulets that an attack led by Romeo, a Montague who has already slain Capellio's son in battle, is shortly to be expected ('E serbata a questo acciario'). Capellio, the head of the Capulet family, announces that an offer of peace has been received from Romeo, but he rejects it and agrees to the immediate marriage of his daughter Giulietta to Tebaldo.

Romeo arrives, pretending to be his own envoy, and asks that peace between the two families be sealed by the marriage of Giulietta to Romeo, who, he says, still weeps over having killed Capellio's son ('Se Romeo t'uccise un figlio'). When he is told that Giulietta is to be married to Tebaldo, Romeo reveals his identity and swears vengeance upon the Capulets.

Act I, scene ii. A room in Giulietta's apartment. Arrayed in her wedding dress, an unhappy Giulietta longs to see Romeo, whom she loves ('Oh! Quante volte'). The physician Lorenzo brings Romeo to her, and the two lovers greet each other rapturously. But when Romeo asks Giulietta to escape with him, her sense of duty to her father leads her to refuse. Distraught, Romeo leaves by the secret door through which he had entered.

Act I, scene iii. A courtyard in Capellio's palace where the wedding festivities have begun. Romeo, disguised as a Guelph, confides to Lorenzo that an army of a thousand Ghibellines in disguise is already in Verona, poised to interrupt Giulietta's wedding. The two men rush off as the noise of battle is heard. Giulietta

enters in distress, and Romeo returns to ask her once again to flee with him. They are interrupted by the arrival of Tebaldo, to whom Romeo reveals his identity. Act I ends with the Guelphs and Ghibellines threatening one another, and with the young lovers in despair.

Act II, scene i. An apartment in Capellio's palace. Lorenzo tells Giulietta that Romeo has escaped, but that she can avoid her imminent marriage to Tebaldo by swallowing a potion that will give her sleep the semblance of death. She will be laid to rest in the family tomb, and will awaken in the arms of her beloved Romeo. Despite her forebodings, Giulietta drinks the potion. When her father arrives to find her too unwell to proceed with the wedding, he begins to suspect treachery on the part of Lorenzo, and orders a close watch to be kept on him.

Act II, scene ii. A deserted spot near Capellio's palace. Romeo waits in vain for Lorenzo, who was to have explained about the potion and taken him to Giulietta. Tebaldo arrives, and the two men are about to fight when the sound of a dirge is heard, and Giulietta's funeral procession appears. Horrified, Romeo and Tebaldo express their despair.

Act II, scene iii. The funeral vaults of the Capulets. Romeo enters with his followers and prises open the lid of Giulietta's coffin. The other Montagues leave, but Romeo, grief-stricken, begs Giulietta's soul to take him to heaven with her ('Deh! Tu bell' anima'), and he swallows some poison. As he loses consciousness, Giulietta rises from her coffin. Romeo dies in her arms, and Giulietta expires from grief as her father and Lorenzo arrive.

Despite the disconcerting fact that eight of its ten numbers contain music initially composed for earlier Bellini operas, notably *Zaira*, Bellini's Romeo and Juliet opera, with its blend of elegiac melancholy and martial ardour, succeeds in capturing the essence of the story, and his decision to write the role of the adolescent Romeo for a female mezzo-soprano can be made to work perfectly well with careful and suitable casting. The highlights of the opera include Romeo's moving larghetto aria, 'Se Romeo t'uccise un figlio', one of Bellini's typically long-breathed melodies; Giulietta's touching romanza with harp accompaniment, 'Oh! Quante volte'; the dramatic and fervent love duet, 'Sì, fuggire'; and, in the final scene, Romeo's andante aria, 'Deh! Tu bell' anima'.

Unlike many bel canto operas, Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* never completely disappeared from the repertoire. In 1935 it was staged in the composer's home town, Catania, to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of his death, and in 1954 it was performed in Palermo with the great Italian mezzo-soprano Giulietta Simionato as Romeo. Other notable performers of the roles of the

young lovers have included Tatiana Troyanos (Romeo) and Beverly Sills (Giulietta) in Boston (1975), Agnes Baltsa (Romeo) and Celia Gasdia (Giulietta) in Florence (1981), Baltsa and Edita Gruberova (London, 1984) and Anne Sofie von Otter and Amanda Roocroft (London, 1992).

Recommended recording: Eva Mei (Giulietta), Vesselina Kasarova (Romeo), Ramon Vargas (Tebaldo), Umberto Chiummo (Capellio), Simone Alberghini (Lorenzo), with the Bavarian Radio Chorus and Munich Radio Orchestra, conducted by Roberto Abbado. RCA 09026 68899. Vesselina Kasarova is superb as the impulsive lover, and Eva Mei immensely appealing as his beloved. The other roles are strongly sung and characterized, and Abbado secures a fine, stylistically perfect performance from the orchestra.

La sonnambula

(The Sleepwalker)

opera semiseria in two acts (approximate length: 3 hours)

Amina, an orphan raised by Teresa *soprano*

Lisa, an innkeeper *soprano*

Teresa, owner of the village mill *mezzo-soprano*

Elvino, a wealthy farmer *tenor*

Count Rodolfo, lord of the village *bass*

Alessio, a villager *bass*

LIBRETTO BY FELICE ROMANI; TIME: THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY; PLACE: A VILLAGE IN SWITZERLAND; FIRST PERFORMED AT THE TEATRO CARCANO, MILAN, 6 MARCH 1831

After the success of *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* in Venice in the spring of 1830, Bellini's next commission was to compose an opera for Milan – not for the most prestigious Milanese theatre, La Scala, but for the Teatro Carcano, one of several other theatres in the city. Bellini and his librettist Felice Romani at first intended to base their opera on Victor Hugo's play *Hernani*, and indeed they completed four musical numbers before abandoning the project, probably because they feared that the opera's revolutionary subject might run into difficulties with the censorship authorities. By early January 1831 they were at work on the politically innocuous *La sonnambula*, which they wrote very quickly.

The plot was taken from the scenario of a ballet, *La Sonnambule*, by the French playwright and librettist Eugène Scribe which had been staged in Paris three years previously, and which had in turn derived from a two-act comedy by Scribe and Casimir Delavigne, first performed in Paris in 1819. At its premiere in Milan, when it shared a double bill with a ballet, the success of Bellini's *La sonnambula* was immense, with its leading roles of Amina and Elvino performed by two of the greatest singers of the time, the soprano Giuditta Pasta and the tenor Giovanni Battista Rubini. The following day Bellini wrote to a friend:

Here you have the happy news of the uproarious success of my opera last night at the Carcano. I will say nothing about the music, for you will read of that in the press. I can only assure you that Rubini and Pasta are two angels who enraptured the entire audience to the point of madness.

The Russian composer Mikhail Glinka had been in the audience. In his *Memoirs* he wrote:

Pasta and Rubini sang with the most evident enthusiasm to support their favourite conductor. In the second act the singers themselves wept and carried their audience along with them so that, in that happy season of carnival, tears were continually being wiped away in boxes and stalls alike. Embracing Shterich [Glinka's travelling companion, an amateur composer] in the Ambassador's box, I too shed tears of emotion and ecstasy.

Act I, scene i. A square in the village, outside the mill. The villagers have assembled to celebrate the imminent marriage of Amina, an orphan brought up by Teresa, the owner of the village mill, to Elvino, a wealthy young farmer. Lisa, the proprietress of the local inn, does not take part in the general air of rejoicing, for she is in love with Elvino ('Tutto è gioia, tutto è festa') and is not interested in the attentions of Alessio, a young villager who loves her. Amina and Teresa arrive, and Amina thanks her friends, especially Teresa, who has always behaved like a mother to her ('Come per me sereno'). Elvino appears, having been praying at his mother's tomb, and the marriage contract is signed and witnessed, the wedding itself to take place next day in the church. Elvino tenderly places a ring on Amina's finger ('Prendi, l'anel ti dono').

A carriage draws up, from which there emerges a handsome stranger who seeks directions to the castle. On being told it is some distance away, he decides to stay overnight at the inn in this village which seems to have fond associations for him ('Vi ravviso, o luoghi ameni'). Although the villagers do not realize it, the stranger is in fact their feudal lord, Count Rodolfo, returning after a long absence to take

up residence in the castle on the death of his father. To the annoyance of Elvino, the Count pays compliments to Amina, who, he says, reminds him of his own lost love ('Tu non sai con quei begli occhi'). As evening falls, the villagers warn the stranger of a phantom which they claim has been haunting their village, a warning that Rodolfo accepts with scepticism. He is conducted by a flirtatious Lisa to her inn, while Elvino, left alone with Amina, gently chides her for having allowed the stranger to pay compliments to her. However, Amina easily reassures the jealous Elvino of her love for him ('Son geloso del zeffiro errante').

Act I, scene ii. Count Rodolfo's room at the inn. Lisa flirts with the Count, whose identity the villagers have by now discovered. Hearing a noise outside, she escapes to an adjoining room, inadvertently dropping a handkerchief which Rodolfo retrieves and hangs over a bedpost. Amina, wearing a white nightgown, now enters through a window, and Rodolfo realizes that she is walking in her sleep and that it is no doubt her somnambulism that has given rise to the rumour of a phantom haunting the village at night. Lisa, who has glimpsed Amina entering Rodolfo's room, assumes that she has an assignation with him, and quietly goes off to inform Elvino. Meanwhile, Amina has begun to talk in her sleep about her marriage and Elvino's jealousy. Rodolfo is touched by her words, and in order to avoid embarrassing her he leaves as Amina, still asleep, lies on the bed.

The villagers arrive to pay homage to the Count. Entering his room, they espy the figure of a sleeping woman on his bed, and are about to withdraw when Lisa returns with Elvino and reveals to him that the woman on the bed is his betrothed, Amina. Awakened by the noise, Amina is unable to explain her presence in the Count's room. Although she protests her innocence ('D'un pensiero e d'un accento'), she is denounced by Elvino and by all the assembled villagers except her foster-mother, Teresa, who takes the handkerchief that is hanging over the bedpost, places it around Amina's neck and catches her as she swoons.

Act II, scene i. A forest between the village and the castle. The villagers are on their way to the castle to ask the Count to help establish the truth. As they leave, Amina and Teresa appear. They encounter Elvino, who confirms his rejection of Amina. The villagers return with the news that the Count has declared Amina innocent, but Elvino, furious at the very mention of Rodolfo's name, snatches the wedding ring from Amina's finger, though he admits to himself that he still cannot hate her ('Ah, perchè non posso odiarti?').

Act II, scene ii. The village square. Lisa's unhappy suitor Alessio learns from her that Elvino now intends to marry her instead of Amina. Lisa rejoices in this change of circumstances ('De' lieti auguri a voi son grata'). Rodolfo attempts to

explain the events of the previous evening to Elvino but, like everyone else in the village, Elvino has never heard of somnambulism and does not believe him. Teresa arrives, asking the villagers to make less noise as Amina is asleep in the millhouse. When she hears that Elvino is to marry Lisa, Teresa produces, to Lisa's evident confusion, the handkerchief that she had discovered in the Count's room. Elvino wonders if there are any honest women in the world, and Count Rodolfo repeats that Amina is innocent. When Elvino asks who can prove it, Rodolfo is able to reply that Amina herself can do so, for at that moment she is seen to emerge, obviously asleep, from an upper window in the millhouse, and to walk across a dangerous ledge on the roof. After she has reached safety, she enters the square still asleep, dreaming of Elvino and the loss of his love ('Ah! non credea mirarti'). At Rodolfo's urging, Elvino replaces on her finger the ring he had taken from her. A cry of 'Viva Amina!' from the villagers awakens Amina, who is overjoyed to find Elvino kneeling at her feet and seeking her forgiveness ('Ah! Non giunge uman pensiero').

