

NAXOS

**Giacomo
MEYERBEER**

**Ballet Music
from the Operas**

Les Huguenots

Robert le Diable

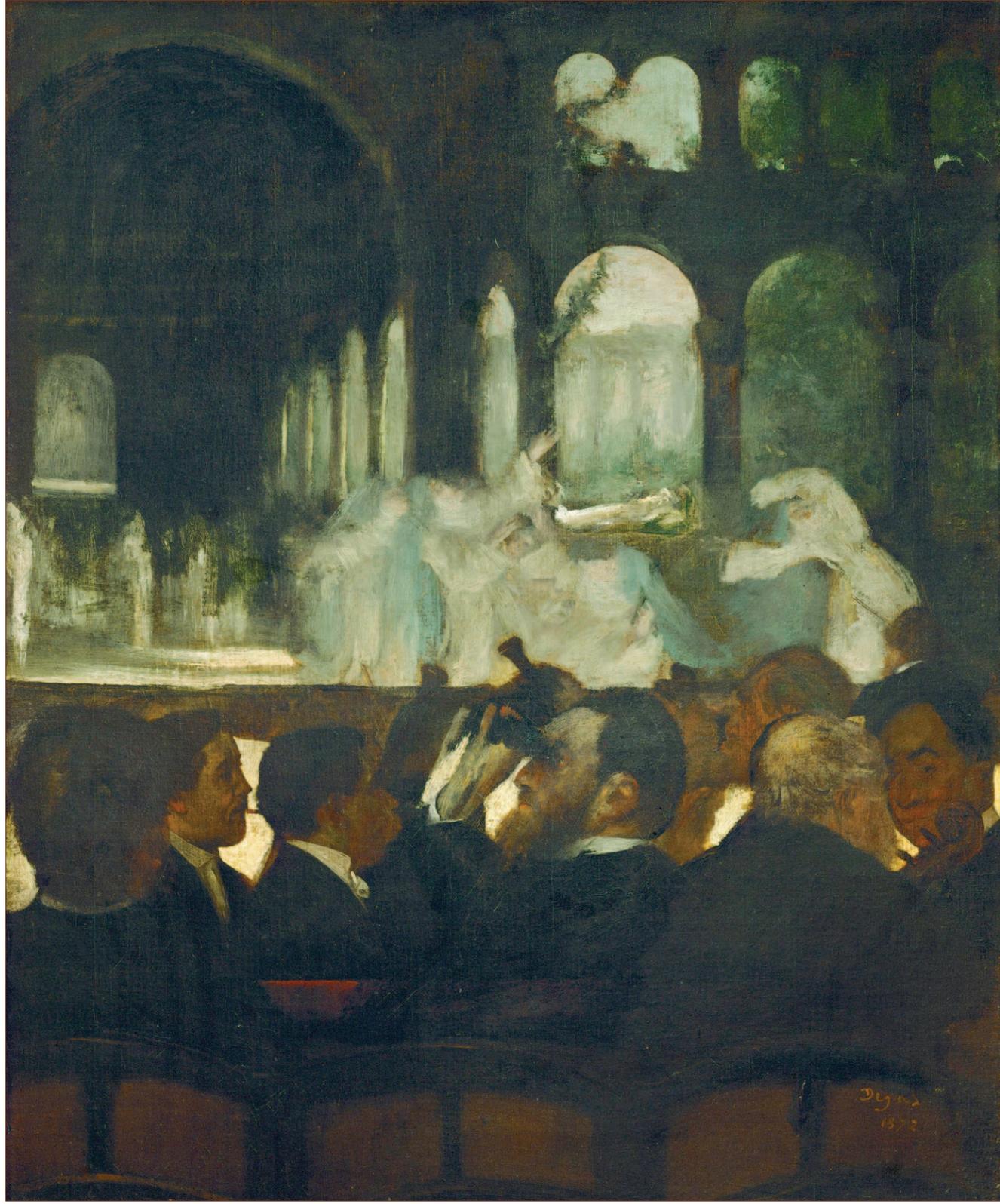
L'Étoile du Nord

Le Prophète

L'Africaine

**Barcelona
Symphony
Orchestra**

Michał Nesterowicz



Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864)

