

OPERAS FOR JANUARY 2022

5 January		Johann Strauss II	Fürstin Ninetta
12		Vincenzo Bellini	La Stranieri
19	Double bill	Gustav Holst	At the Boar's Head
		Ralph Vaughan Williams	Sir John in Love
26		Franz Lehar	Der Zarewitsch

Stories of the Operas

Fürstin Ninetta (Princess Ninetta) Johann Strauss II (1825–1899)

After the minimal success of his only opera Ritter Pásmán, Strauss was, at the beginning of 1892, a disappointed man. After nine performances at the Court Opera in Vienna, only a few theatres abroad took the work into their repertoire. Strauss saw himself obliged to resort to operetta and unimaginative operetta libretti.

In Vienna at the time two writers, Hugo Wittmann and Julius Bauer, had become very successful. Strauss contacted them and asked for an operetta libretto. In return he received from them Fürstin Ninetta, but only the plot and the lyrics, not the dialogue. Julius Bauer was very mysterious about the details of it.

In the autumn of 1892 Strauss finished the score for the Theater an der Wien and rehearsals began under the baton of the younger Adolf Müller. Strauss himself was present at the first dress rehearsal and was very surprised by the dialogue, which he thought did not correspond to his conception of the music. “This libretto does not need any music at all”, was one of his comments. At the première on 10 January 1893, with electric light in the theatre for the very first time, Strauss sat in the audience. Even the Emperor Franz Joseph was present. Fürstin Ninetta was the twelfth of Strauss's fifteen operettas and the first one that he did not conduct himself.

The piece was successful and ran for 76 performances at the theatre. The reactions of the audience and critics were mainly very good, and a dozen other theatres in the Austrian Empire took the work into their repertoire, but after 1905 it seems not to have been given again. Sleeping Beauty slept a hundred years, Fürstin Ninetta for 102 years.

Johann Strauss is often blamed for choosing bad librettos and not concentrating on words and context. That may be true of Fürstin Ninetta, but in most of his operettas he paid careful attention to the mood of the story and adapted his music very closely to it. All Strauss operettas have their own character, and are definitely something more than a sequence of sparkling melodies. In spite of that, the score of Fürstin Ninetta has similarities with parts of Der Carneval in Rom, Die Fledermaus, Prinz Methusalem, Das Spitzentuch der Königin, Der lustige Krieg, Eine Nacht in Venedig and Simplicius. In other words the music is genuine Strauss but in a new guise.

For the present recording the Stockholm Strauss Orchestra has used a Cranz score signed No. 8 and parts signed 7 April 1893. The only divergences from the score in our performance are eight bars in Finale I where Strauss used a barrel-organ, whereas we use an accordion instead. We have not recorded the dialogue, in conformity with Strauss's original conception.

Cast

Ninetta Campocasso - Tua Åberg, Soprano
 Anastasia Knapp (Ferdinand's mother) - Elin Rombo, Soprano
 Adelheid Möbius - Henriikka Gröndahl, Soprano
 Cassim Pascha / Lord Plato - Jesper Taube, Baritone
 Ferdinand Knapp - Fredrik Strid, Tenor
 Prosper Möbius (Anastasia's father) - Göran Eliasson, Tenor
 Baron Mörsburg - Ola Eliasson, Baritone
 Emilio / Consul Rübke - Samuel Jarrick, Baritone
 Wirth (Landlord) - Michael Axelsson, Tenor
 Quästor (Arbiter) - Anders Blom, Tenor
 Rustan (Cassim's servant) - Kristina Martling, Contralto
 Laura - Katarina Wedin-Nilsson, Soprano

Synopsis

Act I: The first act takes place in the entrance-hall of a fashionable beach-hotel in Sorrento. Baron Mörsburg is seated at one table while Adelheid and her young man Ferdinand are seated at another. The waiter Emilio and the landlord inform the Baron of the young couple's planned wedding in the hotel that evening. Ferdinand sings that he now will leave his bachelor days behind and in a duet he asks Adelheid which colour she prefers. He loves red roses, but the girl prefers blue forget-me-nots. The character of the duet has nothing corresponding to it in earlier Strauss operettas. The Baron receives a telegram from his friend Princess Ninetta Campocasso, asking him to reserve a room at the hotel.

