



# GREAT COMEDY OVERTURES

The Barber of Baghdad  
Donna Diana • Fra Diavolo  
Martha • Il matrimonio segreto  
The Merry Wives of Windsor • Mignon  
Si j'étais roi • Susanna's Secret  
Zampa • Zar und Zimmermann

Royal Scottish National Orchestra

Lance Friedel

## Great Comedy Overtures

Comic opera originated in eighteenth-century Italy as *opera buffa* and was soon taken up in France as *opéra comique* and, later, French operetta. Other countries assimilated these Italian and French forms into their own musical traditions, resulting in, for example, the Viennese operetta and the German *Spieloper*. This disc presents popular overtures to comic operas from all the aforementioned distinctive genres.

French composer Ferdinand Hérold (1791-1833) died at the height of his success as a composer for the stage. First performed at the Opéra-Comique in May 1831, *Zampa, ou La Fiancée de marbre* is one of the composer's final pieces and retained its popularity for many years. The brilliant overture is a model of its kind, satisfying as a self-sufficient curtain-raiser with its formal balance and orchestral colour, whilst also setting the scene for the opera's melodramatic tale of seduction and the supernatural. Two slow passages, the first featuring a chorale-like idea for woodwind and the second a freely rhapsodic clarinet solo, contrast effectively with the dashing *Allegros* for full orchestra, whilst the deft transitions between these different sections show Hérold's dramatic flair.

Though his output ranges from church music to songs and piano pieces, the Prussian-born Otto Nicolai (1810-1849) is chiefly remembered today for just one work, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which had its première in March 1849 at the Berlin Opera under the composer's baton. Tragically, Nicolai died just two months later, aged only 38, aware of only the initial stages of its international success. Distinguished by its attractive themes, the overture rapidly established itself as a staple of the concert repertoire. The slow introduction, based on the famous moonlit chorus, and the spirited main *Allegro*, present the romantic and comic elements of the opera, respectively. As a counterweight to the extended opening section, the sparkling coda is delightfully prolonged.

Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari (1876-1948) was born and died in Venice but settled in Germany where most of his operas were first produced. His one-act comedy *Il segreto*

*di Susanna* (Susanna's Secret) was given its première at the Munich Hoftheater in 1909. The 'secret' in the title refers to Susanna's furtive enjoyment of an occasional cigarette and her essential innocence is conveyed by the almost Mozartian grace of Wolf-Ferrari's score. Notable for its delicate, chamber-like textures, the sparkling little overture achieves a contrapuntal feat in that its four themes, presented in quick succession at the start, are heard all together towards the end.

Ambroise Thomas (1811-1896), an instinctive man of the theatre, was also a key figure in the French musical establishment and became professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire. His output ranges from *Hamlet* (1868) to the popular *Raymond, ou le Secret de la reine*, first performed at the Opéra-Comique in 1851, whose overture has retained a foothold in the repertoire. Perhaps the composer's greatest success, however, was the opera *Mignon*, which had its première at the Opéra-Comique in November 1866. An adaptation of Goethe's novel of abduction and mistaken identity *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, it received many performances in France and beyond. The overture serves to acquaint opera-goers with the work's main themes with quintessentially Gallic precision and elegance. Alive with anticipation, an elaborate introduction consisting of florid solos for clarinet, flute and harp, precedes a memorable theme for horn before a vigorous polonaise signals the overture's lively principal section.

Born in Vienna, Emil Nikolaus Freiherr von Reznicek (1860-1945) was a theatre composer, active in Graz, Berlin and Mainz, among other cities. He conducted a Prague military band and the Court Orchestra in Weimar. Among his works are several operas, orchestral works, songs and chamber music but his name is remembered today solely for his second opera, *Donna Diana* (1894), and, more specifically, for its brief, vivacious and superbly crafted overture. Unusually for a comedy overture, it is in strict sonata form with a repeated exposition presenting the two key contrasting themes, followed by a short but eventful development section, heralded by triangle, and

finally a terse recapitulation. Expertly scored, this overture is graced with an almost classical sense of formal proportion and a subtle, painterly use of the orchestra.