La sonnambula, the earliest of his mature masterpieces, has a fair claim to be regarded as the quintessential Bellini opera, with its long-breathed elegiac melodies, its radiant coloratura and its expressive lyricism. Amina's aria and cabaletta in Act I represent the composer at his most individual, the aria ('Come per me sereno') a beguiling expression of the innocence of young love, and the cabaletta ('Sovra il sen la man mi posa') an exhilarating outburst of sheer happiness. The Count's smoothly flowing, nostalgic cavatina ('Vi ravviso, o luoghi ameni') is one of the most attractive arias written for the bass voice, while Elvino is given splendid opportunities for display in the cabaletta to his Act I duet with Amina ('Ah! Vorrei trovar parola'), in which he is required to produce his top C four times. The ensemble finale to Act I ('D'un pensiero e d'un accento') was surely in Sir Arthur Sullivan's mind when he wrote his parody of an operatic ensemble, 'A nice dilemma we have here', in *Trial by Jury*; and Amina's 'Ah! Non credea mirarti', one of the great peaks of the bel canto soprano's repertoire, is very likely the aria that Verdi had in mind when he wrote admiringly of Bellini's 'long, long, melodies'. Its opening notes are inscribed on Bellini's tomb in his home town of Catania.

La sonnambula is a work of immense charm, but a successful performance requires virtuoso singers of the quality of its first interpreters, Pasta and Rubini, or in more recent times sopranos such as Maria Callas, Joan Sutherland or June Anderson and tenors of the calibre of Nicolai Gedda or Alfredo Kraus. When the great Swedish soprano Jenny Lind, nicknamed 'the Swedish Nightingale', sang

Amina at Her Majesty's Theatre, London, in 1847, Queen Victoria wrote in her diary of her performance of 'Ah! Non credea mirarti':

It was all *piano* and clear and sweet, and like the sighing of a zephyr; yet all heard. Who could describe those long notes, drawn out until they quite melt away; that shake which becomes softer and softer; those very piano- and flute-like notes, and those round, fresh tones that are so youthful?

More than a hundred years later the Australian Joan Sutherland sang many performances of *La sonnambula* all over the world. Harold Schonberg wrote in the *New York Times*:

[The second act] has the two great arias, 'Ah! non credea' and 'Ah, non giunge'. The first is a long, unembellished melody that cannot be sung without a flawless technique. The second is one of the all-time coloratura showpieces. In both, Miss Sutherland was as perfect as one could desire . . . when she finished an explosive roar went up from the audience. It was fully deserved. For this was not merely coloratura singing, it was singing in the grand line, and it was the stuff of which legends are made.

Of her Elvino, Nicolai Gedda, the critic of *Opera* wrote: 'The role of Elvino should (and probably does) strike terror into the hearts of our modern tenors, but Mr Gedda sang it with remarkable command of its shadings of volume, its florid decoration, and its terrifying demands on breath control.'

Recommended recording: Joan Sutherland (Amina), Luciano Pavarotti (Elvino), Della Jones (Teresa), Nicolai Ghiaurov (Rodolfo), Isabel Buchanan (Lisa), with the London Opera Chorus and National Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Richard Bonynges. Decca 417 424-2. Joan Sutherland is in her finest voice, spinning out Bellini's languorous melodies with a fine legato and sailing through the cabalettas with apparently the greatest of ease. Pavarotti, too, is in rich voice, and gives one of his most engaging performances on disc, while Richard Bonynges, completely at home in the bel canto repertoire, conducts most stylishly.

Norma

opera seria in two acts (approximate length: 3 hours)

Norma, high priestess of the Druid temple *soprano*

Adalgisa, a virgin of the temple *mezzo-soprano*

Pollione, Roman proconsul in Gaul *tenor*
 Oroveso, Archdruid, Norma's father *bass*
 Clotilde, Norma's confidante *soprano*
 Flavio, a Roman centurion *tenor*

LIBRETTO BY FELICE ROMANI, BASED ON ALEXANDRE SOUMET'S PLAY *NORMA, OU L'INFANTICIDE*; TIME: AROUND 50 BC; PLACE: GAUL; FIRST PERFORMED AT THE TEATRO ALLA SCALA, MILAN, 26 DECEMBER 1831

By the time of *La sonnambula*'s successful premiere at the Teatro Carcano, Milan, in March 1831, Bellini had already agreed to write his next opera, for La Scala. By the end of July he and his librettist Felice Romani had decided on the opera's subject: it was to be based on *Norma*, the French dramatist Alexandre Soumet's new play, which had opened in Paris in April to great acclaim. The usually dilatory Romani produced his libretto very quickly, and Bellini began to compose the opera early in September. *Norma* was given its premiere at La Scala on 26 December, the traditional date for the opening of the carnival season.

To the surprise of everyone connected with the production, the audience at the first performance seemed not to enjoy the opera. Writing to his closest friend, the music historian Franco Florimo, whom he had known since their student days together in Naples, Bellini complained of his great disappointment:

I am writing to you in a state of bitter grief which I cannot express, but which you alone will understand. I have just come from La Scala where the first performance of *Norma* was, would you believe it, a dismal fiasco!!! I tell you truly, the audience was very severe, and seemed to me to want my poor *Norma* to suffer the same fate as the Druid priestess. I no longer recognized those dear Milanese, who had greeted *Il Pirata*, *La Straniera* and *La Sonnambula* with joy on their faces and warmth in their hearts, although I had hoped that with *Norma* I had given them something just as worthy.

The reaction of the first-night audience may to some extent have been organized by a faction supported by the mistress of the composer Giovanni Pacini, whose opera *Il corsaro* was about to be given its premiere at La Scala. Bellini certainly suspected this to be the case. After its first night *Norma* was greeted by its audiences with enormous enthusiasm, and it was performed thirty-nine times during the season. It went on to become the most popular of Bellini's works in Italy and abroad, has retained its popularity to the present day and is regarded as his masterpiece.

Three years after Bellini's death at the early age of thirty-four, the young Richard Wagner wrote an essay on *Norma*, calling it 'indisputably Bellini's most successful composition'. The title role was conceived for the Italian soprano Giuditta Pasta, who some months earlier had created the role of Amina in Bellini's *La sonnambula*. Pasta made comments to the composer on her music as it was being written. At first she disliked her aria, 'Casta diva', but Bellini asked her to practise it every day for a week, promising to rewrite it if after that she still thought it ill-suited to her voice. In the event, he did not have to make any changes to it, and Pasta's performance of 'Casta diva' became famous throughout Europe. (Bellini's original key of G major was too high for her, so she transposed both the aria and its cabaletta down to F, the key in which they are now usually performed.)

Act I, scene i. The sacred forest of the Druids. Oroveso, the Archdruid, arrives with priests and Gallic soldiers to await the rising of the new moon, at which moment his daughter Norma, the high priestess, will perform the ceremony of cutting the sacred mistletoe ('Ite sul colle, o Druidi'). The Druids beg their god, Irminsul, to arouse in Norma feelings of hatred and rebellion against the Romans, who have invaded their country. As the Gauls all move off into the forest, two Romans arrive. They are Pollione, the Roman proconsul, and his friend Flavio, a centurion. Pollione has been Norma's lover and they have had two children, but he confides to Flavio that he now loves Adalgisa, a virgin priestess of the Druid temple, who returns his love ('Meco all' altar di Venere'). However, he fears the wrath of Norma. As the sound of a gong heralds the return of the Druids, Pollione and Flavio depart.

The Druids return with their high priestess, Norma, who approaches the altar stone with a golden sickle in her hand. Expected to incite the Gauls to rise against their Roman oppressors, Norma instead counsels peace, asserting that Rome one day will fall, not through any action on the part of the Gauls but because of its own vices. She cuts a branch from the sacred mistletoe, and all kneel as she raises her arms to the moon and appeals to that chaste goddess to temper the ardent spirits of the Gauls ('Casta diva'). Although Norma promises that, should the god Irminsul ever demand the blood of the Romans, her voice will thunder forth from the Druids' temple, she tells herself that her heart would never allow her to punish Pollione. She longs for him to return to her.

All the Druids depart, except the young novice Adalgisa, who prays to Irminsul for help and protection as she awaits her lover, Pollione. When Pollione arrives, he tells her that he has been recalled to Rome, and begs her not to devote her life to the service of her cruel god but to flee with him ('Vieni in Roma, ah vieni, o cara').

Adalgisa agrees to meet him the following day in the sacred grove and accompany him to Rome.

Act I, scene ii. Norma's secret dwelling in the forest. Torn between her love for the two children she has borne to Pollione and shame at their situation, Norma asks her confidante, Clotilde, to remove the children from her sight. She knows that Pollione has been recalled to Rome, and fears that he may intend to leave her and her children behind. At the sound of someone approaching, Clotilde takes the children away.

Adalgisa enters to confess to her superior, Norma, that she has broken her vow of chastity and with a Roman. Since Norma has done the same, she forgives Adalgisa and is about to free her from her vow when Pollione enters. Realizing that he is the Roman whom Adalgisa loves, Norma reveals to Adalgisa that she too has been Pollione's lover, and she proceeds to revile him ('Oh! Di qual sei tu vittima'). Adalgisa spurns him and, as the hapless Roman attempts to justify himself, the sacred gong sounds, summoning Norma to the temple.

Act II, scene i. Norma's dwelling. Norma enters the room in which her two children are sleeping. She is carrying a knife, for she intends to kill the children rather than allow them to live in shame. Approaching the bed, she raises the dagger but finds that she is unable to strike. She sends Clotilde to fetch Adalgisa, having now decided to entrust the children to the care of Adalgisa and Pollione and then kill herself. Adalgisa, however, says that she will go to Pollione only to remind him of his duty to Norma ('Mira, o Norma'). She and Norma swear eternal friendship ('Si, fino all' ore estreme').

Act II, scene ii. The Druids' sacred grove in the forest. The Gallic warriors await Oroveso, who arrives to declare that the time is not yet ripe for them to rise against the Romans ('Ah! Del tebro'). After Oroveso and the warriors have departed, Norma enters to await the result of Adalgisa's plea to Pollione on her behalf. Clotilde arrives with the news that Adalgisa's approach to Pollione was unsuccessful, and that Adalgisa has returned, weeping, to the temple. In a fury, Norma rushes to the altar and strikes three times upon the sacred shield, summoning Oroveso and the Druids, whom she now incites to war, carnage and destruction.

A noise is heard in the distance, and Clotilde rushes in to announce that a Roman has been captured in the quarters of the virgin novices. Pollione is now led in by soldiers, ready to face the penalty of death rather than reveal that he had been attempting to carry off Adalgisa. Norma is about to strike the fatal blow, when she feels a sudden pity for Pollione. On the pretext of wishing to question him to discover whom he was planning to abduct, she persuades the Druids to withdraw.

Norma offers to spare Pollione's life if he will swear never to see Adalgisa again ('In mia man alfin tu sei'). When he refuses, she summons the Druids, confesses that she herself is the priestess who has broken her sacred vows, and orders her funeral pyre to be prepared. Entrusting her children to the care of her father, Oroveso, whose forgiveness she begs, she mounts the pyre accompanied by Pollione, whose love for her has been reawakened by her greatness of spirit.