Ninetta is the widow of an Italian prince, but is originally from Russia. When she arrives, she is dressed as a young man, Carlino. The Baron, of course, recognizes her, but the other guests see her as a man. In a song she introduces herself as a guide. Her good looks immediately arouse the interest of female guests. At that moment Adelheid and Ferdinand's parents appear. Ferdinand's mother, Anastasia Knapp, is a widow. Adelheid's father, Prosper Möbius, is an Austrian widower who owns a silk factory. Anastasia and Prosper, in their youth, were once in love with each other, but they were unfortunately not allowed to marry. In a duet they both praise Italy, she for the culture, he for its food.

Now two other guests appear, Cassim Pascha and Rustan, his servant. They have travelled with an Italian circus, in which Cassim was a hypnotist and also had the task of holding a trapeze artiste's line with his strong teeth. Before that he was an Egyptian Minister of Finance. Baron Mörsburg recognizes him soon as an old friend, a Russian noble named Tatischeff. He is now on his way to St Petersburg in order to look after his estate. As he is dressed in a caftan and fez, the guests at the hotel call him "the Turk". He now sings about his home country, where blood and vodka flow, but also about his diplomacy which is so sophisticated that nobody can discover his intentions.

In the Finale I the wedding ceremony starts. To perform the marriage, the German consul of Naples, von Rübke, arrives at the hotel. He is not happy about the marriage, as he himself in the previous year, had proposed to Adelheid but been rejected. Among the identity papers he finds that Ferdinand's mother, Anastasia Knapp, is called Anastasia Möbius. Prosper then declares that, as a surprise and present for the young couple, he and Anastasia have married

in Nice the day before. At once Consul Rübke establishes the fact that Ferdinand and Adelheid are stepbrother and stepsister, and thus are not allowed to marry. The only way out of the problem is for the parents to divorce, but to divorce legally there are only two valid reasons, infidelity or bodily assault. The couple, however, do not want to be divorced under false pretences and admit to something that they have not done.

Act II: The second act takes place on the hotel's roof-terrace. A steaming and smoking Mount Vesuvius can be seen in the background. Ferdinand is drawing a picture at his table, when a young girl out of sheer curiosity takes a look at it and recognizes Princess Ninetta's face. Ferdinand sings in embarrassment a song about the artist's delight to make a drawing of a beautiful woman.

Among the guests Emilio gossips about a mysterious man, who has robbed and killed some tourists on the path to Vesuvius. Consul Rübke, the English Lord Plato and Baron Mörsburg are on the terrace when Ninetta appears, now as a pretty young lady.

Consul Rübke and the others notice Ninetta. Lord Plato is in a very special situation. He has made a bet and is not allowed to say anything at all. He is informed of Ninetta's talent for disguising herself, but simply says "Hum".

Cassim Pascha joins the company. He too is charmed by Ninetta and teaches her how to hypnotize. He also asks Ninetta to go with him on a tour to the volcano. This makes Emilio suspect that Cassim is the robber Fra Diavolo. After a short time, however, Ninetta appears again as a boy, and (only to the audience) sings about the tragedy of being born a girl. Ninetta immediately becomes the object of Anastasia's admiration. Cassim appears and in spite of his earlier declarations that he does not like women at all, he takes a walk to the beach looking for Ninetta, singing about a lovely pure young girl. This was not sung at the first performances of the operetta, where, instead, Anastasia sang "Er soll mich verschmäh'n".

In Finale II when Cassim returns from the beach without the lady, but holding her walking-stick, the hotel guests are now convinced that he is the robber. The fact alone that he is a Turk makes him a suspect. Everyone must see that he has the evil eye. They all demand that Cassim should leave the hotel. Cassim then declares that he has bought the whole hotel and is now the true owner of it. He also offers to make Carlino the manager. A judge and policemen are called, and the guests accuse Cassim of the murder of Ninetta, the guide, Carlino and the Princess Campocasso.

Act III: The third act opens in the hotel's banqueting rooms, where a tarantella opens the ball. Cassim burst out singing a waltz about polygamy and a children's ballet follows. The Pizzicato Polka (Neue Pizzicato Polka, Op.449) was composed by Strauss in the spring of 1892, long before finishing the operetta.

Before all the guests Baron Mörsburg declares that the charming Ninetta, to whom all the men were attracted, is a man, and the handsome man, whom the ladies desired, is really a woman. Anastasia gives her husband, Prosper, a box on the ear, and the baron exclaims "Bravissimo! That is the reason for divorce!" Now the young couple will be free to marry. Cassim and Ninetta at last realise that they are cousins and quarrel unnecessarily about the same estate. As in almost every operetta, they all live happily ever after.

