

OPERAS FOR NOVEMBER 2020

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Lakmé. Léo Delibes

Lakmé is an opera in three acts by Léo Delibes to a French libretto by Edmond Gondinet and Philippe Gille. The score, written in 1881–1882, was first performed on 14 April 1883 by the Opéra Comique at the Salle Favart in Paris. Set in British India in the mid-19th century, Lakmé is based on Théodore Pavie's story "Les babouches du Brahamane" and novel *Le Mariage de Loti* by Pierre Loti. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Loti

The opera includes the popular Flower Duet (*Sous le dôme épais*) for sopranos performed in Act 1 by Lakmé, the daughter of a Brahmin priest, and her servant Mallika. The opera's most famous aria is the Bell Song (*L'Air des clochettes*) in Act 2.

Like other French operas of the period, Lakmé captures the ambience of the Orient seen through Western eyes, which was periodically in vogue during the latter part of the nineteenth century and in line with other operatic works such as Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers* and Massenet's *Le roi de Lahore*. The subject of the opera was suggested by Gondinet as a vehicle for the American soprano Marie van Zandt.

Synopsis

The opera is set in India during the British Raj in the late nineteenth century during. Many Hindus have been forced by the British to practise their religion in secret.

Act 1

The Hindus go to perform their rites in a sacred Brahmin temple under the high priest, Nilakantha. Nilakantha's daughter Lakmé (which derives from the Sanskrit Lakshmi) and her servant Mallika are left behind and go down to the river to gather flowers where they sing the famous "Flower Duet." As they approach the water at the river bank, Lakmé removes her jewellery and places it on a bench. A party of British officers, Frederic and Gérald, arrive nearby while on a picnic with two British girls and their governess. The British girls see the jewellery and request sketches: Gérald volunteers to stay and make sketches of the jewellery. He sees Lakmé and Mallika returning and hides. Mallika leaves Lakmé for a while; while alone Lakmé sees Gérald and, frightened by the foreigner's incursion, cries out for help. However, simultaneously, she is intrigued and so she sends away those who had responded to her call for help when they come to her rescue. Lakmé and Gérald begin to fall in love with each other. Nilakantha returns and learns of the British officer's trespassing and vows revenge on him for his affront to Lakmé's honour.

Act 2

At a bazaar, Nilakantha forces Lakmé to sing (Bell Song) in order to lure the trespasser into identifying himself. When Gérald steps forward, Lakmé faints, thus giving him away. Nilakantha stabs Gérald, wounding him. Lakmé takes Gérald to a secret hideout in the forest where she nurses him back to health.

Act 3

While Lakmé fetches sacred water that will confirm the vows of the lovers, Frédéric, a fellow British officer, appears before Gérard and reminds him of his duty to his regiment. After Lakmé returns, she senses the change in Gérard and realises that she has lost him. She dies with honour, rather than live with dishonour, killing herself by eating the poisonous datura leaf.

Leonore. Beethoven

Beethoven's Leonore was inspired by the French libretto by Nicolas Bouilly for "Léonore ou L'amour conjugal", one which had also been set by other composers. Beethoven was very taken by this idyllic portrayal of marital devotion - the Spanish noblewoman, Leonore, who disguises herself as a prison errand-boy named Fidelio, and through this disguise gets access to the fortress where her political-prisoner husband Florestan is in chains, using her cunning and the power of love to rescue him - and in 1803, set about composing an opera of his own to a German translation of the original libretto by Joseph Sonnleithner. By 1805 it was complete: three acts, cleverly mixing elements of French opéra comique, German singspiel and "salvation opera," and imbuing it all with an uplifting quality.

Unfortunately for Beethoven, the Viennese aristocracy and the Imperial court - those patrons on whose generosity Beethoven's livelihood depended - were not there to hear the first performance on November 20, 1805. They had fled Vienna two weeks prior, ahead of Napoleon's then seemingly-unstoppable army. So, instead of an audience of discerning Viennese, Beethoven had a half-full room of mostly French army officers, disinclined to love a work by "the enemy." Not surprisingly, they found Leonore lacking. So, Leonore was shelved, then reworked, and eventually reappeared in its final form almost a decade later, in 1814. The final version of Leonore that emerged in 1814, in addition to many musical changes also had a less linear storyline, a new title, Fidelio, and was one act shorter.

In summary from Leonore (1805) to Fidelio (1814) there were three successive versions of Beethoven's opera, only the last of which has been in the repertory since the 19th Century.

Going against tradition, René Jacobs in 2019, decided to revive the earliest of the three versions, and in the highly praised live recording of Leonore which resulted, and which 5MBS FM will be broadcasting, you'll hear the following cast.