Norma is generally regarded as Bellini's masterpiece, a work in which his sensuous, long-breathed melodies are placed in the service of immensely strong dramatic situations. Its overture is somewhat melodramatic – Bellini's genius was for arias and duets rather than orchestral music. Nevertheless, referring to a theme first heard in the orchestral introduction to Oroveso's Act I cavatina, Verdi wrote that no other composer had created a phrase 'more beautiful and heavenly'. Throughout the opera, the confidence, variety and sheer beauty of Bellini's melody are amazing. Norma's aria 'Casta diva', the wonderfully flowing vocal line of which has been likened to a Chopin nocturne, is one of the peaks of the dramatic soprano repertoire, and the Act II duet, 'Mira, o Norma', for Norma and Adalgisa, their soprano and mezzo-soprano voices blending sympathetically in thirds, is both forceful and moving. The duet 'In mia man alfin tu sei', at the opera's climax, is positively Verdian in its dramatic impetus.

The score of *Norma* seems so perfectly wedded to its libretto that it is difficult to believe that some of it had originally been composed by Bellini for other operas, among them *Bianca e Fernando*, *Adelson e Salvini* and *Zaira*. His orchestration is hardly complex, but it is always appropriate. Asked by a French publisher to reorchestrate the score of *Norma*, Bizet discovered that the task was neither possible nor necessary. Let the final word be Bellini's: 'If I were shipwrecked,' he wrote, 'I would leave all of my other operas and try to save *Norma*.'

When the great Wagnerian soprano Lilli Lehmann sang Norma (in German) at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, in 1890, she said that she found it easier to sing all three Brünnhildes than one Norma. 'In Wagner,' she explained, 'you are so carried away by the dramatic emotion, the action and the scene that you do not have to think how to sing the words. That comes of itself. But in Bellini you must always have a care for beauty of tone and correct emission.' Great twentieth-century interpreters of the title role have included Rosa Ponselle, Maria Callas (for whom Norma was surely her greatest role), Leyla Gencer, Joan Sutherland and Montserrat Caballé. The mezzo-soprano role of Adalgisa, Norma's rival in love, has had such distinguished performers as Fedora Barbieri, Ebe Stignani, Giulietta Simionato, Marilyn Horne and Grace Bumbry (who also sang Norma).

Recommended recording: Maria Callas (Norma), Ebe Stignani (Adalgisa), Mario Filippeschi (Pollione), with the Chorus and orchestra of La Scala, Milan, conducted by Tullio Serafin. EMI CDS 56271–2. Norma was surely Callas's greatest role, one in which her occasional vocal imperfections on this recording are spectacularly outweighed by the dramatic fervour of her portrayal of the wronged Druid priestess. Ebe Stignani is a most sympathetic Adalgisa, her duet scenes with Callas both moving and exciting, and Mario Filippeschi is a suitably stentorian Pollione. Callas's great mentor Tullio Serafin keeps the opera moving at a brisk pace while sacrificing none of its drama.

I puritani (The Puritans)

opera seria in three acts (approximate length: 2 hours, 50 minutes)

Arturo (Lord Arthur Talbot), a royalist *tenor*
 Gualtiero (Lord Walton), governor of a Puritan fortress *bass*
 Giorgio (Sir George Walton), his brother *bass*
 Riccardo (Sir Richard Forth), a Puritan *baritone*
 Sir Bruno Robertson, a Puritan *tenor*
 Elvira, daughter of Gualtiero *soprano*
 Enrichetta (Henrietta, widow of Charles I) *soprano*

LIBRETTO BY COUNT CARLO PEPOLI, BASED ON THE PLAY *TÊTES RONDES ET CAVALLIERS*, BY JACQUES-ARSÈNE ANCELOT AND JOSEPH-XAVIER-BONIFACE SAINTINE; TIME: 1649; PLACE: IN AND AROUND PLYMOUTH; FIRST PERFORMED AT THE THÉÂTRE ITALIEN, PARIS, 24 JANUARY 1835

Bellini's next opera after *Norma* was *Beatrice di Tenda*, which he composed for the Teatro La Fenice in Venice, where it had its premiere in March 1833. Although it was accorded a cool reception at its first performance, *Beatrice di Tenda* was staged in several other Italian cities and abroad before the end of the decade, and is occasionally revived today. It was the last opera on which Bellini and Felice Romani collaborated, for the librettist had not only been dilatory in producing his text for Bellini to set, thus causing the premiere to be postponed, but he had also published a letter in a Venice newspaper blaming the composer for the postponement. Bellini and Romani were never to meet again.

When, early in 1834, the composer was asked to provide a new opera for the Théâtre Italien in Paris, he turned to Count Carlo Pepoli, an Italian poet and

patriot living in exile in Paris, to write the libretto. The subject they eventually chose was a play, *Têtes rondes et cavaliers* (Roundheads and Cavaliers) by Jacques-Arsène Ancelot and Joseph-Xavier-Boniface Saintine, that had been produced in Paris the previous year. (Though one sometimes reads that the play was based on Sir Walter Scott's novel *Old Mortality*, this is incorrect. The plots and characters of the two works are completely dissimilar.) The opera's full title, rarely used today, is *I puritani di Scozia* (The Puritans of Scotland) – although the action takes place in Plymouth, which is in the south of England, the librettist had thought that Plymouth was in Scotland!

When it was staged in Paris on 24 January 1835, *I puritani* had in its leading roles four of the most famous singers of the time: Giulia Grisi (Elvira), Giovanni Battista Rubini (Arturo), Antonio Tamburini (Riccardo) and Luigi Lablache (Giorgio). It was an immense success at its premiere and was soon being staged all over Europe, frequently with the original singers, who became known as 'the *Puritani* quartet'.

Act I, scene i. The courtyard of a fortress near Plymouth, at dawn. Sir Bruno and the Puritan guards welcome the approach of day, prepare themselves for victory over the Stuarts, and then, as the sound of a morning hymn is heard from the nearby chapel, kneel in prayer. The women of the fortress enter, excitedly discussing preparations for the wedding of Elvira, daughter of Gualtiero, the governor of the fortress. When they leave, Riccardo, a Puritan officer, confides to Bruno his great sorrow at the approaching marriage ('Ah, per sempre io ti perdi'). In love with Elvira, Riccardo was promised her hand in marriage by her father, who subsequently informed him that Elvira had confessed her love for Arturo, a Stuart partisan, and that, although he was distressed that she should have chosen a political enemy, he was not prepared to stand in the way of his daughter's happiness and had agreed to allow her marriage to Arturo. Bruno now attempts to comfort Riccardo by reminding him that he has been chosen to lead the Puritan troops, but Riccardo can think only of his love for Elvira ('Bel sogno beato').

Act I, scene ii. Elvira's apartment in the castle. Elvira tells her uncle, Giorgio, whom she loves as a second father, that she will die of grief if she is dragged to the altar to marry Riccardo ('Sai com' arde in petto mio'). When Giorgio assures her that he has persuaded her father to allow her to marry the Cavalier, Arturo, whom she loves, Elvira is overjoyed. She and Giorgio leave to greet Arturo, whose arrival they hear announced by the castle's retainers and soldiers.

Act I, scene iii. The great hall of the castle. Arturo and his attendants enter laden with bridal gifts, including a long white veil, and Arturo addresses words of love

to Elvira ('A te, o cara'). Gualtiero announces that he will have to absent himself from his daughter's wedding, as he must escort a female prisoner to Parliament, in London. After Elvira has left to dress for the wedding, the prisoner seizes an opportunity to approach Arturo, identifying herself as Enrichetta, widow of the recently executed Charles I. Arturo resolves to help her escape. Elvira now returns, dressed for her wedding and carrying her veil. Singing light-heartedly ('Son vergin vezzosa'), she places the veil on Enrichetta's head to see how it will look, and then rushes off to finish her preparations for the wedding. Enrichetta begins to remove the veil but Arturo prevents her, realizing that it makes an excellent disguise. He is about to leave the castle with her when Riccardo rushes in. Thinking that he has found Arturo with his bride, Riccardo exclaims that he cannot allow her to marry a royalist, an enemy of the Puritan cause. The two men draw swords, and when Enrichetta attempts to stop them from fighting she inadvertently loses her veil. Recognizing the prisoner, Riccardo coldly permits her and Arturo to leave.

When Elvira and the others return to begin the wedding procession to the chapel, they discover that the bridegroom has left the castle with the female prisoner. Elvira is so distressed that her mind immediately begins to give way and she imagines herself in the chapel being married to Arturo ('O vieni al tempio').

Act II. A hall in the castle, with a view of the fortifications and, in the distance, the camp of the opposing Stuart army. The Puritan retainers are discussing Elvira's pitiful condition. When Giorgio enters he is asked for news of her, and he describes how Elvira wanders about the castle and its grounds, garlanded with flowers, her hair in disarray, at times imagining that she is being married to Arturo and at other times weeping and longing for death ('Cinta di fiori'). Riccardo arrives to announce that Parliament has condemned Arturo to death, and Elvira enters, unable to recognize her friends, and imagines that she sees Arturo ('Qui la voce sua soave'). After she has left, Giorgio tells Riccardo that, for the sake of Elvira, he must save his rival Arturo from execution ('Il rival salvar tu dei'). Riccardo is moved by Giorgio's words, but both men agree that if, on the morrow, Arturo should fight against them with the Stuart forces, he must be defeated ('Suoni la tromba').

Act III. The countryside near the fortress. As a violent storm gradually subsides, Arturo enters, congratulating himself on having eluded his enemies and made his way back to the castle where he hopes to find Elvira. Hearing her voice singing plaintively in the distance, he takes up her song ('A una fonte'), but conceals himself when he hears soldiers searching for him. Elvira enters, and she and Arturo greet each other ecstatically. He explains to her that the woman with whom he had fled the castle was the Queen.

Elvira and Arturo swear their love for each other ('Vieni fra queste braccia'),

but when military music is heard Elvira's mind begins to wander again. She imagines she is losing Arturo, and her cries bring soldiers rushing to the scene, among them Riccardo and Giorgio. Arturo is seized, and Riccardo informs him that he has been sentenced to death. The word death ('morte') shocks Elvira back to her senses, and the situation of the lovers is pitied by all ('Credeasi, misera'). Suddenly a fanfare is heard, followed by the arrival of a messenger who announces that the Stuarts have been defeated and that a victorious Cromwell has granted amnesty to all prisoners. Everyone rejoices at this unexpected happy outcome.

Although it may lack the dramatic cohesion of *Norma*, Bellini's final opera contains some of his most beautiful and most characteristic music. The soprano and tenor roles of Elvira and Arturo abound in soulful and affecting melodies. Elvira's 'mad scene' consists of the elegantly melancholy 'Qui la voce sua soave', one of the most beautiful arias ever composed, with its magnificent and feverishly brilliant cabaletta ('Vien, diletto'). The stirring duet 'Suoni la tromba' brought the entire audience to its feet at the premiere, and the performance could not continue until Bellini had appeared on stage to acknowledge the applause.

The tessitura of Arturo's music is dauntingly high, rising to the tenor's C sharp in the reprise of the long, gracefully beguiling melody of his elegant entrance aria, 'A te, o cara'. He produces a D natural (twice) in his Act III duet with Elvira, the impassioned 'Vieni fra queste braccia', and in the final ensemble ('Credeasi, misera') a high F sung in the *voix mixte* or supported falsetto which most tenors of Bellini's day used even for less stratospheric notes, but which held no terrors for Rubini. (On one recording of the opera Nicolai Gedda demonstrates how to produce a high F à la Rubini, while on another Luciano Pavarotti demonstrates how not to, by employing a poorly supported falsetto.) Vocally the most dazzling of Bellini's operas, *I puritani* is a work which has a special place in the affections of enthusiasts for the bel canto style of early nineteenth-century Italian opera. Rossini considered that, along with *Norma*, it offered the most unmistakable proof of Bellini's greatness.