Ballet Music from the Operas

Giacomo Meyerbeer, of a wealthy and cultured Berlin Jewish family, having studied in Germany and Italy, became one of the most significant opera composers of all time. His fame rests principally on the four grand operas he wrote for the Paris Opéra, *Robert le Diable*, *Les Huguenots*, *Le Prophète* and *L'Africaine*. These works were spectacularly successful and enormously influential, with *Les Huguenots* one of the most performed of all operas. The venerable tradition of the *opéra-ballet*, going back to Lully, required the inclusion of dance in the operatic scenario, and those in Meyerbeer's works acquired legendary status. The *Ballet of the Nuns* in *Robert le Diable* (choreographed by Filippo Taglioni) when the hero is tempted into sacrilege by the demonic blandishments of ghostly nuns, initiated the whole Romantic tradition of the *ballet blanc*. Meyerbeer's music was also strongly influential on subsequent style. The dances in *Le Prophète* set in the winter snow (choreographed by Auguste Mabile) became famous for their simulation of skating by using roller skates. This, and music from *L'Étoile du Nord*, adapted for Frederick Ashton's ballet *Les Patineurs* by Constant Lambert (1937), spread the beauty of Meyerbeer's dance music all over the world.

Meyerbeer's last ballet, the grandiose *Marche indienne* in *L'Africaine* (choreographed by Arthur Saint-Léon), through its melodic ideas and exotic orchestration, helped to stimulate and sustain the vogue for Orientalism in the later nineteenth century.

Les Huguenots (1836) is a tale of the Wars of Religion in France (1572). The *Danse bohémienne* is a charming diversion as the gypsies invade the scene in Act 3, and by dancing and fortune-telling, distract the citizens of Paris from their religious confrontation. The music is bold and attractive, with sumptuous orchestration and engaging melodies. The recurring theme for unison violas and cellos creates a sense of exciting activity, with the tambourines providing a hint of the exotic. Prominent horns provide sonority, and the the solo cornet a sense of

brash brilliance. The constantly changing and rhythmically vivacious themes induce a sense of breathlessness and novelty.

Robert le Diable (1831) is a legendary story set in Sicily, about the temptations and salvation of Robert Duke of Normandy, the father of William the Conqueror. The *Pas de cinq*, a divertissement, forms part of the tournament in Act 2. The mood is light and sunny, ordinary and every day. The colours are pastel, the mood lightly inflected with Sicilian motifs and characterized by beautiful writing for all the woodwind and the horns. *The Ballet of the Nuns* in Act 3 is highly dramatic, integral to the symbolism of the action. It is also supposed to be supernatural music, the medium of demonic temptation, the very opposite of the *Pas de cinq*: this is nocturnal, moonlit, mysterious, sinister, even slightly grotesque. The sequence begins with the shimmering violins depicting the flickering of the will-o'-the-wisps on the tombstones. The necromantic spirits begin emerging from their graves to the eerie sounds of the sepulchral solo bassoons, fumbling to some kind of dusty resuscitation. The punctuating chords for bassoons, horns, trumpets and trombones with the tam-tam captures something of the ghostly nature of the scene. When the spectres are assembled, they dance in the moonlight to Romantic fairy music, transformed into beautiful women, but since they are creatures controlled by their dark master Bertram, not free agents, the music is also glassy, glittering, slightly mechanical. The sinister underside is hinted at in the hobbling broken rising motif and the bassoon-rich bass writing before the wild abandon of their *bacchanale*, with some lovely brass writing and iterative treble effects. The three *Airs de ballet* depict the temptations of drinking (with dusky horn chords), gambling (a staccato waltz with dicing motifs) and love (a languorous cello solo in duet with the flute). The music is ostensibly seductive, but always with an undercurrent of the sinister and mechanical. When the temptation is achieved, and Robert steals the magic talisman, the final movement is loud and swift,

torrential in the triumph of the dark forces. The hero falls, and demons surround and seize the lost souls of the nuns to return them to their dark resting places. The glittering marionette music and hobbling rising motif of the *Bacchanale* return in altered time, in fuller orchestration and exultant proclamation, as the satanic purpose of the dance is realised and celebrated with fervent, almost manic upwards runs for the whole orchestra.

