

# MEYERBEER

## Overtures and Stage Music

Der Fischer und das Milchmädchen • Wirt und Gast

Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice

Dario Salvi



**Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791–1864) / Abbé Georg Joseph Vogler (1749–1814)**

- 1 Der Admiral, oder Der verlorene Prozess – Overture (1811) 4:26**

**Giacomo Meyerbeer: Der Fischer und das Milchmädchen,  
oder Viel Lärm um einen Kuss (c. 1809)**

**48:29**

- 2** Ouverture 3:38
- 3** Tableau 1: Allegretto galante 1:10
- 4** Tableau 2: Air de Chasse 4:01
- 5** Tableau 3: Allegro furioso – 0:59
- 6** Tableau 4: Allegretto scherzando 0:48
- 7** Tableau 5: Corps de ballet 0:57
- 8** Tableau 6: Air de Chassé par Écho 2:37
- 9** Tableau 7: Allegretto galante 1:11
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- 11** Tableau 9a: Pas de deux 3:00
- 12** Tableau 9b: Andantino pastorale 1:21
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- 15** Tableau 12: Andantino 1:31
- 16** Tableau 13: Molto moderato 1:09
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- 18** Tableau 15: Allegro furioso 1:37
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- 22** Tableau 19: Pas seul 2:19
- 23** Tableau 20: Pas de trois 3:32
- 24** Tableau 21: Finale, ou Contredanse générale 4:05

- 25 Das Brandenburger Tor – Einleitung (1814) 3:23**

**Wirt und Gast, oder Aus Scherz Ernst (1812) (excerpts)**

**8:54**

- 26** Overture 6:42
- 27** Act II: Türkischer Marsch 2:10

- 28 Romilda e Costanza – Overture (1817) 9:26**

# Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791–1864)

## Stage Music

The music on this album presents the very earliest period of the great opera composer Giacomo Meyerbeer's stage career.

In spite of his infantile precocity, the protection of his wealthy and cultured parents Jakob Herz Beer and Amalia Meyer Wulff (married 1788) and extraordinary conditions of study (with Franz Lauska, and Carl Friedrich Zelter), the young Meyerbeer was already 19 years old, still a student in Berlin, when his first stage work was performed. This was a ballet, composed under the guidance of his teacher Bernhard Anselm Weber (1764–1821). Since the premiere was at the Court Opera in Berlin on 26 March 1810, it was mostly written in 1809. The name of the composer of this *ländliche divertissement* was not mentioned. The French ballet master at the Court Opera, Étienne Lauchery (1732–1820), devised the scenario entitled *Le Passage de la rivière ou la Femme jalouse* ('The Crossing of the River, or the Jealous Woman') and choreographed the piece himself.

The autograph score (held in the Staatsbibliothek, Berlin) is headed *Der Schiffer und das Milchmädchen / oder / Viel Lärm um einen Kuss / Ein pantomimisches Ballet in einem Aufzuge / Musik von Meier Beer*. The work, lasting less than an hour, had four performances. The detailed scenario has disappeared, but the piece is still remarkable as Meyerbeer's first encounter with the stage, presciently working with French artists and in the medium of ballet where he would later prove himself an innovator (the very inventor of the Romantic ballet, in his grand opera *Robert le Diable*, 1831). The Fisherman was danced by Monsieur Telle, the Fisherman's Wife the Hostess by Madame Telle, the Milk Maid by Madame Lauchery, and the Sister of the Hostess Mlle. Joyeuse, with Fräulein Holzbecker as the Niece and Herr Moser as the Forester.

The friendly little story emerges from the time of the *ancien régime*, the Rococo age of the refined artist Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806) when Queen Marie Antoinette had a neat little stylised village with artificial landscapes built at the Petit Trianon in the palace of Versailles. The ballet is a harmless diversion provided with a prudish Prussian conclusion.

Meyerbeer wrote music for 22 numbers – from a pastoral overture (*Andantino pastorale, ma non troppo lento*, A major, 3/8), through to an *Allegretto galante* (F major, 2/4), and an *Air de Chasse* (*Allegro*, F major, 6/8), to the final *Contredanse générale* (*Allegretto con spirito*, D major, 6/8). Among the dances written for the fishing and hunting prototypes portrayed in this rural vignette is the *chassé*, after the French 'hunted', in which one foot displaces the other as if by chasing it. The score contains everything that could be expected of a *ballet-divertissement*. Both small and large numbers are heirs to the 18th century, hardly distinguished melodically and harmonically from the minuets and contredanses of Mozart and Beethoven. The tonality is reassuringly centred around the recurring keys of C, D, F and G. The scoring is for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and horns, and the usual strings corresponding to contemporary standards. They are not all employed throughout, but rather differentiated, with the woodwind writing bringing an element of variety to the movements. Each number is self-contained, but there are recognisable relationships and similarities between individual parts. A recurring motif (a turn of semiquavers) recurs in the melodic structure of several of the numbers, and works an unconscious effect to create a sense of harmony and integration.