Famous modern interpreters of the role of Elvira have included Joan Sutherland, Maria Callas, Beverly Sills and June Anderson. The high-lying tenor role of Arturo has been sung to great acclaim by Nicolai Gedda and Alfredo Kraus. Of a 1963 concert performance at Carnegie Hall in New York with Sutherland and Gedda, a critic in *Opera* wrote:

For sheer bravura and unbelievable perfection Joan Sutherland's performance as Elvira was the highlight of the season. She has never been so free, so

radiant, so transcendent; and when Nicolai Gedda soared to a high D in their duet in the last act and Miss Sutherland disappeared into the tonal stratosphere, the audience could scarcely be blamed for becoming hysterical.

An equally magnificent performance in Philadelphia two nights later, with the same cast, was recorded live.

Recommended recordings: Beverly Sills (Elvira), Nicolai Gedda (Arturo), Louis Quilico (Riccardo), Paul Plishka (Giorgio), Richard Van Allan (Gualtiero), with the Ambrosian Opera Chorus and London Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Julius Rudel. Opera Edition, MCD 80356 (this is the one with Gedda's spectacular high F); Joan Sutherland (Elvira), Luciano Pavarotti (Arturo), Nicolai Ghiaurov (Giorgio), Piero Cappuccilli (Riccardo), with the Welsh National Opera Chorus & Orchestra, conducted by Richard Bonyng. Decca 414 476-2.

ALBAN BERG

(b. Vienna, 1885 – d. Vienna, 1935)

Wozzeck

opera in three acts (approximate length: 1 hour, 35 minutes)

Wozzeck, a soldier *baritone*
 The Drum-Major *tenor*
 Andres, a soldier *tenor*
 The Captain *tenor*
 The Doctor *bass*
 An Idiot *tenor*
 Marie *soprano*
 Margret, Marie's neighbour *contralto*
 Marie's Child *treble*

LIBRETTO BY THE COMPOSER, BASED ON GEORG BÜCHNER'S PLAY WOYZECK; TIME: THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY; PLACE: A TOWN IN GERMANY; FIRST PERFORMED AT THE STAATSOPER, BERLIN, 14 DECEMBER 1925

It was after he had attended the Viennese premiere in 1914 of Büchner's play *Woyzeck* (at the time spelt *Wozzeck*, due to someone's misreading of the playwright's handwriting) that Alban Berg began to construct a libretto from Büchner's text and to make some musical sketches for the opera he felt immediately inspired to write. But World War I intervened, and it was not until the middle of 1919 that he managed to finish the first of the opera's three acts. By 1922 Berg's *Wozzeck* was completed and orchestrated; a concert performance of excerpts was conducted by Hermann Scherchen in Frankfurt in 1924. The opera's premiere in Berlin, conducted by Erich Kleiber, required thirty-four orchestral rehearsals and fourteen full rehearsals with the singers, for Berg's complex score was found exceedingly difficult to perform. Despite some interruptions from the audience during the first performance, the opera was produced in a number of other German and Austrian towns until, after the Nazis came to power in 1933, it was labelled decadent and was suppressed.

During his brief life, the German playwright Georg Büchner (1813–1837), whose socialist sympathies were aroused in his student days by the ideals of the French Revolution, wrote two starkly realistic plays, *Woyzeck* and *Danton's Tod* (Danton's Death), and a satirical comedy, *Leonce and Lena*, none of which were staged until several decades after his death. *Woyzeck* is a terse expression of Büchner's sympathy for the brutalized lower echelons of society in nineteenth-century Germany.

Act I, scene i. The Captain's room. It is morning. The Captain is being shaved by his batman, the illiterate, simple-minded, highly nervous Wozzeck. He teases Wozzeck for having produced a child out of wedlock, and is disconcerted when Wozzeck is provoked to assert that 'we poor folk' cannot afford the morality of the rich.

Act I, scene ii. A field outside the town, in late afternoon. Wozzeck and his friend Andres, a fellow soldier, are cutting wood. Andres sings a cheerful folk song, while Wozzeck, who feels the place to be haunted, imagines the sunset to be a great fire consuming the world.

Act I, scene iii. Marie's house, in the evening. Marie, the mother of Wozzeck's Child, is talking to her neighbour Margret, when a military band passes her window and she acknowledges a wave from the Drum-Major. Margret comments on Marie's interest in soldiers, and the two women quarrel. Marie sings her Child to sleep with a lullaby, and Wozzeck appears at the window, babbling confusedly of the terror he experienced in the field that afternoon. After he has run off, the distraught Marie also rushes out.

Act I, scene iv. The Doctor's study, on the afternoon of the following day. In return for a small amount of money, Wozzeck has agreed to act as a guinea pig for the Doctor's experiments concerning diet. The Doctor complains of Wozzeck's behaviour, listens to him raving about his visions in the field, and then contemplates the fame he expects to achieve through the medical discoveries that will result from his study of Wozzeck.

Act I, scene v. Outside Marie's house. Twilight. Marie is talking to the boastful Drum-Major. When he embraces her she at first resists, but soon she changes her mind and leads him into the house.

Act II, scene i. Marie's room. Marie admires herself and her new earrings in a broken mirror, while simultaneously trying to get her Child to sleep. Wozzeck arrives and is suspicious of the earrings, which she tells him she has found. He contemplates the now sleeping Child, then gives Marie some money he has received from the Captain and the Doctor. After he has left, Marie expresses remorse at her infidelity to Wozzeck.

Act II, scene ii. A street. The Doctor, hurrying along, is overtaken by the Captain, whom he upsets with his talk of disease and death. The two men stop Wozzeck as he passes and taunt him with innuendoes about Marie and the Drum-Major. They follow the distraught Wozzeck as he rushes off.

Act II, scene iii. Outside Marie's house. Wozzeck confronts Marie with his suspicions. When he seems about to strike her, she warns him, 'Rather a knife in my heart than lay a hand on me.' Wozzeck repeats her words in a daze as she enters the house.

Act II, scene iv. The garden of a tavern, in the evening. Soldiers and their women are drinking and dancing to the tune of a slow ländler. Wozzeck enters to find Marie dancing with the Drum-Major. The soldiers, led by Andres, sing a hunting song, an apprentice climbs on a table to deliver a drunken discourse, and an Idiot appears, talking incoherently to Wozzeck of blood. As the dancing is resumed, Wozzeck can think of nothing but blood.

Act II, scene v. The barracks, at night. The soldiers are asleep, except for Wozzeck, who tells a somnolent Andres that thinking of the tavern is keeping him awake. The Drum-Major staggers into the room, boasting of his sexual conquest that evening and hinting at the woman's identity. When Wozzeck refuses to drink with him the Drum-Major attacks him, beats him viciously and leaves. Wozzeck sits on his bed, staring vacantly in front of him.

Act III, scene i. Marie's room, at night. Alone with her Child, Marie reads in her Bible, by candlelight, the story of the woman taken in adultery. She prays for mercy.

Act III, scene ii. A path by a pond in the wood, at night. Marie and Wozzeck are walking by the pond. She wants to go home, but he prevents her. He recalls their first meeting, kisses her, and then, as a blood-red moon rises, takes out a knife and cuts her throat.

Act III, scene iii. The tavern, later that night. Youths and girls are dancing a polka. Wozzeck watches, and then he calls Margret over and begins to make love to her. When she notices blood on his hand he tells her he has cut himself and then rushes off, pushing his way through the crowd that has gathered around them.

Act III, scene iv. The path by the pond. Wozzeck has returned to search for the knife, which he had dropped. Finding it, he throws it into the water and watches it sink then walks into the pond to wash away the blood which seems to him now to have spread all over him. He drowns. The Doctor and the Captain arrive in time to hear a sound which the Doctor thinks may be that of a man drowning, but the Captain, made uneasy by the atmosphere of the place, drags the Doctor away.

A dramatic orchestral interlude, recapitulating the opera's main themes, precedes the final scene.

Act III, scene v. The street outside Marie's house, the next morning. Children are playing, among them Marie's Child. Other children arrive, one of whom tells Marie's Child that its mother is dead. The Child, who does not understand, at first continues to play on an imaginary hobby-horse, but then runs off after the others.

Berg studied composition with Arnold Schoenberg, whom he eventually followed down the path of atonalism, a method of composing without using a key system which stayed in vogue for two or three decades in the first half of the twentieth century. However, it was only after the composition of *Wozzeck* that Berg completely embraced Schoenberg's twelve-note method of composition. The structure of *Wozzeck's* musical language is complex, but its dramatic effect is immediate and overwhelming, even though Berg makes frequent use of the unsatisfactory device, borrowed from Schoenberg, of *Sprechgesang* (speech-song), a compromise between speech and song in which the singer's voice hits the pitch of each note but does not sustain it, dropping instead into the cadences of speech. The problem with *Sprechgesang* is that, as the critic Ernest Newman expressed in an essay published eight years after Berg's death, 'it fails to carry conviction either as song, as speech, or as a fusion of the two; it is neither speech achieving melody nor song biting like speech, but a bastard by-product of speech and song, which neither captivates the ear nor commands the assent of the intellect.'

Berg himself described his three-act opera, somewhat dauntingly, as an A-B-A

structure of which the central act, a 'symphony in five movements', is preceded by an act the five scenes of which are 'five character pieces', and is followed by one of which the orchestral interlude and five scenes are 'Inventions'. Fortunately, in an article published three years after the premiere of *Wozzeck*, he wrote that 'from the moment the curtain rises until it falls for the last time, no-one in the audience ought to notice anything of these various fugues and inventions, suites and sonata movements, variations and passacaglias.' Berg makes extensive use of the *Sprechgesang* technique, but his music also moves towards a simpler language to express less complex emotions or feelings; for instance, in Marie's lullaby or in Andres's hunting song. The influence of Mahler, too, is evident in *Wozzeck*, especially in the tavern scene in Act II, which begins with soldiers and their girls dancing a slow ländler, which is soon followed by a waltz. The orchestral interlude preceding the opera's final scene is one of the most impressive sections of the entire work. It quotes music from earlier scenes, but begins with an adagio for strings, which is thought to derive from a symphony that Berg began composing in 1913 but soon abandoned.

Despite its frequent use of *Sprechgesang*, Berg's wonderfully evocative and expressive *Wozzeck* is one of the masterpieces of twentieth-century opera. A number of famous baritones have been attracted to its title role, among them Tito Gobbi, Geraint Evans, Hermann Uhde and Eberhard Waechter. At the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, in 1931 the tenor role of the Drum-Major was sung by the then thirty-year-old high baritone Nelson Eddy, who later had a successful career in Hollywood films.

Recommended recording: Franz Grundheber (Wozzeck), Hildegard Behrens (Marie), Heinz Zednik (Captain), Aage Haugland (Doctor), Philip Langridge (Andres), Walter Raffeyner (Drum-major), Anna Gonda (Margret), Peter Jelosits (Idiot), with the Vienna Boys' Choir, Vienna State Opera Chorus, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Claudio Abbado. DGG 423 587-2. A first-rate cast offers vivid characterizations, and the great Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra responds superbly to Abbado's highly dramatic direction.