Leonore - Marlis Peterson

Florestan - Maximilian Schmitt

Rocco - Dimitry Ivaschenko

Pizarro - Johannes Weisser

Marzelline - Robin Johannsen

Jaquino - Johannes Chum

Don Fernando - Tariq Nazmi

First Prisoner - Florian Feth

Second Prisoner - Julian Popken

With the Freiburger Barockorchester and Zürcher Sing-Akademie conducted by Rene Jacobs

Synopsis:

Act 1:

Marzeline is in love with Fidelio, the key-carrier (who is none other than Leonore, the wife of the unjustly imprisoned Florestan, and who is disguised as a man in order to gain access to save her husband). Marzeline awaits the return of Fidelio, sent on errands by her father, Rocco the jailer, and sings of the joys of being soon married to Fidelio. Jaquino, the doorman of the prison, is the jilted lover of Marzeline. He tries to speak to Marzeline and to express his love, but no longer interested, she rebukes him. Marzeline makes it clear to Jaquino that her heart is set on Fidelio. Whereupon Rocco enters and Jaquino pleads his case to him. Rocco sides with his daughter and tells Jaquino that Marzeline is not for him. Rocco warns that marriage is not something to be taken lightly; Jaquino is upset at Marzeline's refusal, and Marzeline will not be swayed in agreeing to marry Jaquino. Fidelio returns loaded with groceries and heavy chains. Rocco congratulates him on his diligence and promises that it will be rewarded.

Marzeline expresses her happiness that Fidelio loves her, Fidelio, his uneasiness that Marzeline loves him, Rocco, his satisfaction that Marzeline and Fidelio are meant for each other, and Jaquino, his bewilderment at Rocco's favouring Fidelio over himself. Rocco promises that he will marry Fidelio to Marzeline after the departure for Sevilla in a few days of Pizarro, the governor of the prison.

Rocco warns that love is not enough for a happy life. One needs also to have gold. Fidelio expresses his eagerness to help Rocco in his duties by accompanying him in his rounds of the prisoners because Rocco comes back from his rounds absolutely exhausted. Rocco tells him that the Governor has given strict orders that no one be allowed near the prisoner of State, but Marzeline pleads that her father must accept Fidelio's assistance for her and Fidelio's sake. Rocco agrees to seek Pizarro's permission for Fidelio to accompany him, at the same time informing them that there is one prisoner who has been imprisoned for two years and whose ration of food has been diminished for the past month on orders of the governor and who will soon die. Fidelio senses that this could well be her husband, Florestan, but cannot get any more information from Rocco. Marzeline fears that such a sight might be too much for Fidelio, but Fidelio assures her that he has might and courage. Rocco congratulates Fidelio for his courage; Fidelio assures that his love will give him strength and courage, while Marzeline expresses her concern that Fidelio will suffer in seeing the pitiful condition of the prisoner of State. Rocco promises to speak to the Governor today to get his permission to have Fidelio accompany him and tells Fidelio to join hands with Marzeline, which they do, Fidelio, with misgivings, and Marzeline, with joy.

Act 2:

The Governor Pizarro enters and gives orders for sentries to keep watch and to warn him of anyone's approaching the prison. He has learnt from an agent that the Minister is going to make a surprise visit to check on reports that there are prisoners detained without authority. Pizarro is savouring his vengeance on Florestan. He will kill Florestan and bury his body before the Minister arrives. The soldiers comment on Pizarro's agitation and decide to go about their duty, fearing reprisal. Pizarro tries to bribe Rocco into murdering Florestan, but Rocco refuses. Pizarro tells Rocco to dig a grave in the disused well in the dungeon where Florestan is imprisoned and, when done, to give him a signal, at which point Pizarro in

disguise will enter the dungeon and murder Florestan. Marzeline sings that one must above all be faithful to one and never give grounds to suspicion, to which Fidelio agrees. She then sings of the happy days that they will spend with their aging father and of the joys of motherhood. Fidelio expresses his misgivings at having to deceive Marzeline. Marzeline leaves in order to let the prisoners come to take a breath of fresh air. Left alone, Fidelio reflects on her imminent meeting with her husband and prays that hope will give her the strength successfully to save him. The prisoners sing their happiness to breathe in the light of the day and a prisoner expresses his hope to be freed one day. Another prisoner warns him to speak softly, because they are being watched. Rocco comes and makes them go back to their prison cells; then he informs Fidelio that Pizarro has given permission for Fidelio to accompany him to the dungeon of the prisoner of State, Florestan. He also tells him that he will have to dig a grave, because Pizarro will kill Florestan and they will have to bury him. Marzeline and Jaquino enter hurriedly to warn Rocco of the arrival of Pizarro. Pizarro arrives and berates Rocco for dawdling and sends him and Fidelio off to their duty; then, turning to the guards, Pizarro orders them to keep good watch, which they promise to do, while Pizarro savours his imminent revenge.

