

Saturdee Opry Links Meyerbeer Edition/ Rip Rense

Saturdee Opry Links' big Meyerbeer Edition is now posted for your ambivalence. This neglected, overlooked composer was a giant of the 19th century; indeed there was no composer whose works were performed more than Meyerbeer's sprawling five-act historical dramas. SOL has presented a smattering of exemplary excerpts from his two biggies, "Les Huguenots" and "Robert le Diable," as well as lesser-known Meyerbeer fare---plus a complete "Diable" with English subtitles. Also: illuminating articles about the composer. Perfect for putting you to sleep on a late summer day. Or for stimulating your curiosity and perhaps building a few new synapses (before it's too late!) Ambivalent? Can't make up your mind? Well, Jimmy, too. (See below.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bY-zmJ1VCQI>

Saturdee Opry Links Overture

"Emma de Resburgo," by Meyerbeer.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTouhk4PveM>

About the opera:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emma_di_Resburgo

Writes SOL appreciator Chris Tombrello:

Dare I say jaunty? Old Scottish castles are always in demand for historical dramas, it seems. It's convenient the conscience-stricken Lord has a signed confession from his father, it wraps up the plot with astounding efficiency.



Giacomo Meyerbeer



Diana Damrau



Nicolai Ghiaurov

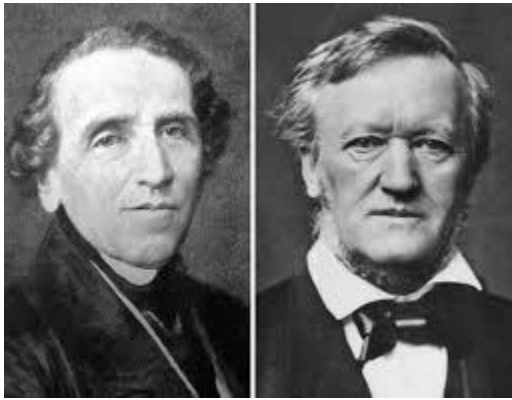


Léonce Escalais



Sumi Jo and friend

1.



Meyerbeer and snide critic

Except for "Les Huguenots" and "Robert le Diable," Meyerbeer's operas are seldom performed these days---partly because they are expensive, partly because they feel a bit off their time. Once the most successful operatic composer of the 19th century, Meyerbeer's immense, ambitious works fell out of favor long ago---somewhat due to relentless attacks by Wagner, who snidely called him a "Jewish banker to whom it occurred to compose operas" (yet Wagner was heavily influenced by Meyerbeer's orchestration and use of motifs.) Steeped in German orchestral style in his early years, Meyerbeer---from a wealthy family---moved to Italy in order to absorb Italian opera, and it is usually said that his works combine the best of both worlds. Here is a gorgeous except from his early work, "Emma di Resburgo," from an excellent album of lesser known Meyerbeer arias by soprano Diana Damrau. (A good place to start, in getting acquainted with his music.) Sorry, no translation available. The opera is set in Scotland. This is "Sulla rupe triste, sola... Ah questo bacio" ("On the sad cliff, alone, ah, this kiss.")

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yfos_iirkrs

About the opera:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emma_di_Resburgo

About the Damrau Meyerbeer album:

<https://www.gramilano.com/2017/04/cd-review-diana-damrau-in-meyerbeer-grand-operas-a-diva-in-her-prime/>

2.



Touraine

A Prussia-born-and-raised Jew, Meyerbeer changed his first name from Jakob to Giacomo while living in Italy, inspired by studying the great works of Rossini. He wrote a number of operas in Italian there, but the majority of his life success---his greatest works---were in French, and premiered in Paris. His best remembered opera, the five-act epic, "Les Huguenots," debuted in Paris in 1836, and is still in repertory today. Here is an exquisite aria from that opera, sung to utter perfection and pristine beauty by the incredible Lisette Oropesa (who also happens to be a very nice human being---hardly the "diva" stereotype.) This is "Ô beau pays de la Touraine," or "O beautiful province of Touraine."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ux8dCLT7H-8>

Synopsis:

In the gardens at the Château de Chenonceaux, Queen Marguerite looks into a mirror held by her enamoured page Urbain, and sings a paean to her beloved homeland, Touraine.

Translation:

<https://lyricstranslate.com/en/%C3%B4-beau-pays-de-la-touraine-oh-beautiful-region-touraine.html>

3.