Lulu

opera in a prologue and three acts (approximate length: 2 hours, 50 minutes)

Lulu *high soprano*

Countess Geschwitz *dramatic mezzo-soprano*

A Wardrobe-Mistress *contralto*
 A Schoolboy *contralto*
 The Doctor *spoken role*
 The Painter *lyric tenor*
 Dr Schoen *heroic baritone*
 Alwa Schoen, his son *heroic tenor*
 An Animal-Tamer *bass*
 Rodrigo, an athlete *bass*
 Schigolch, an old man *high character bass*
 The Prince *tenor*
 The Theatre Director *buffo bass*
 The Marquis *tenor*
 The Professor *tenor*
 Jack the Ripper *baritone*

LIBRETTO BY THE COMPOSER, BASED ON FRANK WEDEKIND'S PLAYS *ERDGEIST* AND *DIE BÜCHSE DER PANDORA*; TIME: THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY; PLACE: A GERMAN TOWN, PARIS AND LONDON; FIRST PERFORMED, IN INCOMPLETE TWO-ACT FORM, AT THE STADTTHEATER, ZÜRICH, 2 JUNE 1937; FIRST PERFORMANCE OF THE THREE-ACT VERSION, COMPLETED BY FRIEDRICH CERHA, AT THE PARIS OPÉRA, 24 FEBRUARY 1979

After the premiere in 1925 of his first opera, *Wozzeck*, Berg decided to write another, and he began to look for a subject. He soon found what he wanted in two plays by the German playwright Frank Wedekind, *Erdgeist* (Earth Spirit) and *Die Büchse der Pandora* (Pandora's Box). Their central character is Lulu, a beautiful, sensuous creature who drifts from promiscuity to prostitution. Fashioning a libretto from both plays, Berg began work on the opera that was to occupy him for several years and that was still not complete when he died on Christmas Eve in 1935, at the age of fifty. He had almost finished the work in short score and had orchestrated the first two acts but very little of the third.

Berg's widow, Helene, asked first Arnold Schoenberg and then Anton von Webern to complete *Lulu* so that it could be performed, but both composers declined, and when the opera was given its premiere in Zurich in 1937 it was in the unfinished state in which Berg had left it. Helene Berg subsequently refused to allow the orchestration of Act III to be completed by others, and it was only after her death in 1976 that *Lulu* was performed complete, the orchestration of Act III having been finished by another Viennese composer, Friedrich Cerha.

The German playwright and actor Frank Wedekind (1864–1918), though influenced by the naturalism of August Strindberg, is generally considered a forerunner of the expressionists. His first plays, *Die junge Welt* (The Young World) and *Frühlings Erwachen* (Spring's Awakening), deal with the problems created by adolescent ignorance of sex, while *Erdegeist* (1895) and *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1904) portray sexual licence with a frankness that many in Wedekind's audience found shocking. The loose and shambling structure of the 'Lulu' plays is reflected in the rather shapeless libretto that Berg assembled from them.

Prologue. The Animal-Tamer, whip in hand, appears before the curtain to introduce his beasts, among them Lulu.

Act I, scene i. The Painter's studio. Lulu is having her portrait painted, watched by her ex-lover Dr Schoen, whose son Alwa, a writer, arrives to take his father to a performance of his play. When the two men have left, the Painter attempts to make love to Lulu, but is interrupted by the sudden arrival of Lulu's elderly husband, who immediately collapses in a state of shock and dies. Apparently unmoved, Lulu realizes that she is now both free and rich.

Act I, scene ii. An elegantly furnished room in Lulu's house. She is now married to the Painter, and his finished portrait of her is hanging on a wall. Lulu reads a letter from Dr Schoen which, to her annoyance, announces his engagement. Schigolch, an old beggar who considers himself Lulu's adoptive father, enters. He is delighted to find Lulu living in such luxury, but leaves when Dr Schoen arrives to say farewell to Lulu. She tells Schoen that her husband seems not to notice anything she does. When the Painter enters, Lulu leaves, and Schoen reveals to her husband that he was Lulu's lover for years, and has bought every picture the Painter has sold in order to provide Lulu with riches. The Painter's immediate response to this revelation is to rush out and slit his throat in the bathroom. Alwa Schoen enters, announcing that revolution has broken out in Paris. His father is worried that the suicide of Lulu's husband may affect his own marriage plans, and Lulu expresses her confidence that Dr Schoen will, in due course, change those plans and marry her.

Act I, scene iii. A theatre dressing-room. Lulu, now a famous dancer, is visited by Alwa Schoen, who is in love with her. She leaves to go on stage, while Alwa considers writing an opera about her. Lulu returns, claiming that the sight of Dr Schoen's fiancée in the audience has made her too ill to dance. A Prince, who wants to take Lulu to Africa, enters and sings her praises. When Dr Schoen arrives, Lulu threatens to run off to Africa with the Prince, at which Schoen agrees to break off his engagement to his fiancée.

Act II, scene i. A magnificent room in Dr Schoen's house. Lulu is now married to Schoen, whom she makes wildly jealous by flirting with the lesbian Countess Geschwitz, the athlete Rodrigo, and a Schoolboy whose meeting with her has been arranged by Schigolch. When Alwa Schoen arrives, the others hide. Dr Schoen overhears Lulu telling Alwa that she was responsible for his mother's death. Getting rid of the others, Dr Schoen brandishes a gun at Lulu and suggests that she should kill herself. Instead, she fires at Schoen, who dies calling on his son to avenge him. Despite Lulu's pleas Alwa calls the police, who arrest her. A silent film sequence (anticipating the next scene) shows Lulu's trial, her imprisonment and her eventual escape from a cholera ward with the aid of Countess Geschwitz.

Act II, scene ii. The same room, in a state of neglect. Countess Geschwitz, Alwa and Rodrigo the athlete await Schigolch, who is to take the Countess to the hospital to change places with Lulu. Schigolch arrives, and he and the Countess Geschwitz leave together. Soon, Schigolch returns with Lulu, whose sickly appearance causes the athlete to abandon his plan to marry her and take her to Paris as his performing partner. Lulu and Alwa Schoen leave for Paris together.

Act III, scene i. A salon in a Paris casino. The Marquis, a white-slave trafficker, threatens to expose Lulu to the police unless she agrees to be sold to a brothel in Cairo. The athlete and Schigolch attempt to get money from Lulu, the Marquis calls the police, and Lulu, dressed as a boy, escapes with Alwa.

Act III, scene ii. A garret in London. Alwa and Schigolch await the return of Lulu, who is now a prostitute and supporting them both. Lulu arrives with a client, a Professor whose pockets are picked by Schigolch. Her next client is a negro who has an altercation with Alwa and kills him. Lulu's final client turns out to be Jack the Ripper, who kills both her and Countess Geschwitz who has attempted to come to her aid.

The score of *Lulu*, in which Berg utilized Schoenberg's twelve-note system much more consistently than in *Wozzeck*, is a treasure-trove for musical analysts, for it was put together by Berg in an almost clinically intellectual manner, with the music of individual scenes fashioned to fit the requirements of various forms of absolute music. One scene is a rondo, another a movement in sonata form, a third a set of variations, and so on. In Act II, the music accompanying a silent film sequence is a palindrome, with the notes reading the same backwards as forwards.

Due to a large extent to its provenance in Wedekind's disjunct plays, *Lulu* is aesthetically less satisfying than Berg's earlier opera, *Wozzeck*, and it has to be admitted that its eponymous heroine is an absolutely repulsive creature. Remarkably,

however, although it is an uneven work, *Lulu* contains passages of great emotional impact, and its dramatic climaxes are shattering.

Recommended recording: Teresa Stratas (Lulu), Yvonne Minton (Countess Geschwitz), Franz Mazura (Dr Schoen), Kenneth Riegel (Alwa Schoen), Paris Opera Orchestra, conducted by Pierre Boulez. DGG 415 489–2. These are the singers and conductor of the 1979 Paris premiere of the complete work. An intensely exciting performance.

HECTOR BERLIOZ

(b. La Côte-Saint-André, Isère, 1803 – d. Paris, 1869)

Benvenuto Cellini

opera semiseria in two acts (approximate length: 2 hours, 40 minutes)

Benvenuto Cellini *tenor*
 Balducci, Papal treasurer *bass*
 Teresa, his daughter *soprano*
 Ascanio, Cellini's apprentice *mezzo-soprano*
 Fieramosca, a sculptor *baritone*
 Pope Clement VII *bass*
 Francesco, an artisan *tenor*
 Bernardino, an artisan *baritone*
 Pompeo, a ruffian *baritone*

LIBRETTO BY LÉON DE WAILLY AND AUGUSTE BARBIER; TIME: 1532; PLACE: ROME;
 FIRST PERFORMED AT THE PARIS OPÉRA, 10 SEPTEMBER 1838

Although Berlioz's talents were usually more impressively deployed in the concert hall than in the opera house, his great ambition was to succeed as a composer of opera. The enormous success of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* at the Paris Opéra in 1836 encouraged Berlioz to revise his first opera, *Benvenuto Cellini*, which, in its original form as an opera whose musical numbers were separated by spoken dialogue, had been rejected by the Opéra-Comique. Its libretto was very loosely adapted from the memoirs of the fifteenth-century Florentine sculptor

Benvenuto Cellini, which Berlioz had read shortly after his return from a year spent in Rome. (He called Cellini 'that bandit of genius'.) With its dialogue replaced by recitatives, *Benvenuto Cellini* was accepted by the Paris Opéra.

The work was a failure at its premiere in 1838, probably not so much due to its poor libretto – which uneasily attempts to juxtapose heroic and farcical genres – as to its unwieldy structure and the uneven quality of Berlioz's music. Also, the tenor Gilbert-Louis Duprez apparently sang badly in the title role. After four performances the opera disappeared from the stage until 1852, when Liszt staged it at Weimar, on which occasion Berlioz took the opportunity to revise his score, simplifying some of its technical difficulties and toning down the light-hearted elements that had been written with the Opéra-Comique in mind. At Liszt's suggestion, he also shortened the opera somewhat. For many years it continued to be performed in this Weimar version, but in recent times the Paris 1838 score has been preferred, though occasionally with the recitatives replaced by dialogue from the original Opéra-Comique version.

Act I, scene i. The house of Balducci, the papal treasurer. Shrove Monday, at night. Balducci is annoyed because the Pope has summoned the Florentine goldsmith Cellini to Rome to make a statue of Perseus, a commission that Balducci had hoped would be won by Fieramosca, the official Papal sculptor, whom Balducci intends to become his son-in-law. His daughter Teresa, however, has other plans. She is delighted to receive a note thrown in from the street by a masked reveller, Cellini, who enters after Balducci has left angrily, and who arranges with Teresa that they will elope on the following evening. Cellini and Teresa are overheard by Fieramosca (in the trio 'Demain soir, mardi gras'). When Balducci returns, suspicious at finding his daughter still awake so late, Cellini manages to make his escape from the house unobserved, but Fieramosca is discovered and dragged off by women neighbours to be given a ducking in the public bath house.

Act I, scene ii. The courtyard of a tavern in the Piazza Colonna, on Shrove Tuesday evening. Cellini and his fellow metalworkers plan their revenge on Balducci, who has sent only a meagre sum as advance payment for the statue of Perseus that Cellini must complete by the following morning. Fieramosca and his accomplice Pompeo make plans to frustrate Cellini's intended elopement with Teresa. At an open-air theatre on the other side of the piazza a play is performed, satirizing Balducci. Among the spectators are Cellini, his apprentice Ascanio, Fieramosca and Pompeo, all attired as monks, the guise in which Cellini has arranged to meet Teresa. A fight breaks out between the opposing factions, in the course of which Cellini stabs Pompeo, mortally wounding him. Cellini is seized

by the crowd but, in the confusion following the boom of a cannon to signal the end of the carnival, he escapes, and another 'monk', Fieramosca, is apprehended in his place.