Act 3:

Florestan remarks on the darkness and silence of his surrounding and submits his suffering to the will of God. Then, he recalls how the happy days with his wife were lost, because he did his duty by speaking the truth. He pulls out a portrait of his wife and tells her to sooth her grief with the thought that he has done his duty. Rocco and Fidelio then arrive in the dungeon where Florestan is chained. Fidelio and Rocco comment how cold it is and Rocco points at the sleeping Florestan, but it is too dark for Fidelio to tell if it is her husband. Rocco then points to the disused well which needs to be freed from the rubble obstructing it. Florestan wakes up. Rocco leaves the pit they have been digging to speak to Florestan, while Fidelio listens intently. Upon recognizing the voice of her husband, she becomes weak and keeps herself from falling by clinging to the rim of the pit. Florestan asks Rocco who is the governor of the prison. Upon learning it is Pizarro, he begs Rocco to go as soon as possible to Sevilla and tell his wife, Leonore, of his condition. Rocco tells him he cannot do it. Florestan then asks for water. Rocco tells him he can give him the wine he has in a flask and asks Fidelio to bring it. Pizarro enters and asks if all is ready. Rocco tells him that everything is. Pizarro tells Rocco to send Fidelio away; while Rocco motions to Fidelio to go, Pizarro comments that he will have to get rid of both of them later, to ensure that his deeds will remain unknown forever. Rocco asks Pizarro if he wishes to have the prisoner unchained. Pizarro says no and draws a dagger. Pizarro reveals to Florestan who he is and mocks him for having attempted to overthrow him. Now Pizarro will murder him. Fidelio thrusts herself between Pizarro and Florestan, revealing that she is Leonore, Florestan's wife, to the consternation of Pizarro and Rocco and to the joy of Florestan. She pulls a pistol aiming it at Pizarro. A trumpet call is heard signalling the arrival of the minister. Leonore and Florestan rejoice, Pizarro curses, and Rocco is dumbfounded. Pizarro leaves hurriedly followed by Rocco who wrestles the pistol from Leonore's hand. Emotionally exhausted and distraught for having lost her weapon, Leonore faints. Florestan cannot believe that his wife has come and calls her to him. Leonore comes back to her senses and hurries to Florestan, who clasps her in his arms. They sing of their joy to be reunited. The voices of prisoners seeking

vengeance are heard in the distance; Leonore and Florestan fear that their last moments have arrived and are ready to face death, which will put an end to their suffering and let them die in each other's arms. Rocco enters followed by Don Fernando, Pizarro, Marzeline, Jaquino, the prisoners and townspeople. He asks Don Fernando to have mercy on Leonore and Florestan. Don Fernando says he came to avenge virtue and be their saviour. Rocco returns the pistol to Leonore and tells her he took it away for fear that she may use it against herself in her despair. Don Fernando asks Rocco to hand the keys to Leonore so she may free her husband from his chains. All present praise the Lord and his justice. Don Fernando asks Rocco how long Florestan was imprisoned and tells Pizarro that he shall suffer the same fate. The chorus exclaims that the punishment is too light, while Florestan asks Don Fernando to be lenient. Don Fernando decides to leave the matter to the judgement of the king. All praise the courage and virtue of Leonore.

Romeo et Juliette **Charles Gounod**

Roméo et Juliette (Romeo and Juliet) is an opera in five acts by Charles Gounod to a French libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, based on The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare. It was first performed at the Théâtre Lyrique (Théâtre-Lyrique Impérial du Châtelet), Paris on 27 April 1867.

The libretto follows the story of Shakespeare's play.

Act 1: Overture prologue:

A short chorus sets the scene of the rival families in Verona.

A masked ball in the Capulets' palace. Tybalt talks to Pâris about Juliette, who appears with her father. Roméo, Mercutio, Benvolio and their friends enter, disguised, and Mercutio sings a ballad about Queen Mab, after which Juliette sings a joyful waltz song. The first meeting between Roméo and Juliette takes place, and they fall in love. But Tybalt re-appears and suspects that the hastily re-masked Roméo is his rival. While Tybalt wants immediate revenge, Capulet orders that the ball continue.

Act 2

The Capulets' garden

After Roméo's page Stephano has helped his master gain access, he reveals the two young lovers exchanging their vows of love.