L'Étoile du Nord (1854) tells how Tsar Peter the Great overcame conspiracy and rebellion and found his happiness with the Livonian peasant girl Catherine. The waltz is danced in a military camp, and has a deliberateness and heaviness paradoxically challenging the fleetness of the dance. This is captured in the interplay between very low bass (virtuoso writing for cellos, double bass and bassoons) and high treble (piccolos and flutes). The second movement is an orchestral arrangement of a cavalry song and should reflect lightness of movement and *grandezza* of style. The third movement is a beautiful cantabile prayer, the chief theme of the opera, and motif of Catherine's destiny. It is smooth, suave, calming, tranquil, with continuous flowing arpeggios scored for two harps. The last movement is measured and reflective but cheerful, marking the return to everyday normality after the many adventures of Acts 1 and 2. The harmonies of this entr'acte are reassuring and the orchestration smooth and comforting.

Le Prophète (1849) centres on the Anabaptist uprising of 1534-5, when, led by John of Leyden, they established their New Zion in the Westphalian city of Münster. This sequence of four dances, the famous *Ballet of the Skaters*, is set in a winter landscape, a forest next to a frozen lake. The music is written in a highly virtuoso fashion, with demanding orchestral playing and a brilliant sense of colour. It is performed by peasants, camp followers and canteen suppliers, so retains something of

the nature of folk dancing, rough waltzing, stamping, and broad ice-skating (like the many Netherlandish winter scenes painted by the Breughel family). The first and third episodes (waltzing and skating) capture the folksy feel, with heavy rhythms, syncopations and sliding figures in the orchestra. The second and fourth episodes are lighter and more propulsive (the rather elegant *Redowa* and fleet *Galop*). The last movement in particular is mercurial and glittering, growing in excitement, like an increasing fall of snow. All four pieces have a high brilliant orchestral sheen and very strong bass writing. The trombones play a great part, as do the bassoons, adding a dark edge to the music.

L'Africaine (1865) is based on the voyage of Vasco da Gama around Africa to India in 1498. The *Marche Indienne*, an orchestral tour de force celebrating the returning heroine Sélika, freed from her captivity, is processional, a fusion of march and dance. The exotic, faraway atmosphere is conjured up in the orchestral colours. There is a textured mahogany quality imparted by the powerful scoring for lower woodwind and brass (with four bassoons, bass clarinet and ophicleide), which carries the piece on a dark tonal substratum. The strangeness is also conveyed in the spiky dotted rhythms and runs of the low-lying main theme (for the warriors). This is contrasted with the lighter silvery brass choir playing the smooth cantabile of the second theme (for the priests) and its serene string extension in the subsidiary part of the melody. The interplay of these themes builds up to the climactic grand entry of the Queen, very ceremonial in its march-like formality and heavy military style. This is beguilingly contrasted with the fluid interplay of strings, harps, bells and triangle, as interpolated brassy fanfares lead to the triumphant conclusion.

Robert Ignatius Letellier

Barcelona Symphony Orchestra, the National Orchestra of Catalonia



Photo: May Circus

The Orquestra Simfònica de Barcelona i Nacional de Catalunya, OBC, (Barcelona Symphony Orchestra, the National Orchestra of Catalonia) was founded in 1944 under the direction of Eduard Toldrà. Pablo González was appointed Music Director in September 2010. The OBC is committed to promoting classical and contemporary music of all cultures and tendencies, paying special attention to Catalan composers. Throughout its over seventy years of history, the OBC has programmed numerous new productions and has made several recordings with important labels, including an ongoing collaboration with Naxos. At the same time, the OBC is continually touring abroad, performing at some of the world's major concert halls such as Carnegie Hall, the Vienna Musikverein and Konzerthaus, and the Concertgebouw, and is frequently invited to renowned international festivals. The OBC collaborates regularly with other cultural institutions, both in Spain and abroad and is the first Spanish orchestra to sign an agreement with the digital platform Medici.tv. In April 1999 the OBC moved to *L'Auditori* of Barcelona, as its resident venue. The building was designed by Spanish architect Rafael Moneo.