La Straniera [The Strange Woman]**Vincenzo Bellini**

La straniera is an opera in two acts by Vincenzo Bellini, from a libretto by Felice Romani, based on *L'étrangère* (1825) by Charles-Victor Prévot, vicomte d'Arlincourt. It was composed in the autumn of 1828 and premiered in February 1829 in Milan.

At the heart of the plot of this opera is a complicated series of historical events beginning at the end of the twelfth century. King Philip Augustus of France [Philip II of France] married the Danish princess Ingeborg in 1193. For unknown reasons, he separated from her the day after the wedding and sought an annulment from Pope Celestine III. Ingeborg, however, insisted that the marriage had been consummated, and that she was his wife and the rightful Queen of France. Philip ultimately obtained an annulment through an assembly of French bishops. He then sought to marry Marguerite, daughter of William I, Count of Geneva, but she was kidnapped on the way to Paris by Thomas I of Savoy, who married her instead. Ultimately, in 1196 Philip married Agnes of Merania ["la straniera"], the daughter of a nobleman, Bertold IV of Dalmatia. Denmark continued to complain about Philip's treatment of Ingeborg and in 1200 Pope Innocent III required Philip to take her back, rendering him essentially a bigamist and subject to excommunication. Agnes died in 1201, however, ending the threat of excommunication.

Bellini and librettist Romani took tremendous liberties with this already unusual story and devised a plot where the King, in order to resolve the problem of his double marriage, sends Agnes to live at a cottage on Lake Montolino. Philip then sends her brother to watch over her secretly, masquerading under the name Valdeburgo. Agnes has assumed the name of Alaide and hides under a veil. Count Arturo has fallen in love with her, in spite of his engagement to Isoletta, daughter of the Duke of Montolino. At this point the opera begins.

The opera was first performed at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan on 14 February 1829. Few performances occurred after its presentation in Palermo in 1840. The opera was revived in 1954 in Bellini's hometown of Catania. It was revived again in 1968 at the Teatro Massimo in Palermo, with Renata Scotto in the title role. Scotto performed it again in Venice in 1970 with conductor Ettore Gracis, while in 1969 a concert performance at Carnegie Hall featured Montserrat Caballé under the baton of Anton Guadagno. The opera was performed again in concert in 1993, again at Carnegie Hall, with Renée Fleming. A complete concert performance was given in November 2007 in London, with Patrizia Ciofi (as Alaide), Dario Schmunck (Arturo), and Mark Stone (Valdeburgo) in the principal roles, conducted by David Parry with the London Philharmonic Orchestra; a complete studio recording was made with these forces the same week.

Synopsis

Act 1: Scene 1: A wedding chorus proclaims the upcoming wedding of Isoletta, daughter of Montolino, to Count Arturo of Ravenstal. Isoletta fears her Arturo's changed attitude toward her. She tells Baron Valdeburgo that she believes Arturo has fallen in love with a mysterious woman living as a hermit in a hut by the lake. In the distance a crowd is heard following "la straniera" on the lake shore, cursing her as a witch. Count Montolino shares his daughter Isoletta's concerns, but is reassured by his friend Osburgo who promises to bring Arturo to his senses.

Scene 2: Arturo is at the hut of "la straniera" Alaide. He desires to know the identity of this mysterious woman. Inside the hut he sees a portrait of her dressed in royal robes, wearing jewels. Alaide enters and chastises Arturo for entering her hut. She tells him she will reveal nothing about her past and begs him never to return. She does, however, admit to an attraction to Arturo. She sends him away, warning that his persistence will be their ruin.

Scene 3: During a hunting expedition, Osburgo and Valdeburgo encounter Arturo. Osburgo begs him to return for his wedding to Isoletta. Arturo refuses, asking Valdeburgo to meet his true love. Arturo promises he will never see her again if Valdeburgo judges her unworthy. Valdeburgo, upon seeing Alaide, hails her and almost calls out her real name, but Alaide stops him. Valdeburgo tells Arturo that—for reasons he cannot reveal—Arturo must renounce any intentions toward Alaide. She cannot ever marry Arturo. Thinking Valdeburgo is his rival for Alaide's affections, Arturo attacks him with his sword. Alaide intervenes and begs Arturo to leave. She agrees to see him again—if for the last time.