Act II, scene i. Cellini's studio, at dawn on Ash Wednesday. Ascanio comforts Teresa, who is concerned for Cellini's safety. Cellini arrives, describes how he made his escape, and urges Teresa to flee with him immediately to Florence. Their departure is frustrated by the arrival of Balducci and Fieramosca, who denounce Cellini. The subsequent quarrel is interrupted by the arrival of Pope Clement VII. (At the opera's premiere in 1838 it was a Cardinal Salviati who appeared, the censor having forbidden the theatrical impersonation of a pope.) Annoyed at finding his statue not yet cast, the Pope issues an ultimatum. If Perseus is finished by the end of the day, Cellini will be pardoned and allowed to marry Teresa. If not, he will be hanged for the murder of Pompeo.

Act II, scene ii. Cellini's foundry, that evening. Ascanio sings a lively aria recounting the events of the day ('Tra la la, mais quai-je donc?'). In his aria, 'Sur les monts les plus sauvages', Cellini expresses his longing to exchange the cares of the artist for the simple life of a shepherd tending his flock on a remote mountainside. Fieramosca enters, challenging Cellini to a duel, and the two men go off to fight, leaving the foundry workers furious at their master's absence and in no mood to continue with their task. However, when Fieramosca returns and attempts to bribe them to leave Cellini and come to work for him instead, they turn on him in anger. Cellini reappears and berates Fieramosca for not having kept their rendezvous for the duel, and Fieramosca is now forced to help in the foundry.

The Pope arrives, and the casting of the statue begins. When Fieramosca announces that there is not enough metal to complete the work, Cellini orders all of his other precious statues to be melted down to replenish the furnace. The metal fills the mould, and the statue is cast. The Pope pardons Cellini, grants him Teresa's hand in marriage, and leaves a scene of general rejoicing.

Though its score may lack cohesion, some of *Benvenuto Cellini's* individual numbers represent Berlioz at his most resourceful in terms of rhythmic complexity and orchestral colouring; for example the charming, lyrically expansive trio, 'Demain soir, mardi gras', in Act I, and the scintillating carnival scene, some of the music of which Berlioz used for his *Carnaval romain* concert overture (1844). This scene also contains the goldsmiths' chorus, 'Honneurs aux maîtres ciseleurs', one of the musical highlights of the opera. There is also the beautiful duet, 'Sainte Vierge Marie', in which Teresa and Ascanio pray for Cellini's safety, with the monks chanting in the background. And Cellini's superb andante aria 'Sur les

monts les plus sauvages', in which he yearns for the simple life, provides the opera's most lyrical moment of repose, a complete contrast to the evocative rhythms of the forging scene. 'A variety of ideas, a vitality and zest and a brilliance of musical colour such as I shall perhaps never find again': this was Berlioz's own judgment on his opera. A fair verdict, but he should perhaps have added that the work's musical complexity makes it difficult to perform, and that some of the finest musical numbers present the most difficulties.

Recommended recording: Nicolai Gedda (Benvenuto Cellini), Christiane Eda-Pierre (Teresa), Jane Berbie (Ascanio), Robert Massard (Fieramosca), Jules Bastin (Balducci), Roger Soyer (Pope Clement VII), Derek Blackwell (Francesco), Robert Lloyd (Bernardino), Raimund Herincx (Pompeo), with the Royal Opera House Chorus and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Colin Davis. Philips 416 955–2.

For many years Nicolai Gedda was the leading exponent of the role of Cellini, and Colin Davis remains the finest Berlioz conductor. An exemplary performance and recording.

Béatrice et Bénédict

opéra comique in two acts (approximate length: 1 hour, 30 minutes)

Béatrice, niece of Leonato *soprano*
 Bénédict, an officer *tenor*
 Hero, daughter of Leonato *soprano*
 Claudio, an officer *baritone*
 Don Pedro, a general in the army *bass*
 Leonato, governor of Messina *spoken role*
 Ursula, Hero's companion *mezzo-soprano*
 Somarone, a music master *bass*

LIBRETTO BY THE COMPOSER, BASED ON SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY *MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING*; TIME: THE PAST; PLACE: MESSINA, SICILY; FIRST PERFORMED AT THE NEUES THEATER, BADEN-BADEN, 9 AUGUST 1862

Commissioned in 1858 by the theatre attached to the casino in the German spa town of Baden-Baden to write an opera about the Thirty Years War, Berlioz persuaded the management to allow him instead to produce an operatic version

of Shakespeare's comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*, under the title of *Béatrice et Bénédict*. (Shakespeare's spelling of his hero's name is Benedick.) Berlioz himself wrote the libretto, dispensing with Don John and the sub-plot involving the attempted discrediting of Hero, and substituting a tedious new character, the musician Somarone, for Shakespeare's engaging Dogberry.

Act I. The garden of Leonato's palace. The citizens of Messina rejoice because a threatened Moorish invasion has been averted and await the return of their victorious army. Leonato's daughter Hero learns that her fiancé, Claudio, has distinguished himself in battle, and her cousin Béatrice enquires disdainfully after Bénédict, with whom she has long enjoyed a relationship based on supposedly witty bickering.

The citizens dance a *sicilienne* and then disperse. Hero joyously anticipates her reunion with Claudio in an attractive two-part aria, its calm opening *largetto* ('Je vais le voir') followed by an exhilarating *allegro* ('Il me revient fidele'). When Bénédict, Claudio and their general, Don Pedro, arrive, the light-hearted banter between Béatrice and Bénédict ('Comment le dedain pourrait-il mourir?') amuses Bénédict's two comrades, who hatch a plot to make Béatrice and Bénédict fall in love with each other.

After the music master Somarone has rehearsed his chorus and orchestra in their contribution to the forthcoming wedding of Claudio and Hero, Bénédict overhears his colleagues and Leonato discussing, in apparent seriousness, Béatrice's love for him. He resolves to requite her love ('Ah, je vais l'aimer'). As night falls, Hero and her companion Ursula, who have practised a similar deception upon Béatrice, extol the beauty of the evening in a lyrical duet ('Nuit paisible et sereine').

Act II. A room in Leonato's palace. After an *entr'acte* which makes use of the *sicilienne* from the previous scene, the act begins with dialogue, followed by Somarone leading a drinking song ('Le vin de Syracuse'). Béatrice enters, reflecting on the true nature of her feeling for Bénédict in an aria ('Il m'en souvient') in whose concluding section ('Je l'aime donc?') she discovers that feeling to be one of love. She confesses that this is so, in an exquisite trio with Hero and Ursula ('Je vais d'un coeur aimant').

Béatrice and Bénédict are still reluctant to admit to each other their changed feelings, but after a Wedding March and the exchange of contracts between Hero and Claudio they are finally persuaded to confess that they love each other, and to sign their own wedding contract. The opera ends with a sparkling duet for Béatrice and Bénédict ('L'Amour est un flambeau').

Béatrice et Bénédict, its fifteen numbers separated by spoken dialogue, can hardly be regarded as a satisfactory musical adaptation of Shakespeare's play. A less complex work than *Much Ado About Nothing*, it is, however, a pleasant romantic comedy whose lively and brilliantly scored overture (utilizing tunes to be heard later in the opera) became a highly popular concert item. The pace of Berlioz's score throughout the opera is, in general, leisurely.

Recommended recording: Susan Graham (Béatrice), Jean-Luc Viala (Bénédict), Sylvia McNair (Hero), Gilles Cachemaille (Claudio), Gabriel Bacquier (Somarone), with the chorus and orchestra of the Opéra de Lyon, conducted by John Nelson. Erato Musifrance 2292-45773-2. A fine cast, with Viala a superb Bénédict, a stylish French orchestra and chorus, an American conductor well-known for his Berlioz performances, and the dialogue in full delivered by French actors.

Les Troyens

(The Trojans)

grand opéra in five acts (approximate length: 3 hours, 45 minutes)

Cassandra, daughter of Priam *soprano*
 Ascanius, son of Aeneas *soprano*
 Hecuba, wife of Priam *mezzo-soprano*
 Polyxenes, daughter of Priam *soprano*
 Aeneas, a Trojan warrior *tenor*
 Choroebus, betrothed to Cassandra *baritone*
 Pantheus, a Trojan priest *bass*
 Ghost of Hector *bass*
 Priam, King of Troy *bass*
 Helenus, son of Priam *tenor*
 Andromache, widow of Hector *mime*
 Astyanax, her son *mime*
 A Greek Captain *bass*
 Dido, Queen of Carthage *mezzo-soprano*
 Anna, her sister *contralto*
 Iopas, a Carthaginian poet *tenor*
 Narbal, minister of Dido *bass*
 Hylas, a young Phrygian sailor *tenor*
 The god Mercury *bass*

LIBRETTO BY THE COMPOSER, BASED ON BOOKS 1, 2 AND 4 OF VIRGIL'S *AENEID*; TIME: CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY; PLACE: TROY AND CARTHAGE; PART TWO, COMPRISING ACTS III, IV AND V, FIRST PERFORMED AT THE THÉÂTRE-LYRIQUE, PARIS, 4 NOVEMBER 1863. FIRST PERFORMED COMPLETE AT THE HOFTHEATER, KARLSRUHE, 5 DECEMBER 1890

From his boyhood, when he first made the acquaintance of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Berlioz was fascinated by the ancient world of Greece and Rome. However, it was not until he reached middle age that he felt ready to compose an opera about events in classical antiquity. Writing his own libretto based on Virgil, he proceeded to create *Les Troyens*, a grand opera in two parts. It used to be thought far too long to be staged complete in one evening, although it actually takes less than four hours to perform (excluding intervals). The work was not staged in its entirety until twenty-one years after its composer's death. Part Two alone, 'Les Troyens à Carthage' (The Trojans at Carthage), had its premiere in 1863, but it disappeared from the repertoire of the Théâtre-Lyrique after twenty-one performances – some with extensive cuts – given over a period of six weeks. Part One, 'La Prise de Troie' (The Capture of Troy), had to wait until 1890, when finally a complete performance of *Les Troyens* was given in Karlsruhe on two consecutive nights. Although some stagings in the first half of the twentieth century were of all five acts, they were never entirely complete. At the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, in 1957 the opera was performed virtually complete, and a Scottish Opera production in 1969 claimed to have subjected the work to no cuts at all.

Part One: 'La Prise de Troie' (The Capture of Troy)

Act I. The abandoned camp of the Greek army outside the walls of Troy. The Greeks have apparently departed, leaving behind them only a huge wooden horse. The Trojans emerge from the city to examine it. When Cassandra, prophetess and daughter of the Trojan King Priam, tells her betrothed, Choroebus, that she has dreamed of the downfall of Troy, and urges him to flee, Choroebus dismisses her fears ('Quitte-nous des ce soir'). King Priam and his wife, Hecuba, lead their people in a hymn of thanks for deliverance from the Greeks, while Andromache, widow of the slain hero Hector, enters with her infant son, in silent mourning for her husband.

Aeneas, a Trojan warrior, enters with the shocking announcement that the high priest Laocoon was devoured by sea serpents when he attempted to incite the populace to destroy the wooden horse which he suspected of being some kind of Greek ambush. The citizens react in horror ('Châtiment effroyable'). King

Priam orders the horse to be brought into the city. Cassandra utters a warning, but even the ominous sound of clashing arms from within the horse fails to deter the citizens of Troy from dragging it into their city.

Act II, scene i. A room in Aeneas's palace. The Ghost of Hector appears to Aeneas, telling him to flee from Troy and to found a new empire in Italy ('Ah! fuir, fils de Vénus'). The Greeks who were hidden in the horse have captured Troy, and King Priam is dead. Choroebus enters with a band of followers, and Aeneas joins them as they rush off to fight.

Act II, scene ii. The temple of Vesta. The Trojan women are praying at the altar of the goddess ('Ha! puissante Cybèle') when Cassandra rushes in. She tells them that Aeneas and his followers will escape to build a new Troy in Italy, but that they, the women of Troy, should kill themselves rather than become slaves of the Greeks. Those few women who are afraid to do so are driven out by the others, and as the first of the Greek soldiers enter Cassandra stabs herself. Her example is followed by the other women, some of whom leap from the colonnade, meeting death with a cry of 'Italy' on their lips.