"Les Huguenots," by Meyerbeer, was five years in the making. That's a Wagnerian schedule! It generally concerns French wars between Catholics and Protestants, culminating in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572 in which thousands of French Huguenots (Protestants) were slaughtered by Catholics. One of the major arias in the work is "Gimme That Ol' Time Religion (It's good enough for me.)" What? That's a lot of piff-paff, you say? Right you are, and so is this call-to-arms aria, for bass, "Pour les couvents, c'est fini" ("The monasteries are finished!")---also known as. . ."Piff! Paff!" Here is the tremendous Nicolai Ghiaurov, doing the honors.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGp4hFZYJgo>

Translation:

4.



"Les Huguenots," is chocked full of vigorous, inviting, rollicking choral passages. Here are two examples:

1. Paris, the 'Pré aux clercs' on the left bank of the Seine, Sunday, at sunset. Citizens enjoy a stroll on a beautiful evening. The Huguenot soldiers sing a bloodthirsty war song in praise of the Protestant Admiral Coligny. Yes, nothing goes better with a pastoral scene in nature than a bloodthirsty call for killing, I always say. This is

"Entracte et chœur: C'est le jour de dimanche" (just the first two minutes or so.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xikyNfyUSAQ>

2.

And what 19th century dramatic opera would be complete without a gypsy dance? (Oh, can I say "gypsy" anymore, or will the woke police come after me?) Here is said dance from "Les Huguenots," "Ronde bohémienne: "Venez ! – Vous qui voulez savoir d'avance." No, it does not have the sweaty allure of the equivalent passage in Bizet's "Carmen," but this was decades earlier.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LcLhIX3NYnA>

5.

Saturdee Opry Links doesn't get to Meyerbeer often, and here is one of his later operas that no one at all gets to anymore, "L'Etoile du Nord" ("The North Star.") It's a comic piece that has disappeared from the repertory, although one bit of it survives as a concert staple. That aria---really an obbligate for flutes and soprano---is "C'est bien l'air que chaque matin" ("This is the air every morning.") It's a kind of coloratura tour-de-force, once was a great showcase for Jenny Lind, the famed "Swedish Nightingale" of 19th century opera. The content? Well, it involves the love of Peter the Great for his Catherine. Their union eventually takes place, but not until Catherine has a bit of a crazy time of it, disguising herself as a soldier and serving in the Russian camp (shades of Donizetti's "Daughter of the Regiment!") It's complicated.

Synopsis: After surreptitiously watching Peter and a companion drink and carouse in the former's tent with a couple of fetching femmes, Cathy becomes appropriately deranged. Peter restores her calm and

SOL EXTRA 2!

Okay, so why *is* Meyerbeer so seldom performed anymore?

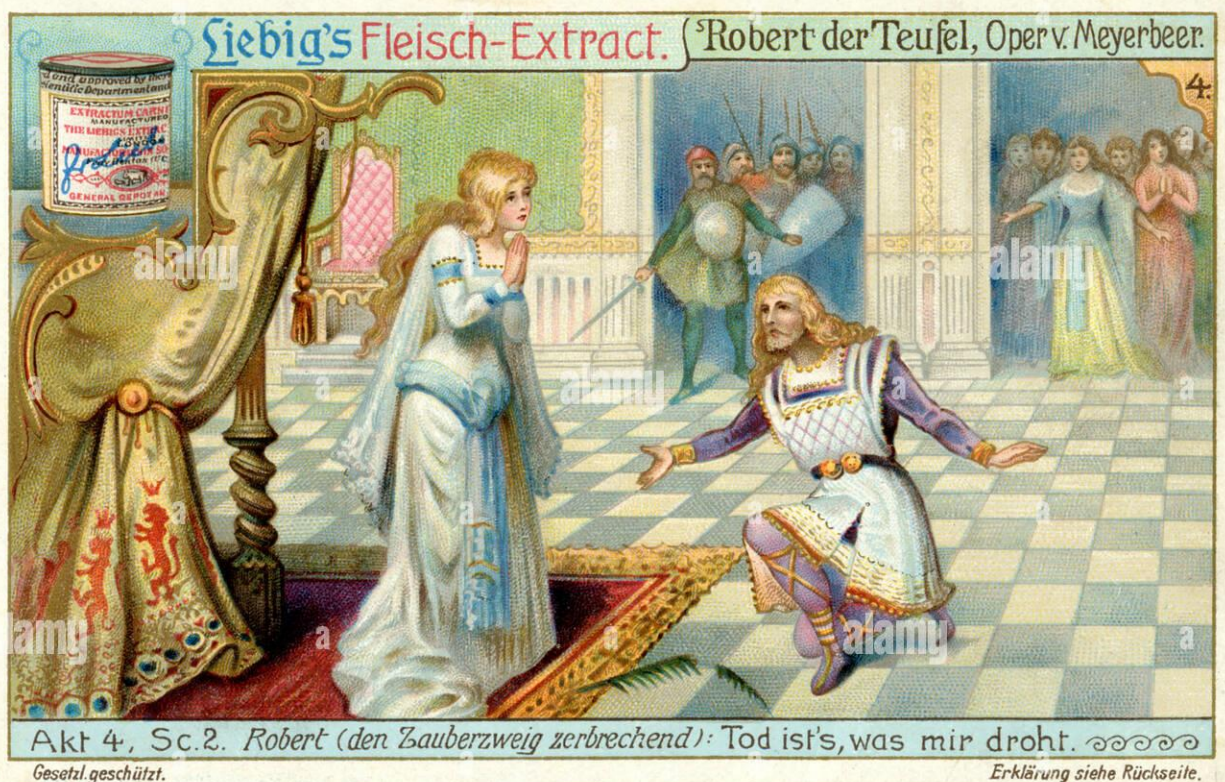
EXCERPT:

Yet Wagner should not be given sole blame for Meyerbeer's eclipse. "Huguenots," "Robert le Diable," "Le Prophète," and other Meyerbeer blockbusters retained their popularity even at the zenith of Wagnermania, around the turn of the last century. The eventual decline of grand opera affected Jewish and Gentile composers alike: Rossini's almighty "Guillaume Tell" also dropped from sight. . .

"Huguenots" is stocked with showpiece arias for the leads, but it becomes increasingly evident that individuals are helpless against the larger social energies that ensnare them. Meyerbeer represents those binding forces with a complex network of recurring melodic shapes, harmonic relationships, rhythmic patterns, and instrumental timbres—a system that helped inspire Wagner's use of leitmotifs.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/22/the-dark-prophetic-vision-of-giacomo-meyerbeer>?

7.



alamy

Image ID: KD6KXG
www.alamy.com

As noted earlier, Meyerbeer's orchestration was one of his innovative, influential strong points. Wagner, despite his anti-Semitism, took a cue from this, as did the stupendously innovative orchestrator, Hector Berlioz. Said Berlioz of Meyerbeer's orchestral coloration:

"'Robert le Diable' provides the most astonishing example of the power of instrumentation when applied to dramatic music; a power of recent introduction which has achieved its fullest development in the hands of M. Meyerbeer; a conquest of modern art which even the Italians will have to acknowledge in order to prop up as best they can their miserable system which is collapsing in ruins." (What Berlioz had against Italian art is for another post.)

Meyerbeer's inventions included unusual-for-their-time sonic combinations and textures, including the use of low brass and woodwind playing chromatic passages (sound like Wagner, folks?) and, in "Robert. . .", a brass band and male choir to characterize the demons in Act 3. The devil was in the details. BUT. . .this has nothing whatsoever to do with the following selection from "Robert. . ." This is the rather thrilling, stalwart tenor aria, Au tournois Chevaliers," or "At the tournament, knights." This the excellent, clarion forgotten tenor of yore, Léonce Escalais.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jpDOEATQJU>

Synopsis:

Robert and his mysterious friend Bertram are among a group of knights who are preparing to compete in a tournament for the hand of Princess Isabelle.

About the tenor:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%C3%A9on_Escalais

8.

There are countless sequences in opera that sing the praises, literally, of wine, women, gambling, and other delights. In 1831, this particular choral passage from act one of Meyerbeer's "Robert le Diable," must have inspired audiences to increase sinning. This is "Versez à tasses pleines" ("Pour cups full!")

Note: that there are almost no translations available for this opera on-line is an indicator of how eclipsed Meyerbeer has become.

Synopsis:

Robert and his mysterious friend Bertram are among a group of knights who are preparing to compete in a tournament for the hand of Princess Isabelle. They all praise wine, women and gambling ("Versez à tasses pleines"). Robert's attendant Raimbaut sings a ballad about a beautiful princess from Normandy who married a devil; the princess had a son, Robert, known as 'le diable'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2KO0VOXtjA>

Or, if you want see how it looks on stage, go to this link of the complete opera (with subtitles), and start at 5:55:00.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEsLX4Ni1Sk>

9.