Scene 4: Arturo, still mistakenly crazy with jealousy directed at Valdeburgo, is further infuriated when Osburgo tells him that he has overheard Valdeburgo and Alaide planning to flee together. Arturo duels with Valdeburgo who is wounded by Arturo's sword and falls in the lake. Alaide then appears and Arturo curses her. Alaide reveals that Valdeburgo is actually her brother. Arturo jumps in the lake in an effort to save Valdeburgo. A crowd attracted by the shouting finds Alaide standing with Arturo's bloody sword. They accuse her of murdering Valdeburgo and drag her off as a prisoner.

Act 2: Scene 1: Alaide is brought to trial. Osburgo testifies against her. The presiding Priore [Prior] asks her name, and she responds only "la straniera." The Prior feels that he has heard her voice before. Arturo rushes in and proclaims her innocence and confesses his own guilt. However, Valdeburgo suddenly appears as well to announce that Arturo is innocent. The Prior again demands Alaide's name, which she refuses to reveal. But she does agree to lift her veil for the Prior. He gasps upon seeing her face and sends her off with Valdeburgo. Arturo is left alone, while the Prior chastises Osburgo for his false testimony against Alaide.

Scene 2: Arturo comes to beg Alaide's forgiveness and confess his love. But he encounters Valdeburgo outside her hut. Valdeburgo again pleads with Arturo to desist in his attentions toward Alaide. Arturo reluctantly agrees to return to marry Isoletta, but asks that Alaide attend his wedding so he can see her one last time. Valdeburgo agrees.

Scene 3: Isoletta, truly unhappy and understandably feeling ignored and unloved, prepares for her wedding. The wedding party appears. Valdeburgo tells Arturo that Alaide is present, but hidden. Arturo behaves badly toward Isoletta who threatens to stop the wedding. Alaide, Valdeburgo, Arturo and Isoletta all weep over their respective torments. Isoletta finally renounces Arturo. Alaide suddenly reveals herself and begs Isoletta to continue with the wedding, and starts to rush out of the church. Arturo abandons Isoletta at the altar and begs Alaide to run off with him. The Prior then announces to all that Alaide is in fact Queen Agnes. What's more, the Prior has just learned that the Queen's rival for the throne has died and she must now return to Paris. Arturo, rendered mad by this news, throws himself on his sword. Isoletta falls on his dead body. La Straniera/Alaide/Agnes must now return to fulfil her duty as Queen, abandoning all hope of personal happiness.

At the Boar's Head: Gustav Holst

At the Boar's Head is an opera in one act by the English composer Gustav Holst, his op. 42. Holst himself described the work as "A Musical Interlude in One Act". The libretto, by the composer himself, is based on Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part 1 and Henry IV, Part 2. Holst devised the idea for this opera in 1924, whilst convalescing from an illness. During this period, he alternated between reading Henry IV, Part I and an edition of John Playford's "The English Dancing Master", as well as folk melodies collected by Cecil Sharp and others. Holst noticed that the rhythm and metre of Shakespeare's lines matched the tunes in the Playford, as well as the tunes that Sharp and others had collected. He then decided to set a number of those melodies to a story assembled from episodes set at the Boar's Head Inn from the two parts of Henry IV. Three of the melodic passages are original, including a recitative for Prince Hal and a setting for the sonnets. Otherwise, Holst devised his score from reworking the collected folk tunes. Imogen Holst summarised the folk tunes which her father used in the score as follows:

John Playford, *The English Dancing Master*: 28 country dance tunes

Cecil Sharp, published editions: 4 morris tunes, 1 traditional country dance

Chappell, *Popular Music of the Olden Time*: 3 ballads

G. B. Gardiner, manuscript collection: 2 folksongs

Roles

Falstaff	bass
Prince Hal	tenor
Poins	bass
Bardolph	baritone
Doll Tearsheet	soprano
Peto	tenor
Pistol	baritone
Hostess	soprano

Synopsis

The opera observes classical unities of a single setting for the plot, with the events occurring in real time on a single day. The story focuses on the conversations between Falstaff and Prince Hal, and the characters who wander in and out of the Boar's Head Tavern in Eastcheap. Throughout the story, the sound of door knocks bring reminders of events happening in the world outside the tavern, including the marching of soldiers to war.

The story begins in late afternoon, as Bardolph, Gadshill and Peto sing and drink in an upstairs room at the tavern. Falstaff arrives, followed by Prince Hal and Poins, whom Falstaff accuses of cowardice, for not assisting him in an attempted highway robbery earlier that day. Falstaff exaggerates the story, until Prince Hal says that he and Poins had stolen from Falstaff money that had previously been taken from unarmed travellers.