It is a harmless tale. Laundresses are distracted from their work by young foresters. The young men are first scolded by their leader and by the lady innkeeper, who finally join them in their dances. The fisherman arrives with a beautiful fish that his wife, the innkeeper, takes to the village, while her husband puts his nets to out dry. A young dairy maid asks to be transported to the other side of the river: the fisherman tries to steal a kiss from her. He is surprised by the return of his wife who, in rage, throws the maid's milk jar into the river. The young dairy maid takes revenge by breaking the hostess's spinning wheel. Finally, the chief forester brings peace and all join in a general dance of reconciliation and harmony.

The various tableaux present the action as follows:

Nos. 1–7 – Exposition: Laundresses and Hunters [3–9](#)

Nos. 8–14 – The Milkmaid and the Fisherman [10–17](#)

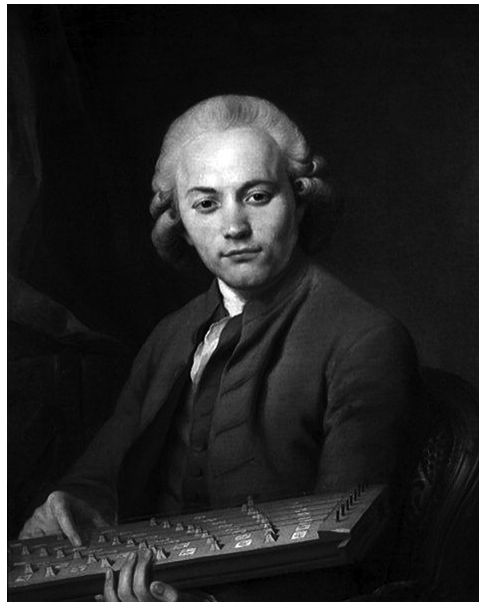
Nos. 15–18 – The Hostess and the Milkmaid [18–21](#)

Nos. 19–21 – General reconciliation [22–24](#)



**MEYER-BEER**

The Young Meyerbeer



The Abbé Vogler



Michal Josef Gusikov



Gaetano Rossi



The ballet is an enchanting discovery from beginning to end, the tonal language bright and forward, appropriate to the style of this music.

Whereas *Der Fischer und das Milchmädchen* is a neo-Classical idyll, the overtures on this album take us into a more dramatic realm. In 1810 the youthful composer left Berlin for Darmstadt to join the household of the famous organist, composer, traveller and theoretician the Abbé Georg Joseph Vogler (1749–1814). Here Meyerbeer was a fellow pupil of Carl Maria von Weber (1786–1826), and the two became fast friends. The Abbé's approach to music is exemplified in the overture to the opera *Der Admiral, oder Der verlorene Prozess* (1811, unperformed), which both he and Meyerbeer set to music at the same time. On 10 January 1811 Meyerbeer wrote to his friend Johann Baptist Gänsbacher (1778–1844) in Vienna: 'Papa [Vogler] had the great idea that I should set the same text, number for number simultaneously with him.' The overture probably marks a collaboration, with the use of a most unusual instrument, the *strohfidel* – typical of the Abbé's experimental attitude to new orchestral colours. The instrument was propagated by Michal Josef Gusikov (1806–1837), a Russian-Jew, who gave the first performances of klezmer music to West European concert audiences on his 'wood and straw instrument' which he popularised when his weak lungs would no longer allow him to play the flute at concert level.