Part Two: 'Les Troyens à Carthage' (The Trojans at Carthage)

Act III. Dido's palace in Carthage. In the city founded by Dido after she and her followers had fled from Troy, the people are celebrating their new-found prosperity. They greet their Queen, Dido ('Gloire à Didon'), who, when left alone with her sister Anna, confesses to her that she feels a strange sadness. Anna advises her to remarry and thus provide Carthage with the security of a king, but Dido resists, swearing to be faithful to the memory of her dead husband, although to herself she confesses that Anna's suggestion has its attractions ('Sa voix fait naître dans mon sein').

Iopas, the court poet, enters to announce that a fleet of foreign ships has been driven ashore by storms. The shipwrecked sailors appear. They are the Trojans, among them a disguised Aeneas. Aeneas's son, Ascanius, presents Dido with ceremonial trophies from Troy, and one of the Trojans, the priest Pantheus, explains that they were on their way to Italy to found the new Troy.

Narbal, Dido's minister, arrives with the news that a threatened invasion by the Numidians has now begun. Aeneas reveals his identity and offers to defend Carthage. Dido gratefully accepts his offer, and after leaving Ascanius in her care Aeneas departs to lead the combined Carthaginians and Trojans into battle against the Numidians.

Act IV, scene i. A forest near Carthage. Naiads, bathing in a stream, are frightened off by the arrival of a hunting party. A storm breaks out. Separated from the

other hunters, Dido and Aeneas take refuge in a cave. The intensity of their passionate love for each other is symbolized by flashes of lightning, as dancing fauns and nymphs utter cries of 'Italy!' (The music of this scene is the orchestral sequence known in concert performances as the Royal Hunt and Storm.)

Act IV, scene ii. A garden of Dido's palace by the sea. Aeneas has defeated the Numidians, but Anna and Narbal, conversing, disagree as to whether the love of Dido and Aeneas will prove advantageous to Carthage. The lovers enter, with Ascanius and attendants, and celebratory dances are performed before them. At Dido's command Iopas sings ('O blonde Cérès'). Aeneas informs Dido that Andromache, Hector's widow, has now married the son of her husband's slayer, and this leads Dido to ponder the possibility of remarrying.

All marvel at the beauty of the evening ('Tout n'est que paix et charme') and, when finally they are alone, Dido and Aeneas declare their love for each other in an exquisite duet ('Nuit d'ivresse et d'extase infinie'), some of its text charmingly modelled on the love scene between Lorenzo and Jessica in Act V of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. As Dido and Aeneas wander off together, Mercury, the messenger of the gods, appears, uttering three times an admonitory cry to Aeneas of 'Italy!'

Act V, scene i. The harbour at Carthage, by night. Hylas, a young Phrygian sailor on one of the Trojan vessels, sings nostalgically of his homeland ('Vallon sonore'). Pantheus and the Trojan chiefs agree that they must set sail for Italy immediately, to the dismay of two Trojan sentries who are annoyed at having to leave their easy life in Carthage.

Aeneas enters and soliloquizes on the conflict between his love for Dido and his duty to obey the command of the gods and sail for Italy ('Inutiles regrets'). When the ghosts of Priam, Hector, Cassandra and Choroebus appear, urging him to do his duty, Aeneas rouses the sleeping Trojan soldiers, ordering them to prepare for departure. Dido enters hurriedly, begging him to stay, but Aeneas, as he hears the distant sound of the Trojan march, rushes on board his ship with a cry of 'Italy!'

Act V, scene ii. A room in Dido's palace. Told that the Trojan fleet has put out to sea, Dido at first expresses her fury, which when she is alone turns to bitter grief. She determines upon death ('Ah, je vais mourir'), wondering if Aeneas will see from his ship the flames of her funeral pyre. She then bids a farewell to the city of Carthage ('Adieu, fière cité').

Act V, scene iii. A terrace overlooking the sea. Narbal and Anna pronounce a solemn curse on Aeneas and the Trojans, and Dido mounts the steps of the pyre. Taking Aeneas's sword, she utters a prophecy that one day a warrior (Hannibal)

will arise to avenge the shame brought on her by Aeneas. She then stabs herself. As she dies, Dido is vouchsafed a vision of Rome, the eternal city.

Admirers of Berlioz consider *Les Troyens* his masterpiece, but others have found it excessively long for the amount of really inspired music it contains. The English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams referred to the opera tantalizingly as 'the second most boring opera in the world', and more than one distinguished writer on opera has criticized the work not only for its unevenness of musical quality but also for its shortcomings as drama. It has to be admitted that Berlioz lacked the theatrical instincts of such dedicated composers of opera as Meyerbeer, Verdi or Wagner; he was not, in the sense that they were, a man of the theatre. Nevertheless, *Les Troyens*, though it may include stretches in which tedium is not always kept at bay, contains some of Berlioz's most beautiful music. The orchestral *Royal Hunt and Storm*, the exquisite love duet of Dido and Aeneas ('Nuit d'ivresse et d'extase infinie'), and Aeneas's stirring 'Inutiles regrets' are but a few of the opera's most effective numbers.

Les Troyens, requiring vast forces and many changes of scene, is a difficult opera to stage, and the role of Aeneas calls for a dramatic tenor of great range, vocal flexibility and stamina. Jon Vickers, one of the finest heroic tenors of his day, was a magnificent Aeneas at Covent Garden in 1957, a production, conducted by Rafael Kubelik, which led to a renaissance of interest in Berlioz's vast work. A definitive score was published in 1969, the composer's centennial year, and a new staging at Covent Garden conducted by Colin Davis in that year, with Jon Vickers repeating his acclaimed Aeneas, and the role of Dido shared by Josephine Veasey and Janet Baker, led to the release of a now famous recording. In 1974 the Metropolitan Opera, New York, staged the opera substantially complete, with Kubelik conducting, Vickers predictably superb as Aeneas and Christa Ludwig a Dido of great charm. In 2000 the Salzburg Festival oddly chose to present *Les Troyens*, one of the grandest epics ever composed, in a minimalist production, which was generally derided by critics and audiences.

Recommended recording: Jon Vickers (Aeneas), Josephine Veasey (Dido), Berit Lindholm (Cassandra), with the chorus and orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, conducted by Colin Davis. Philips 416 432–2. Davis gives a magisterial account of the work, Jon Vickers, predictably, is a splendidly heroic Aeneas, Josephine Veasey a commanding Dido, and Berit Lindholm an effective Cassandra. The large supporting cast includes some of the Royal Opera's most reliable performers of the time, and the quality of the recorded sound is superb.

GEORGES BIZET

(b. Paris, 1838 – d. Bougival, 1875)

Les Pêcheurs de perles

(The Pearl Fishers)

opera in three acts (approximate length: 1 hour, 45 minutes)

Leïla, priestess of Brahma *soprano*Nadir, a fisherman *tenor*Zurga, chief fisherman *baritone*Nourabad, high priest of Brahma *bass*

LIBRETTO BY EUGÈNE CORMON AND MICHEL CARRÉ; TIME: THE ANCIENT PAST;
PLACE: CEYLON; FIRST PERFORMED AT THE THÉÂTRE LYRIQUE, PARIS, 30 SEPTEMBER 1863

Throughout his brief life Bizet's main interest remained the composition of operas, several of which were never performed, among them his first, a one-act *opéra comique*, *La Maison du docteur* (The Doctor's House), written during his teenage student years, and the five-act *Don Rodrigue*, composed in 1873 immediately before he embarked upon *Carmen*. Bizet's earliest success came with a one-act comic opera, *Le Docteur Miracle*, which won a prize offered by Jacques Offenbach and was staged at Offenbach's theatre, the Bouffes-Parisiens, in 1857. Thereafter, although *Les Pêcheurs de perles* (1863), *La Jolie Fille de Perth* (The Fair Maid of Perth; 1866), *Djamileh* (1872) and Bizet's one undisputed masterpiece, *Carmen* (1875), were staged, only *Carmen* achieved a real and lasting success. *Les Pêcheurs de perles* was given no more than eighteen performances at its first appearance in 1863 and was not taken into the Théâtre Lyrique's repertoire. It was more than twenty years after Bizet's death that it began to be staged elsewhere, but it is now quite frequently revived.

Act I. A rocky beach in Ceylon. The pearl fishers are in celebratory mood, singing and dancing as they prepare their nets for the coming season. Reminded by one of their number, Zurga, that they must choose a leader, the other fishermen immediately select Zurga himself. A young fisherman, Nadir, now emerges from the forest, and Zurga greets him as a dear friend with whom he had lost contact. Nadir and Zurga had both fallen in love with a beautiful young woman whom they

had encountered at the Brahmin temple in the town of Kandy, but they had vowed to renounce her so as not to disturb their friendship. The two men now reminisce (*'Au fond du temple saint'*) and swear to remain friends (*'Amitié sainte'*).

A boat arrives, carrying Nourabad, the high priest of Brahma, and a veiled young woman, the virgin priestess whose task it will be to pray for the fishermen's safety during the coming season. The young priestess is welcomed with flowers by the fishermen (*'Sois la bienvenue'*) and takes the sacred oath of obedience administered by Zurga. As she does so, she and Nadir recognize each other, for she is Leïla, the young woman he and Zurga had fallen in love with in Kandy.

Leïla is conducted by Nourabad to the ruins of a temple on the cliff above the beach, where she is to keep her vigil. When the others have all departed, Nadir reflects on his love for her in a gently seductive aria (*'Je crois entendre encore'*), and then he falls asleep. Leïla emerges from the temple above, and sings an invocation to Brahma (*'O dieu Brahma'*), interrupted by the voice of Nadir who, awakened by her singing, ardently reaffirms his love.

Act II. The temple ruins, at night. Nourabad warns Leïla to be faithful to her religious vows. Before he leaves her to watch and pray throughout the night, Leïla tells him how, as a child, at the risk of her own life, she had saved the life of a stranger who, in return, gave her a necklace which she still wears. Left alone, she sings of her love for Nadir (*'Comme autrefois dans la nuit sombre'*). Nadir arrives, and a passionate love duet ensues (*'Ton coeur n'a pas compris le mien'*).

Nadir and Leïla agree to meet again the next day. However, as Nadir leaves, he is seen by Nourabad, who calls upon guards to pursue him. Nadir is captured and, incited by Nourabad, who accuses the lovers of sacrilege, an angry crowd calls for him and Leïla to be put to death. In order to save his friend, Zurga claims the right, as chief of the fishermen, to spare their lives. When Nourabad tears the veil from Leïla's face, Zurga recognizes her and, consumed with jealous fury, orders the lovers to be executed. As Leïla and Nadir are led away, all pray to Brahma for guidance.

Act III, scene i. Zurga's tent. Zurga recalls the past, regrets the present and, in a tender, lyrical aria (*'O Nadir, tendre ami de mon jeune âge'*), thinks fondly of his old friend whom he has condemned to death. Leïla, under guard, arrives to plead for Nadir's life. However, when Zurga realizes how greatly she loves his friend and rival his jealousy is aroused again, and he reaffirms the sentence of death upon them both. As Nourabad and the fishermen come to lead Leïla away, she removes her necklace and gives it to a young fisherman, asking him to see that her mother receives it. Zurga recognizes it as the necklace that he gave, years previously, to a young girl who saved his life.