The Hostess announces the arrival of a gentleman from Court, whereupon Falstaff and the others leave. After Prince Hal delivers a soliloquy, Falstaff and the others return with news that civil war has begun. Falstaff advises Prince Hal to rehearse what he will say to the King

before he returns to Court. Prince Hal practices with Falstaff in the role of the King, and later the two trade roles.

Doll Tearsheet arrives, and Prince Hal and Poins don disguises to be able to observe her and Falstaff's behaviour. Falstaff asks for a song, whereupon the disguised Prince Hal sings Shakespeare's sonnet 19, "Devouring Time, blunt though the lion's paws". Falstaff is displeased and interrupts with the ballad "When Arthur first in Court began", and the two songs continue in parallel. A distant march precedes a communication from Bardolph to Prince Hal, who must go to the Court at Westminster. Prince Hal and Poins remove their disguises and leave to the shouts of the outside crowd.

Pistol calls to Falstaff off-stage, and then enters the inn, in spite of the misgivings of Doll and the concern of the Hostess for the inn's reputation. Pistol and Doll argue vehemently, and Pistol is ejected. Bardolph arrives with word that a dozen captains are searching all the taverns for Falstaff. Falstaff bids Doll farewell, but at the end, before all the men go off to war, Bardolph brings a last message for Doll Tearsheet to meet Falstaff one last time. The hostess pushes Doll through the door to the assignation at the close of the opera.

Sir John in Love is an opera in four acts by the English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams. The libretto, by the composer himself, is based on Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and supplemented with texts by Philip Sidney, Thomas Middleton, Ben Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher. The music deploys English folk tunes, including "Greensleeves". Originally titled "The Fat Knight", the opera premiered at the Parry Opera Theatre, Royal College of Music, London, on 21 March 1929. Its first professional performance was on 9 April 1946 at Sadler's Wells Theatre.

Performances of the opera have remained rare, including 1978 and 1988 productions by the Bronx Opera (New York City) and a 1997 Barbican concert performance. After 1958, the opera remained unstaged in the UK until the 2006 production at English National Opera (ENO), which was ENO's first production of the work. In August 2010, the Australian Shakespeare Festival, an initiative of the University of Tasmania, gave a professional concert presentation of the opera conducted by Myer Fredman. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland gave four performances of the work in May 2015. In January 2017, the Bronx Opera performed the work as part of their 50th anniversary season.

Roles

Sir John Falstaff	baritone
Anne Page	soprano
Mistress Page	soprano
Mistress Ford	soprano
Mistress Quickly	contralto
Fenton	tenor
Doctor Caius	tenor
Frank Ford	bass
Robert Shallow	tenor or baritone
Sir Hugh Evans	baritone
Master Slender	tenor

Simple	tenor or baritone
Master George Page	baritone
Bardolph	tenor
Corporal Nym	baritone
Ancient Pistol	bass
Rugby	bass
The Host of the 'Garter Inn'	baritone
Robin	non-singing
John	baritone
Robert	baritone

Synopsis

Act 1: Outside Page's house, Justice Shallow and Parson Evans are angry at Sir John Falstaff and his men for getting Abraham Slender drunk and stealing his wallet. Slender is trying to compose a sonnet to express his affection for Anne Page, but cannot get past the line "O sweet Anne Page". Falstaff enters, dismissive of the anger of Shallow and Evans towards him. Anne Page, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford then arrive.

Remaining outside, Evans and Shallow conspire to arrange a match between Slender and Anne Page, and send Simple, Slender's servant, to Mistress Quickly to obtain her assistance. Anne Page then directs the men towards dinner. Left alone, she ponders her mother's wish for her to marry Dr. Caius, whom she does not desire. However, her true love, Master Fenton, then arrives. Anne Page and Fenton sing a duet, but Master Page drives off Fenton, as he thinks that Fenton is only after Anne Page's dowry. Master Page is himself inclined more towards Slender as a match for Anne.

As Fenton hides, Dr. Caius, his servant John Rugby, and Mistress Quickly appear. Caius hopes for Mistress Quickly's assistance in winning over Anne Page. Simple tries to deliver the letter from Slender, but Caius intercepts it, and after reading it, thinks that Evans also has designs on Anne Page. After Caius, Rugby and Simple depart, Fenton appears and gives Mistress Quickly a ring for Anne and some gold for herself, to assist him in winning Anne Page. The gold directs Mistress Quickly to place Fenton at the top of the list of suitors for Anne Page.