Back to beauty, for Meyerbeer was no slouch at "writing pretty." But that's a simplification, because this lovely, heart-rending aria ends with a splash, as was only apt for "grand opera" of the day. Here is the genius voice of Diana Damrau again, from her album of mostly overlooked Meyerbeer work (SOL recommends.) This is "Robert, toi que j'aime," ("Robert, I love you") from Act 4 of "Robert le Diable."

Synopsis:

Isabelle is preparing for her marriage with the Prince of Granada. Alice rushes in to inform her of the evil, strange things she has learned about Robert, but she is interrupted by envoys of the Prince who

enter bearing gifts. Then Robert arrives and, using the power of a magic branch, freezes everyone except himself and Isabelle! Yet he is unsettled by the power he's wielding, and confesses to Isabelle that he is indeed using witchcraft, begging her not to hold it against him. (Yes, this indeed was the inspiration for "Bewitched.") Isabelle expresses her love for him, but implores him to repent. Robert breaks the branch and the spell it has created, and is taken into custody by Isabelle's attendants.

<https://youtu.be/1FquVttOtsM?si=qew7A6XuXNota5KT>

OR, if you want to see how it looks on stage, here is June Anderson, with English subtitles. Start at 2:13:15.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEsLX4Ni1Sk>

Insights into the aria, various renditions, full translation!

<https://sopranolife.wordpress.com/2011/05/29/robert-toi-que-jaime/>

FINAL BOW:



SOL's Meyerbeer edition ends with a bel canto confection, "Mon coeur s'élance et palpite," from the composer's 1849 five-act (largely forgotten) biggie, "Le prophète: (The Prophet)---the follow-up to "Les Huguenots." As usual, the plot is layered with grand dramatic interplay set against a historic and/or legendary backdrop. This opens with a lilting, touching, catchy melody, sung luminously by Damrau, before morphing into a "big finish" rather typical of the day. And so it becomes today's SOL "big finish." Sidelight: Like Meyerbeer's other operas, "Le Prophète" lost favor in the early part of the twentieth century and fell out of the operatic repertoire worldwide, except for very occasional revivals. The Metropolitan Opera revived the opera in 1918 as a vehicle for star tenor Enrico Caruso, but its appearances have been sporadic ever since.

Synopsis: The religious wars of the 16th century, Dordrecht and Münster. Jean de Leyde (based on the historical John of Leiden), whose beloved, Berthe, is coveted by Count Oberthal, ruler of Dordrecht, is persuaded by a trio of sinister Anabaptists (sort of like born-again) to proclaim himself king in Münster.

<https://youtu.be/bsTASxJg06c?si=VcypcpEmhbjxaSe3>

TRANSLATION:

*Au ciel d'avance j'habite,
Je vais revoir mon bien-aimé, oui!
Légers oiseaux, volez vers sa demeure
Et que vos chants lui disent mon amour.
Bientôt vos chants en doux refrains*

diront a lui mon amour!
Mon cœur s'élance...
Du moment où l'orpheline t'aperçut,
Faveur divine, seul, rêvant sur la colline.
Un regard changea mon sort!
Aujourd'hui servant nos flammes
Vois, ta mère de nos âmes
Vient hâter l'heureux accord
Mon cœur s'élance...

ENGLISH:

In heaven I live in advance,
I will see my beloved again, yes!
Light birds, fly to his home
And may your songs tell him of my love.
Soon your songs in sweet refrains
will tell him my love!
My heart soars...
From the moment the orphan saw you,
Divine favor, alone, dreaming on the hill.
One look changed my fate!
Today serving our flames
See, your mother of our souls
Comes to hasten the happy agreement
My heart soars...

SOL SUNDEE ENCORE!

This opera could not, probably, be performed today without lots of unwarranted woke apology. It contains Meyerbeer's best known aria, "O Paradiso," something SOL says to himself every time he drives in Los Angeles. It's from the opera, "L'Africaine," another five-act giganticus, a complex thing based on the explorations of Vasco de Gama, and here involving an African queen. Punish yourself with the full plot summary:

<https://www.naxos.com/LibrettiSungText/Libretti?id=826AAA71-6794-48AD-ACE7-223ACCB79A62>

In any case, this is a fabulous aria, duly part of standard tenor recital repertory. In essence, De Gama is captured by priests, who intend to sacrifice him. With this fate looming, he is still stunned and overwhelmed by the wonders of a new land he has discovered, and sings accordingly. ¿Quién es más macho? Giuseppe Lauri-Volpe o el Mario Lanza?