Act 3

Scene 1: Laurent's cell

Roméo and Juliette, accompanied by Gertrude, go to the cell, and the wedding takes place. Laurent hopes that reconciliation between the houses of the Montagus and the Capulets may thus take place.

Scene 2: a street near Capulet's palace

Stephano sings to attract the occupants into the street. Gregoire and Stephano skirmish as men from each family appear. The duel is first between Tybalt and Mercutio, who falls dead, and then between Roméo, determined to avenge his comrade, and Tybalt. Tybalt is killed by Roméo, who is banished by the Duke.

Act 4

Juliet's room at dawn

Roméo and Juliette are together and, after a long duet, Roméo departs for exile. Juliette's father comes to remind her of Tybalt's dying wish for Juliette to marry Count Pâris. The friar gives Juliette a draught which will cause her to sleep, so as to appear as if dead and, after being laid in the family tomb, it is planned that Roméo will awaken her and take her away. [A ballet scene in the grand hall of the palace was inserted at this point.] But the opera continues. Juliet's father is determined that a wedding between his daughter and Count Pâris will take place that very day. An organ sounds in a gallery in the Capulet Palace and a grand march and wedding ceremony ensues. Just as Friar Laurent is about to place the ring on Juliette's finger, she falls seemingly lifeless in front of the assembled guests and to general consternation, is pronounced dead.

Act 5

Juliet's tomb

A long orchestral interlude portrays Juliette's long slumber. Roméo appears having broken into the tomb. Believing Juliette dead, he takes poison. As it takes effect, Juliette awakens from the friar's potion and the lovers' last duet is heard before the poison takes effect on Roméo. As Roméo weakens, Juliette stabs herself, to be united with her lover in death.

Nabucco Verdi

Nabucco short for Nabucodonosor, [English Nebuchadnezzar] is an Italian-language opera in four acts composed in 1841 by Giuseppe Verdi to an Italian libretto by Temistocle Solera. The libretto is based on biblical stories from the Book of Jeremiah and the Book of Daniel and the 1836 play by Auguste Anicet-Bourgeois and Francis Cornue, although Antonio Cortese's ballet adaptation of the play given at La Scala in 1836, was a more important source for Solera than the play itself. Under its original name of Nabucodonosor, the opera was first performed at La Scala in Milan on 9 March 1842.

Nabucco is the opera which is considered to have permanently established Verdi's reputation as a composer. He commented that "this is the opera with which my artistic career really begins. And though I had many difficulties to fight against, it is certain that Nabucco was born under a lucky star".

It follows the plight of the Jews as they are assaulted, conquered and subsequently exiled from their homeland by the Babylonian King Nabucco [Nebuchadnezzar II]. The historical events are used as background for a romantic and political plot. The best-known number from the opera is the "Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves", *Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate* / "Fly, thought, on golden wings", a chorus which is regularly given an encore in many opera houses when performed today.

Roles

Nabucco, King of Babylon	baritone
Abigaille, supposedly his elder daughter	soprano
Fenena, his daughter	mezzo-soprano
Ismaele, nephew of the King of Jerusalem	tenor
Zaccaria, high priest of the Jews	bass
Anna, Zaccaria's sister	soprano

Abdallo, Babylonian soldier tenor

High priest of Baal bass

People, soldiers

Synopsis

Time: 587 BC Place: Jerusalem and Babylon

Act 1: Jerusalem. Interior of the Temple of Solomon

The Israelites pray as the Babylonian army advances on their city (Gli arredi festivi giù cadano infranti / "Throw down and destroy all festive decorations"). The High Priest Zaccaria tells the people not to despair but to trust in God (D'Egitto là su i lidi / "On the shores of Egypt He saved the life of Moses"). The presence of a hostage, Fenena, younger daughter of Nabucco, King of Babylon, may yet secure peace (Come notte a sol fulgente / "Like darkness before the sun"). Zaccaria entrusts Fenena to Ismaele, nephew of the King of Jerusalem and a former envoy to Babylon. Left alone, Fenena and Ismaele recall how they fell in love when Ismaele was held prisoner by the Babylonians, and how Fenena helped him to escape to Israel. Nabucco's supposed elder daughter, Abigaille, enters the temple with Babylonian soldiers in disguise. She, too, loves Ismaele. Discovering the lovers, she threatens Ismaele: if he does not give up Fenena, Abigaille will accuse her of treason. If Ismaele returns Abigaille's love, however, Abigaille will petition Nabucco on the Israelites' behalf. Ismaele tells Abigaille that he cannot love her and she vows revenge. Nabucco enters with his warriors (Viva Nabucco / "Long live Nabucco"). Zaccaria defies him, threatening to kill Fenena if Nabucco attacks the temple. Ismaele intervenes to save Fenena, which removes any impediment from Nabucco destroying the temple. He orders this, while Zaccaria and the Israelites curse Ismaele as a traitor.