In the inn, Falstaff notes that he is facing hard financial times. He comes up with a scheme to seduce Mistresses Ford and Page and swindle them of some money. Falstaff writes identical love letters to Mistresses Ford and Page, but his henchmen Nym and Pistol refuse to be part of this scheme. Falstaff then instructs his page Robin to deliver the separate letters.

Nym and Pistol then decide to inform Master Ford of Falstaff's scheme. Ford enters, already feeling jealousy and suspicion of his wife's fidelity. When Nym and Pistol tell Ford of Falstaff's plan, Ford resolves to visit Falstaff in disguise to see how far Falstaff's plot proceeds. The merry wives, Mistresses Ford and Page, sing of cuckoos in counterpoint to Ford's rage.

Act 2: Scene 1: A room in Page's house. In Page's house, Mistress Page reads the letter to her from Falstaff. Mistress Ford then arrives with her own letter from Falstaff. The merry wives compare the letters and see that they are identical except for the names. They vow revenge on

Falstaff for his attempted treachery. They engage Mistress Quickly to deliver a message to Falstaff that he should go to Alice Ford's house between ten and eleven that night.

Scene 2: The parlour of the Garter Inn. Bardolph announces to Falstaff the arrival of a visitor, Master "Brook", who is Ford in disguise. "Brook" affects to be in love with Mistress Ford, but that she has a reputation for fidelity. He offers Falstaff money to see if Falstaff can seduce Mistress Ford on his behalf. "Brook" is shocked to learn that Falstaff already has a planned assignation with Mistress Ford that night. After Falstaff leaves, Ford tears off his disguise and rages against his wife's apparent infidelity.

Act 3: Scene 1: A footpath near Windsor. Fenton asks for the Inn Host's assistance to win Anne Page. Anne arrives, initially expressing some doubts because of Fenton's past association with Falstaff, but he convinces her of his true love. She then tells him of her mother's plan to marry her off to Caius, and her father's plan to marry her off to Slender. Her intention, however, is to marry Fenton, and the Inn Host plans to find a priest to officiate a ceremony between them.

Scene 2: A field near Windsor. Caius enters, with plans to challenge Evans to a duel over Anne Page. Caius, along with Ford, Shallow, Slender and the Inn Host, meet Evans by the river bank for the duel. However, the duel between Caius and Evans gradually peters out, until the Host asks them for mutual forgiveness to each other and reconciliation at the Inn over a pint. Ford then invites the company to his house, intending to show them a "monster".

Scene 3: A room in Ford's house. At Ford's house, the merry wives, with Mistress Quickly present, are setting the trap for Falstaff, in the form of a laundry hamper. Mistress Ford instructs her servants to dump the contents of the hamper into a ditch on her command. All except Mistress Ford hide, who sings "Greensleeves" in preparation for Falstaff's arrival. Falstaff appears, but before he can start in earnest on the seduction, Mistress Quickly bursts in to warn of Mistress Page rushing over to the house. Mistress Page suddenly comes in to let everyone know that Master Ford is en route to the house in a jealous rage, which to her is part of the scheme to dupe Falstaff, except that Ford truly is on his way to the house, of which no one is aware. The only place for Falstaff to hide is the laundry basket. Falstaff therein hides, and then Ford and his followers suddenly show up, in search of the "monster" alluded to earlier. Mistress Ford directs her servants to remove the laundry basket, which they do, under great strain because of Falstaff's weight. Ford only succeeds in finding Mistress Page hidden behind a curtain.

Act 4: Scene 1: A room in Ford's house. Ford asks forgiveness from his wife, which she grants. The Fords and Pages then plot a final revenge on Falstaff, by luring him to Windsor Forest, where legend has it that Herne the Hunter haunts Herne's Oak, and fairies torment unaware travellers. Mistress Page intends to dress as the fairy queen, and with the help of local children, will taunt Falstaff. Mistress Page tells Caius that Anne will be wearing green, to allow him to find her. In turn, Master Page informs Slender that Anne will be wearing white.

Scene 2: Windsor Forest. Falstaff has received a communication from Mistress Ford to meet her at Herne's Oak, dressed as Herne the Hunter, and wearing antlers, in the hope of frightening away any intruders. The merry wives arrive, but before anything between the three of them can happen, some fairies appear and the merry wives quickly depart. Anne

Page, dressed in blue, appears with a group of fairies and leads a dance around Herne's Oak. Caius and Slender each arrive, and search respectively for a fairy dressed in green and in white, which they each find and then depart. Fenton arrives and finds Anne Page, and they leave. The fairies tease Falstaff, until a horn call stops the action.