Michał Nesterowicz



Photo: Mirek Pietruszyński

Since winning the Cadaqués Orchestra European Conducting Competition in 2008, Michał Nesterowicz has gone on to conduct many of the major orchestras in Spain, Switzerland, Italy, Poland and the UK, as well as numerous other leading European ensembles. He is Artistic Director of the Orquestra Sinfónica de Tenerife, and has previously held equivalent posts at the Orquestra Sinfónica de Chile and the Polish Baltic Philharmonic Orchestra (Gdańsk). Other orchestras with which he has worked include the Tonhalle Orchester Zürich, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Orquesta y Coro Nacionales de España, Orquestra Sinfónica de Barcelona y Nacional de Catalunya, Orquestra Sinfónica de Galicia, Orquestra Sinfónica de Navarra, Orchestra della Svizzera Italia, National Orchestra of Belgium and Basel Symphony Orchestra. Michał Nesterowicz studied at the Wrocław Academy of Music and graduated from the class of Marek Pijarowski in 1997. He was among the winners of the Sixth Grzegorz Fitelberg International Conducting Competition in Katowice and has since conducted the Warsaw National Philharmonic Orchestra, Sinfonia Varsovia, Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, Katowice, and the Wrocław Philharmonic Orchestra.

Giacomo Meyerbeer was one of the most significant opera composers of all time. The four grand operas represented here brought him his greatest fame, with *Les Huguenots* being one of the most performed of all operas. Meyerbeer's contributions to the French tradition of *opéra-ballet* acquired legendary status, including the ghostly *Ballet of the Nuns* from *Robert le Diable*; the exotic orchestral colour of the *Marche indienne* in *L'Africaine*; and the virtuoso *Ballet of the Skaters* from *Le Prophète* in which the dancers famously glided over the stage using roller skates.

l:OBC ORQUESTRA SIMFÒNICA
DE BARCELONA
I NACIONAL DE CATALUNYA

Giacomo MEYERBEER

(1791-1864)



Ballet Music from the Operas

| | | | |
|--|------|--|------|
| Les Huguenots (1836) | | L'Étoile du Nord (1854) | |
| 1 Act 3: Danse bohémienne (Gypsy Dance) | 4:46 | 9 Act 2: Waltz | 3:32 |
| Robert le Diable (1831) | | 10 Act 2: Chanson de cavalerie | 1:18 |
| 2 Act 2: Pas de cinq | 9:28 | 11 Act 1: Prayer | 2:23 |
| Act 3: Ballet des Nonnes (Ballet of the Nuns) | | 12 Entr'acte to Act 3 | 2:02 |
| 3 Les Feux Follets et Procession des nonnes | | Le Prophète (1849) | |
| 4 Bacchanale | 3:53 | Act 3: Ballet des Patineurs (Ballet of the Skaters) | |
| 5 Premier Air de Ballet: Séduction par l'ivresse | 5:00 | 13 Waltz | 1:41 |
| 6 Deuxième Air de Ballet: Séduction par le jeu | 2:19 | 14 Redowa | 7:08 |
| 7 Troisième Air de Ballet: Séduction par l'amour | 3:20 | 15 Quadrilles des patineurs | 4:48 |
| 8 Finale | 2:34 | 16 Galop | 5:01 |
| | 1:36 | L'Africaine (1865) | |
| | | 17 Act 4: Marche indienne (Indian March) | 8:51 |

Barcelona Symphony Orchestra
(Orquestra Simfònica de Barcelona i Nacional de Catalunya)

Michał Nesterowicz

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Produced, engineered and edited by Sean Lewis • Booklet notes: Robert Ignatius Letellier

Cover: *Le ballet de Robert le Diable*, 1871,
by Edgar Degas (1834-1917) (akg-images / Erich Lessing)