Meyerbeer continued to write operas in the German mode for some years after leaving Darmstadt. In 1812 he travelled to Munich where he completed his first full opera, the rather grandiose Biblical *Jephtas Gelübde* (8.660477-78) (first performed in the city on 23 December 1812) and also wrote a comic Singspiel *Wirt und Gast, oder Aus Scherz Ernst*, with a libretto by Johann Gottfried Wohlbrück (1770–1822). This was based on *The Story of the Sleeper Awakened* from *The Arabian Nights*, translated by Antoine Galland (1646–1715) between 1704 and 1717, and published in the ninth volume of his work (1712). The opera followed on from Weber who composed his version of the fairy tale *Abu Hassan* the year before (first performed in Munich in 1811). *Wirt und Gast, oder Aus Scherz Ernst*, in the tradition of the 'Turkish' theme established by Mozart in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (first heard in Vienna in 1782). (Rossini would contribute to the genre with his own *L'italiana in Algeri*, Venice, 22 May 1813.) The score is alive with Oriental exoticism, in the clashing percussion of the Janissary music (where the effect of using triangle, cymbals and bass drum sought to imitate the music played by the infantry regiment forming the Sultan's bodyguard), while also capturing the chromatic unease that reflects the deception of the storyline. The opera was produced in Stuttgart on 6 January 1813 before Meyerbeer left for Vienna where he spent nearly two years. It was remodelled for the Austrian capital as *Die beiden Kalifen* for a performance on 20 October 1814, and also mounted in Prague by Weber on 20 October 1815. The score used here is the Dresden MS entitled *Alimelek, oder Wirt und Gast*, copied by Johann Christoph Beck (1755–1827), the conducting score with notes pasted in and very rare small pencil entries (mainly corrections). Weber again conducted a performance of his friend's work, this time in the Saxon capital on 22 February 1820. The exotic strain is even stronger in the *Turkish March* that occurs in *Act II* as part of Alimelek's brief and fabulous experience of being the Caliph for a day. The opera was first revived at the festival of Bad Urach on 9 and 10 October 2010.

While still in the Austrian capital Meyerbeer wrote another German opera, the one-act occasional piece *Das Brandenburger Tor*, with libretto by Johann Emanuel Veith (1787–1876), celebrating the liberation of Berlin from Napoleonic control, and the triumph of the coalition of King Frederick William III of Prussia, Emperor Alexander I of Russia, and Emperor Francis I of Austria. Meyerbeer's family procured a commission from the National Theatre in Berlin that was intended to mark the victorious entry into the capital of the returning Prussian troops. The composer's mother, Amalia Beer, hoped for a production of this work in Berlin to mark the great national events, but owing to the King's early departure for Vienna the little Singspiel was never performed in Meyerbeer's lifetime. The premiere was only on 5 September 1991, on Meyerbeer's bicentenary, at the Schauspielhaus in Berlin. The scenario celebrates the return of peace and the freedom to love again in a tender affair that stands in marked contrast to the spirit of Prussian nationalism and the triumphal symbolism of the Brandenburg Gate for Berlin. The gentle prelude captures the pastoral charm and peace of this work.

The composer then visited Paris and London, after which he made the biggest artistic move of his life. He travelled to Italy later in 1815 where he assimilated the operatic style of the day. Here he Italianised his patronym to 'Giacomo' and conflated his first name and surname to the famous form which became known to posterity. After a sojourn in Sicily (from June to October 1816) where he collected folk songs, he produced the first of his six Italian operas, all of which were well received.

The young Meyerbeer's passionate reaction to the Italian operatic tradition can be compared with cascading water, in its light and sparkling invention. To a lively sense of accessible, tuneful Rossini-like melody, he adds passages of floridity, and then brings a Germanic sense of apt and colourful instrumentation. Meyerbeer's orchestral writing is clear and delicate, rather than aggressive, pleasingly complementing the voices but never overpowering them.

Meyerbeer's first Italian opera *Romilda e Costanza*, an *opera semiseria* about fraternal jealousy and rescue from false imprisonment, was first performed in Padua (Teatro Nuovo, 19 July 1817). The work was composed between May and July 1817, the first collaboration with his librettist Gaetano Rossi (1774–1855) of Verona. On 14 May Rossi undertook 'to write a Melo-drama at the wish of signor Giacomo Meyerbeer in the time prescribed.' A contract with the impresario Girolamo Mazzucato was signed on 1 June. Rossi provided four of Meyerbeer's six Italian libretti, and remained a lifelong friend whom Meyerbeer supported financially in his old age.

The overture shows Meyerbeer's complete assimilation of the Rossinian mode. After an introduction of almost Beethovenian solemnity, with prominent horns, the jaunty dotted theme of the first subject is launched over reiterated staccato quaver chords (as in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*). This moves into a truncated development by means of an ascending figure (quaver triplets rising to a minim) before descending in a cascade of triplets, generating tension, but this time in thirds, used iteratively, in a double descending motion – a short then a long descent (again as in *Il barbiere*). The heart of this developmental excitement is underpinned by a surging bass line, with trombones descending in octaves (as in *La gazza ladra*), while the transition to the second subject is heralded by a falling *pizzicato* passage in the lower strings (as in *L'italiana in Algeri* and *La Cenerentola*). These are all fingerprints of the typical Rossini overture. Meyerbeer's sophisticated Germanic technique comes into play in the final peroration, where the excitement of the approaching climax is borne upwards to be held in momentary suspension by a twice repeated first inversion sequence. Meyerbeer used the overture again for his next opera *Semiramide*, but integrated it by incorporating the main theme of the overture into the *Act I* finale of that opera. *Romilda* was first revived in modern times at the festival at Bad Wildbad on 17 July 2019 (8.660495-97). The present take on the overture is reflective and more nuanced than the aforementioned faster performance, emphasising the gravitas of the story and the harmonic textures of the composition.