The Fords and Pages come on the scene, and Falstaff realises that he has been tricked. He takes it in good humour. Master Page now says that by this point, Anne is married to Slender. Slender arrives with his new "bride", who turns out to be young William Page in disguise. In turn, Mistress Page says that Anne is now married to Caius. Caius appears, with his "bride", who is actually Falstaff's page, Robin. Fenton and Anne finally appear, and reveal to all that they are officially married. The opera ends with a chorus of reconciliation.

Der Zarevitsch. Operetta in 3 Acts. Music by Franz Lehár, book and lyrics by Bela Jenbach and Heinz Reichert, English by Adam Carstairs. Based on the play by Gabryela Zapolska.

Premiere: Deutsches Künstler Theater, Berlin - 21 February, 1927

& Johann Strauss-Theater, Vienna - 18 May, 1928

Among the late-period pieces that Lehár wrote with Richard Tauber's participation in view, this stands out because of its strong Russian flavour, allied to a particularly tender and melodious score. The young Zarevitch must be tricked into overcoming his lack of interest in women, because a dynastic marriage is expected of him. The plan goes wrong when he and Sonia, the 'decoy', fall wildly in love and elope to Naples. Their happiness is abruptly terminated when his father, the Czar, dies and Sonia renounces him when duty calls him back to Russia.

Synopsis.

Act I: Outside the Tsar's palace in St Petersburg, the palace guard is on duty while inside an entertainment featuring Cossack dancers, singers and a balalaika orchestra is taking place. During the interval of the concert, while the Zarevitch Aljoscha is out of his apartment, his uncle, the Grand Duke, takes the opportunity to show some society ladies around it. They are the first females to cross the threshold of these rooms, because the Zarevitch has grown up with a hate for women. The visitors discover that his apartment is furnished in the most austere fashion, but with a complete range of keep-fit equipment.

When the Grand Duke and the ladies have returned to the concert, the Zarevitch's valet, Ivan, finds a handbag that one of the ladies has left behind. While he is having a look at it, he is surprised by the arrival of his wife, Mascha, who has slipped past the guards to get inside the palace. Ivan is alarmed. Not only is she not supposed to be there, but Ivan is not even supposed to be married because of the Zarevitch's dislike of women. Knowing the Zarevitch's attitude, Mascha can only suspect her own husband has been up to something when she finds him with a lady's handbag. Ivan has to produce some rapid reassurances of his fidelity and some soothing words of love.

Not surprisingly, the Zarevitch's views on women are of real concern to his father, the Tsar, and the Prime Minister has been deputed to ensure that Aljoscha gets some experience with women in readiness for his marriage. It seems that an entire dancing group at the day's musical entertainment was made up of girls in male costume and, when the Zarevitch singled

out the athletic prowess of one of these 'boys' for particular mention, it was arranged that 'he' should be brought along to the Zarevitch's apartments—ostensibly for a gymnastic work-out. Sonja, the dancer chosen, arrives at the Zarevitch's apartment dressed in a white Cossack uniform, with a long coat and high, patent leather boots. The Prime Minister warns her to respond to the Zarevitch with complete obedience and to be prepared for some rough treatment when he discovers that she is a woman. Left alone, Sonja looks round the room and apprehensively sits down to await Aljoscha's arrival.

While Sonja waits in an adjoining room, the Zarevitch returns and contemplates his lonely existence. He likens his isolation to that of a soldier keeping watch on the vast expanses of the River Volga and begs the Lord above to send him an angel before he dies. A groom enters and tells the Zarevitch that the Cossack boy is here. Sonja is shown into his presence, and the two are soon chatting freely but, when Aljoscha suggests a work-out, Sonja is reluctantly persuaded to take off her coat, revealing her true sex.

Furious, the Zarevitch makes as if to strike her but Sonja stops him and pleads with him to let her stay. Openly admitting that she had been planted by the Prime Minister, she begins with her honesty to win his confidence and, finally, she suggests that together they might defeat his uncle. She will visit him every evening, making it look as though she were his lover. The Grand Duke would be satisfied by the appearances and cease to push women on him, while they would simply remain good friends.