Act 2: The Impious One. Scene 1: Royal apartments in Babylon

Nabucco has appointed Fenena regent and guardian of the Israelite prisoners, while he continues the battle against the Israelites. Abigaille has discovered a document that proves she is not Nabucco's real daughter, but the daughter of slaves. She reflects bitterly on Nabucco's refusal to allow her to play a role in the war with the Israelites and recalls past happiness (Anch'io dischiuso un giorno / "I too once opened my heart to happiness"). The High Priest of Baal informs Abigaille that Fenena has released the Israelite captives. He plans for Abigaille to become ruler of Babylon, and with this intention has spread the rumour that Nabucco has died in battle. Abigaille determines to seize the throne (Salgo già del trono aurato / "I already ascend the [bloodstained] seat of the golden throne").

Scene 2: A room in the palace

Zaccaria reads over the Tablets of Law (Vieni, o Levita / "Come, oh Levite! [Bring me the tables of the law]"), then goes to summon Fenena. A group of Levites accuse Ismaele of treachery. Zaccaria returns with Fenena and his sister Anna. Anna tells the Levites that Fenena has converted to Judaism, and urges them to forgive Ismaele. Abdallo, a soldier, announces the death of Nabucco and warns of the rebellion instigated by Abigaille. Abigaille enters with the High Priest of Baal and demands the crown from Fenena. Unexpectedly, Nabucco himself enters; pushing through the crowd, he seizes the crown and declares himself not only king of the Babylonians but also their god. The high priest Zaccaria curses him and warns of divine vengeance; an incensed Nabucco in turn orders the death of the Israelites. Fenena reveals to him that she has embraced the Jewish religion and will share the Israelites' fate. Nabucco is furious and repeats his conviction that he is now divine (Non son più re, son dio / "I am no longer King! I am God!"). There is a crash of thunder and Nabucco promptly

loses his senses. The crown falls from his head and is picked up by Abigaille, who pronounces herself ruler of the Babylonians.

Act 3: The Prophecy. Scene 1: The Hanging Gardens of Babylon

Abigaille is now Queen of Babylon. The High Priest of Baal presents her with the death warrant for the Israelites, as well as for Fenena. Nabucco, still insane, tries to reclaim the throne without success. Though his consent to the death warrant is no longer necessary, Abigaille tricks him into signing it. When Nabucco learns that he has consigned his true daughter to death, he is overcome with grief and anger. He tells Abigaille that he is not in fact her father and searches for the document evidencing her true origins as a slave. Abigaille mocks him, produces the document and tears it up. Realizing his powerlessness, Nabucco pleads for Fenena's life (*Oh di qual onta aggravasi questo mio crin canuto* / "Oh, what shame must my old head suffer"). Abigaille is unmoved and orders Nabucco to leave her.

Scene 2: The banks of the River Euphrates

The Israelites long for their homeland (*Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate* / "Fly, thought, on golden wings; [Fly and settle on the slopes and hills]"). The high priest Zaccaria once again exhorts them to have faith: God will destroy Babylon. The Israelites are inspired by his words.

Act 4: The Broken Idol. Scene 1: The royal apartments, Babylon

Nabucco awakens, still confused and raving. He sees Fenena in chains being taken to her death. In despair, he prays to the God of the Hebrews. He asks for forgiveness, and promises to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and convert to Judaism if his prayers are answered (*Dio di Giuda* / "God of Judah! [The altar, your sacred Temple, shall rise again]"). Miraculously, his strength and reason are immediately restored. Abdallo and loyal soldiers enter to release him. Nabucco resolves to rescue Fenena and the Israelites as well as to punish the traitors.

Scene 2: The Hanging Gardens of Babylon

Fenena and the Israelite prisoners are led in to be sacrificed (*Va! La palma del martirio* / "Go, win the palm of martyrdom"). Fenena serenely prepares for death. Nabucco rushes in with Abdallo and other soldiers. He declares that he will rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem and worship the God of the Israelites, ordering the destruction of the idol of Baal. At his word, the idol falls to the ground of its own accord and shatters into pieces. Nabucco tells the Israelites that they are now free and all join in praise of Jehovah. Zaccaria proclaims Nabucco the servant of God and king of kings. Abigaille enters, supported by soldiers. She has poisoned herself. She begs forgiveness of Fenena, prays for God's mercy and dies.