**Robert Ignatius Letellier**

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## Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice



welcomed numerous world-renowned soloists such as Isabelle van Keulen, Vladimir Spivakov, Ludwig Güttler, Radek Baborák, Gábor Boldoczki and Sergei Nakariakov. Aside from concerts, the orchestra regularly engages in operatic and theatre projects and has recorded dozens of successful albums on record labels including Naxos, ArcoDiva, Supraphon, Classico, Monitor-EMI and Amabile.

[www.kfpar.cz](http://www.kfpar.cz)

The Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice is valued for its stylistic interpretations and the extraordinary quality of its orchestral sound, and it is rightly ranked amongst the world's leading representatives of Czech musical culture. It often performs at the most prestigious festivals in the Czech Republic and venues throughout Europe such as the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, the Grosses Festspielhaus, Salzburg, the Herkulesaal and the Gasteig, Munich, the Musikverein, Vienna, the Brucknerhaus, Linz, and the Meistersingerhalle, Nuremberg among many others. Outside Europe the orchestra has performed in Japan and toured extensively around America. The first principal conductor, Libor Pešek, quickly raised the orchestra to a high standard, and subsequent principal conductors have included Marco Armiliato and Mariss Jansons. The orchestra has also

## Dario Salvi



Dario Salvi is a Scottish-Italian conductor, musicologist and researcher who specialises in the restoration and performance of rare works. Salvi conducts symphonic works, ballet, opera and operettas across Europe, the Middle East and the US. His passion is the rediscovery and performance of long-forgotten masterpieces. He is currently collaborating with Naxos on recordings of Romantic ballets and a series on Auber's overtures and orchestral music. Other important projects include recording Viennese operettas by Johann Strauss II, Franz von Suppé, Carl Michael Ziehrer and others, as well as completing world premiere recordings of works by Giacomo Meyerbeer and Engelbert Humperdinck. Salvi has also written books on Viennese operetta, published new musical editions of operas and is a lifetime honorary member of The Johann Strauss Society of Great Britain.

[www.dariosalvi.com](http://www.dariosalvi.com)

Meyerbeer was a precocious composer and this album traces some of his very earliest works. *Der Fischer und das Milchmädchen* was his first stage work, a charming rural vignette that contains all the essential features of a *ballet-divertissement* couched in writing that enchantingly evokes the 18th century. Collaborating with his teacher, the Abbé Georg Vogler, Meyerbeer composed *Der Admiral* in 1811. The following year saw *Wirt und Gast* with the vivid Oriental exoticism of its Janissary music, while *Romilda e Constanza*, his first Italian opera, shows his complete assimilation of Rossinian models.

# Giacomo MEYERBEER

(1791–1864)

## Overtures and Stage Music

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|--------------|--|--------------|
| <b>1</b>     | <b>Giacomo Meyerbeer / Abbé Georg Joseph Vogler (1749–1814):<br/>Der Admiral, oder Der verlorene Prozess<br/>(‘The Admiral, or The Lost Trial’) – Overture (1811)*</b> | <b>4:26</b>  |
| <b>2–24</b>  | <b>Meyerbeer: Der Fischer und das Milchmädchen, oder Viel Lärm<br/>um einen Kuss (‘The Fisherman and the Milkmaid,<br/>or Much Ado About a Kiss’) (c. 1809)*</b>       | <b>48:29</b> |
| <b>25</b>    | <b>Das Brandenburger Tor (‘The Brandenburg Gate’)<br/>– Einleitung (1814)*</b>   | <b>3:23</b>  |
| <b>26–27</b> | <b>Wirt und Gast, oder Aus Scherz Ernst<br/>(‘Landlord and Guest, or A Serious Joke’) (1812) (excerpts)</b>  | <b>8:54</b>  |
| <b>28</b>    | <b>Romilda e Constanza – Overture (1817)</b>   | <b>9:26</b>  |

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**Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice**

**Dario Salvi**

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

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