The Zarevitch is tempted and agrees. Then, discovering Sonja is hungry, he orders a fine meal to be brought to them. Sonja, seeking to make their situation look more realistic, adds a request for champagne and is astonished to learn that the Zarevitch has never touched a drop in his life. She tells him of the wonders it can perform, as they clink glasses and drink together. As Aljoscha mellows, Sonja continues her counselling, but suddenly he tells her she must go... but she may come back the following day. Left alone, his melancholy returns, but he thanks the Lord for having finally sent him one of His angels.

Act 2: In the Zarevitch's palace, Aljoscha is sitting at the dinner table with some of his officers. By contrast with the austere surroundings of his apartments in his father's palace, everything here is bright and friendly and a woman's touch is much in evidence. The atmosphere is distinctly merry, with a balalaika orchestra playing on the terrace, but the Zarevitch is lost in thought, contemplating his beating heart. Is it love at last? Gradually he brightens up and urges his officers to drink up. '

The Grand Duke finds the Zarevitch's altered demeanour most encouraging, though Aljoscha is still embarrassed by his uncle's references to the traces of feminine influence he sees around him. The Zarevitch has a speech to learn for the officers' parade later in the day, but this is forgotten when Sonja arrives. It soon transpires that all the signs of feminine presence about the place have been carefully arranged and that the relationship between the two is still purely platonic but now Aljoscha is anxious for Sonja to give up her dancing career and move into the palace with him. Not only has he fallen for a woman's attractions, but he is convinced that Sonja is the only one for him. He tells her that she may bring her friends to see her at the palace, and when she has gone he reaffirms to himself the passion that he now feels. He is determined to make the most of the spring of his life.

When Aljoscha has left for the parade, Sonia returns with her dancing friends. Ivan comes upon two of them, Olga and Vera, and cannot resist a little mild flirtation but, once again, he has the misfortune for Mascha to turn up and catch him. She complains that ever since the novelty of his balalaika playing wore off he has had little to offer her, and he has to do some swift sweet talking to retrieve the situation. Sonja, meanwhile, is revelling in telling her dancing friends of her happiness at her new life.

Now the dark clouds begin to gather over the relationship between the Zarevitch and Sonja. As far as the Tsar and his Prime Minister are concerned, Sonja has served her usefulness by breaking down the barriers between the Zarevitch and womankind. Now a royal wife has been found for him and she is to arrive that evening. The Grand Duke takes it upon himself to dispose of Sonja and, separating her from her friends, he tells her that she will have to leave. He will arrange the break-up by telling Aljoscha of all the previous lovers she has had. Sonja obediently goes along with the plan but, when the Zarevitch returns, she cannot bring herself to say goodbye. All the two can do is reaffirm their love for each other.

The Lord Chamberlain arrives to conduct the Zarevitch to meet his future wife and Aljoscha instructs the Lord Chamberlain to tell his father that he refuses. He remains at his palace with Sonja, who has arranged a Thousand and One Nights dancing display by all her friends.

Aljoscha is delighted with the dancing and, when the girls crowd round him, he tells them of all that Sonja means to him. Suddenly the Grand Duke appears with four officers in full uniform but, once again, Aljoscha refuses to obey his father's command. The Grand Duke then tells him of Sonja's admission to a string of previous lovers, and the Zarevitch is shattered. In such a situation Sonja can no longer hold to the story she had agreed. She swears to Aljoscha that she has belonged to no other man and that she had gone along with the deception only under duress and, the Grand Duke's plan in ruins, they fall into each other's arms.

Act 3: In a garden in Naples, Sonja and the Zarevitch are relaxing in front of a villa overlooking the gently lapping sea. Since they fled to Naples they have thought of nothing but each other and their days consist of nothing but thoughts of love.

Ivan and Mascha have accompanied them to Naples, and Ivan has been finding great delight in the local girls while Mascha has been enjoying the attentions of the Italian men. This time it is Ivan who has to do the pleading, reassuring her that he, no matter what, will always be there when Mascha needs someone.

One day the Grand Duke appears in Naples with a group of army officers. Once more he has come to plead with the Zarevitch: the Tsar is ill and may die at any time. He must return. Aljoscha declares that he would renounce the throne rather than give up Sonja, but then a telegram is handed to the Zarevitch: his father has died, and he is already Tsar. The officers swear their allegiance and Aljoscha realises that duty calls him. He kneels before Sonja, kisses her hand and abruptly departs as the broken-hearted Sonja is left helplessly lamenting the workings of fate.