Act III, scene ii. The place of execution: a funeral pyre beneath a statue of

Brahma. Preparations for the execution of Nadir and Leïla are under way when suddenly flames are seen in the sky, and Zurga enters to announce that the fishermen's camp is ablaze. The others rush off to save the camp, and Zurga tells the two captives that it was he who started the fire. He shows Leïla the necklace and urges her to escape with Nadir. As the lovers flee together, Zurga watches the villagers escaping through the forest and awaits the return of Nourabad, who will no doubt decide his fate.

Although Bizet was only twenty-four when he wrote it, *Les Pêcheurs de perles* is a mature and individual work with his melodic gift very much to the fore. There are naive touches of the exotic in its orchestration, to emphasize the fact that it is set in the East; in Ceylon, to be precise, although Mexico was the librettists' initial choice of locale. The opera's most popular numbers are the languid tenor aria 'Je crois entendre encore' and the duet for tenor and baritone, 'Au fond du temple saint', with its broad, sweeping melody.

Recommended recording: Barbara Hendricks (Leïla), John Aler (Nadir), Gino Quilico (Zurga), with the Toulouse Capitole Chorus and Orchestra conducted by Michel Plasson. EMI CDS 7 49837 2.

No one in recent years has sung the beautiful tenor aria, 'Je crois entendre encore' as enchantingly as Nicolai Gedda (who has recorded it on one of his recital discs). However, despite the superb performances of Gedda and Ernst Blanc as Nadir and Zurga in an earlier EMI recording conducted in masterly style by Pierre Dervaux, that version must yield pride of place to Michel Plasson's account of the opera. Plasson allows Bizet's sensuous melodies to speak for themselves in leisurely tempi which seem to have a natural sense of flow. Barbara Hendricks is a sweet-voiced Leïla, John Aler's high tenor is well suited to the role of Nadir, and Gino Quilico makes an ideal Zurga.

Carmen

opéra comique in four acts (approximate length: 2 hours, 45 minutes)

Carmen, a gypsy *mezzo-soprano*
 Don José, a corporal *tenor*
 Escamillo, a toreador *baritone*
 Micaëla, a peasant girl *soprano*
 Zuniga, a lieutenant *bass*

Morales, a corporal *baritone*
 Frasquita, a gypsy *soprano*
 Mercèdes, a gypsy *soprano*
 Le Dancaire, a smuggler *tenor or baritone*
 Le Remendado, a smuggler *tenor*
 Lillas Pastia, an innkeeper *spoken role*

LIBRETTO BY HENRI MEILHAC AND LUDOVIC HALÉVY, BASED ON THE NOVELLA *CARMEN*, BY PROSPER MÉRIMÉE; TIME: THE 1820S; PLACE: SEVILLE; FIRST PERFORMED AT THE OPÉRA-COMIQUE, PARIS, 3 MARCH 1875

In 1867 Bizet's four-act opera *La Jolie Fille de Perth* had its premiere in Paris at the Théâtre-Lyrique. Its libretto by Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges and Jules Adenis, loosely based on Sir Walter Scott's novel *The Fair Maid of Perth*, tells of the love of Henry Smith, an armourer, for Catherine Glover, the daughter of Simon, a glovemaking in the Scottish town of Perth. The opera closed after only eighteen performances, and five years later his next work for the stage, *Djamileh*, a comic opera in one act, was even less successful. In 1873 Bizet was invited to compose a new work for the Opéra-Comique, despite the failure of his *Djamileh* at that theatre in the previous year. The composer himself decided upon Prosper Mérimée's novella *Carmen* (first published in 1845) as his subject, and a libretto was commissioned from the experienced team of Meilhac and Halévy.

Prosper Mérimée (1803–70), a French novelist and playwright whose historical novels were highly regarded in his lifetime, was a civil servant whose interest in archaeology led to his being appointed Inspector of Ancient Monuments. His best-known work, *Carmen*, told the story of Don José, a simple country lad whose infatuation with the sultry gypsy temptress Carmen ends in tragedy, a story much of the details of which were somewhat altered by Bizet's librettists, not only to provide more opportunities for musical numbers but also to modify Mérimée's realism.

Bizet's opera was far from being an unqualified success at its first performances, many audiences and critics finding it too unusual in structure as well as shockingly immoral in content. It nevertheless achieved thirty-five performances in 1875 and was revived the following season. Gradually its popularity grew until in due course it became one of the best-loved of operas. Its composer, however, had died of a throat infection at the early age of thirty-six, three months after *Carmen*'s premiere.

As first performed in Paris, *Carmen* was an *opéra comique*, that is to say an

opera with musical numbers separated by spoken dialogue. When it was staged in Vienna some months later in German translation, its dialogue was replaced by recitatives written by Bizet's friend and fellow composer Ernest Guiraud. For many years thereafter, *Carmen* continued to be heard with Guiraud's recitatives, but it is now almost invariably performed in its original version with dialogue. The 1964 edition by Fritz Oeser, a German musicologist, restored to the score music that had been discarded by Bizet before the opera's premiere; however, *Carmen*, which is now by far the most popular of French operas, works best on stage when performed in the original version that Paris audiences heard in 1875. Famous nineteenth-century composers such as Tchaikovsky, Brahms and Wagner expressed their admiration for *Carmen*, and Nietzsche declared it to be the perfect antidote to Wagnerian neurosis.

Act I. A square in Seville, with a tobacco factory on one side and a military guard-house on the other. Corporal Morales and the other soldiers on guard are idly observing the passers-by ('Sur la place, chacun passe') when Micaëla, a young woman with fair hair bound in plaits, enters and asks for a corporal called Don José. Morales tells her that José will arrive shortly with the changing of the guard. He and his fellow soldiers attempt to flirt with Micaëla, at which she shyly makes her escape.

Preceded by a gang of children imitating them, the new company of guards arrives, among them Don José and his superior officer, Lieutenant Zuniga. Before the guards they are replacing march off, Morales tells José that a pretty girl has been asking for him, and from his description of her José recognizes Micaëla. The factory bell now rings and the girls who work in the factory begin to saunter back after their break ('La cloche a sonné'), with the young men in the square making light-hearted attempts to intercept them. As the soldiers wonder where the most popular of the factory girls, the gypsy Carmen, can be, Carmen herself appears, expounding her fickle philosophy of love in the Habanera, 'L'amour est un oiseau rebelle', all the while keeping a provocative eye on José who appears to be paying no attention to her. As she finishes her song, Carmen flings a red flower in José's face and runs off into the factory with the other girls.

José retrieves Carmen's flower and places it in his tunic as Micaëla returns. She has brought from José's mother in the country a fond kiss, which she proceeds to deliver, and a letter in which his mother urges José to marry Micaëla, his childhood sweetheart ('Parle-moi de ma mère'). When Micaëla departs again, José tells himself that he will do as his mother asks – marry Micaëla, and forget the sorceress who threw him a flower. He is about to tear Carmen's flower from his tunic when

an uproar begins in the factory and a number of factory girls emerge, some accusing Carmen of having stabbed another girl, while others side with Carmen. Zuniga sends José and two soldiers into the factory to investigate, and they return with Carmen, who refuses to answer any questions.

Ordering José to bind Carmen's hands, Zuniga goes off to write an order for her detention. Left alone with José, Carmen has little difficulty in persuading him to let her escape (*Seguidilla*: 'Près des remparts de Séville'). As José marches her away, she gives him a push, and he obligingly falls in the way of the other two soldiers accompanying them. Carmen escapes, and José is placed under arrest.

Act II. Lillas Pastia's tavern, by the ramparts of Seville. Carmen and two other gypsy girls, Mercèdes and Frasquita, have been dining with Lieutenant Zuniga, Corporal Morales and a third soldier. Carmen sings a lively gypsy song ('*Les tringles des sistres tintaient*'), with Mercèdes and Frasquita joining her in the refrain. Zuniga informs Carmen that the soldier who was sent to prison for allowing her to escape has now been released. Lillas Pastia is about to close the tavern for the night when a crowd is heard in the street outside, acclaiming the toreador Escamillo. When Escamillo and his admirers enter the tavern, the toreador is toasted by Zuniga and responds with a boastful song about his exploits in the bullring ('*Votre toast, je peux vous le rendre*').

When his approaches to Carmen are rebuffed, Escamillo leaves with his entourage. Zuniga also leaves, but tells Carmen he will return later. After the tavern's customers have all departed, Carmen and her friends are joined by Le Dancaire and Remendado, leaders of a gang of smugglers who use the inn as a base. In a quintet ('*Nous avons en tête un affaire*') the men describe their next expedition, for which they need the help of the girls to divert the attention of the customs officers. Carmen refuses to go with them, claiming that she is in love with the soldier who helped her and who has just been released after two months in prison. Le Dancaire suggests that Carmen should persuade her soldier to join them, and she agrees to try. The smugglers and the other two girls retire, leaving Carmen alone to await José, whose voice can now be heard raised in song as he approaches the tavern.

Carmen sets out to charm José by singing and dancing for him, but when he hears bugles in the distance sounding the retreat he tells her he must return to barracks immediately. However, when Carmen contemptuously orders him to rush back to his fellow soldiers if he is not interested in her, José takes from his tunic the flower she once threw at him, describes how it comforted him throughout his time in prison ('*La fleur que tu m'avais jetée*') and declares that he loves her. Carmen almost succeeds in persuading him to flee with her to the mountains

(‘Là-bas, là-bas, dans la montagne’), but he cannot bring himself to become a deserter. He is about to leave, when Zuniga returns for his hoped-for assignation with Carmen. The two men fight, but are separated by Le Dancaire and Remendado, who take Zuniga prisoner. Now hopelessly compromised, José departs for the mountains with Carmen and the smugglers.

Act III. A rocky gorge in the mountains. The smugglers and their companions are carrying contraband goods up to a hiding place, but decide to rest for an hour at the suggestion of Le Dancaire. Carmen and José are bickering. José reminds himself that down in the valley there lives a blameless old lady, his mother, who mistakenly believes him to be honest. But when Carmen tells him to go back to mother he reacts threateningly. Mercèdes, Frasquita and Carmen decide to tell their fortunes with a pack of cards. Lovers are predicted for the other two girls, but the cards turned up for Carmen all represent death (‘Mêlons! Coupons!’).

Le Dancaire orders the men to move the contraband goods while the women distract the attention of the customs officers. Left to stay on guard, José moves further up the mountain path, failing to see a guide entering from below with Micaëla, who has come at the behest of José’s mother to attempt to rescue José from the clutches of the evil woman who has turned him into a criminal (‘Je dis que rien ne m’épouvante’). Micaëla catches sight of José on his lookout above, just as he is raising his rifle to fire at someone further off. As he fires, Micaëla hides among the rocks in fear.

Escamillo, who had been José’s target, now appears, examining the bullet-hole in his hat. Ordered by José to halt, he reveals his identity, and the two men chat amiably until Escamillo intimates that he has ventured into the smugglers’ lair to visit Carmen, who he has been told is tired of her present lover, a deserter. In a jealous fury, José challenges Escamillo to a duel, and the two men fight with knives. Escamillo falls and is saved from being stabbed only by the intervention of Carmen, who arrives with the rest of the gang. Escamillo, as he leaves, invites the entire company to his next bullfight in Seville. José attempts to attack him again, but is restrained.

Micaëla, whose hiding place is now discovered, begs José to return with her to his mother. Carmen tells him to go, as he is clearly not cut out for the life of a smuggler, but José declares that he will never give her the opportunity to run off to a new lover. When Micaëla reveals that his mother is dying, José agrees to go with her, but assures Carmen that they will meet again. As he and Micaëla hurry away, the voice of Escamillo singing his toreador song can be heard in the distance. Carmen rushes off in the direction of the voice, while the others prepare to move.