Lauri-Volpe:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBBnWIde6aM>

Lanza:

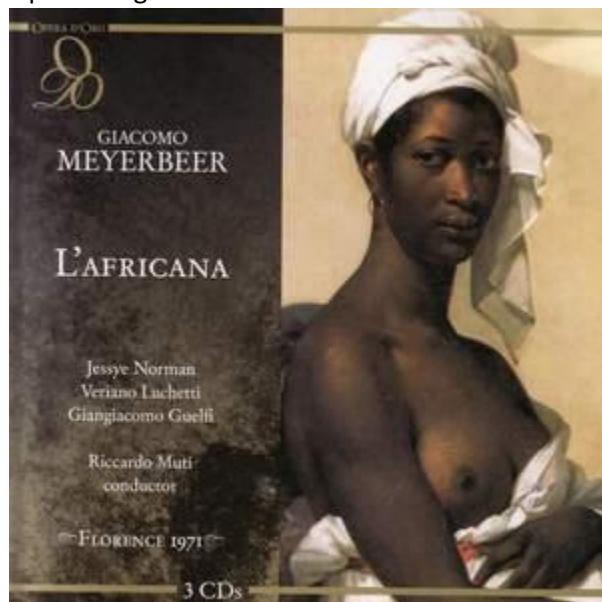
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdqk4d0Qfbo>

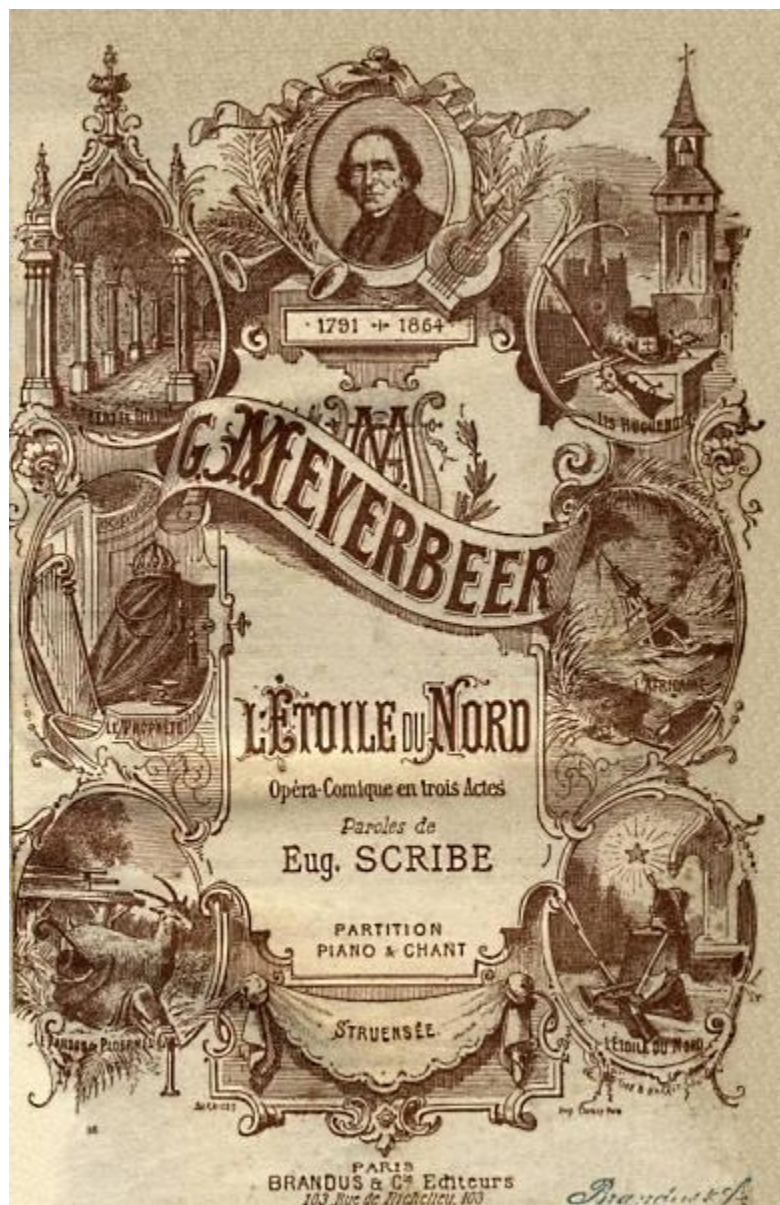
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"I never drink. . . wine," says Bela. "Only RC."



Opera images. . .





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