*Martha, or Richmond Fair*, given its première in Vienna in November 1847, was a great success for its German composer Friedrich von Flotow (1812-1883). Based on a ballet pantomime produced in Paris in 1844, *Martha* effectively blends elements of German *Singspiel* with Parisian *opéra comique*. Flotow's adroit handling of his orchestral forces is evident in the brief overture, an engaging potpourri of some of the opera's key themes. A memorable horn theme in the substantial introduction (later heard as Lyonel's prayer in Act 3 of the opera) is restated imposingly near the end.

For more than half a century Daniel-François-Esprit Auber (1782-1871) maintained a position at the forefront of French musical theatre. Admired by Wagner, his *La Muette de Portici* (1821) established the medium of grand opera as adopted by Meyerbeer, among others. Auber's most typical works, however, are in the field of *opéra comique*, where his natural melodic flair has free rein. Of these the most celebrated is *Fra Diavolo, ou L'Hôtellerie de Terracine* (1830), telling the story of an Italian robber-chief. Unexpectedly, the overture's preamble opens with a side drum solo, succeeded by a military march that starts with solo strings and gradually builds to a *fortissimo* climax before dying away again. The droll main section is full of vitality.

Albert Lortzing (1801-1851) was the leading composer of the *Spieloper*, the German equivalent of the Italian *opera buffa* or the French *opéra comique*. He scored his most important international success with his three-act comic opera *Zar und Zimmermann* (Tsar and Carpenter), for which he also wrote the libretto. Within a few decades of its première at the Leipzig municipal theatre in December 1837, it had secured a place in the repertoire of most German opera houses and achieved performances throughout Europe. The overture boasts a number of vivid ideas. Among its felicities of instrumentation, the main theme at the start of the *Allegro*

section is given to first violins accompanied by chiming triangle underpinned by the cellos' rustic-sounding drone.

The foremost Italian composer of the second half of the eighteenth century, Domenico Cimarosa (1749-1801) wrote over 65 operas, in addition to instrumental music and works for the church. *Il matrimonio segreto* (The Secret Marriage) is his most celebrated piece. It was first performed in Vienna's Burgtheater in 1792, just two months after Mozart's death. Three arresting chords launch the overture but any sense of solemnity is immediately dispelled by the ensuing playful *Allegro*.

Perhaps best remembered today for his ballet *Giselle* (1841), the prolific French composer Adolphe-Charles Adam (1803-1856) was a melodist of distinction. His oriental opera *Si j'étais roi* (If I were King) achieved considerable success following its first performance at the Théâtre-Lyrique in Paris in September 1852 and its fresh and lively overture has retained a place in the light music repertoire. Adam exploits fully the resources of a large orchestra, including piccolo, trombones, triangle, side drum, bass drum and harp.

Peter Cornelius (1824-1874) was born in Mainz into a theatrical family. He wrote many songs and three operas, the last of which, *Gunold*, was completed after his death. *Der Barbier von Bagdad* was written in 1858 to a libretto by the composer himself which he based on a story from *The Arabian Nights*. This sparkling two-act German comic opera received its première in Weimar in December 1858 under the baton of Franz Liszt, the theatre's music director. Following the first performance, Liszt suggested to Cornelius that he write a fresh overture to replace the short prelude but the composer died before he was able to make an orchestration. Several arrangements of Cornelius's overture exist, including one by Liszt himself; the D major version heard here is by the conductor Felix Mottl. Packed with incident, the overture uses several themes heard later in the opera.

Paul Conway

## Royal Scottish National Orchestra



The Royal Scottish National Orchestra was formed in 1891 as the Scottish Orchestra and became the Scottish National Orchestra in 1950. It was awarded Royal Patronage in 1991. Throughout its history the orchestra has played an integral part in Scotland's musical life, including performing at the opening ceremony of the Scottish Parliament building in 2004. Many renowned conductors have contributed to its success, including George Szell, Sir John Barbirolli, Walter Susskind, Sir Alexander Gibson, Neeme Järvi, Walter Weller, Alexander Lazarev and Stéphane Denève. In 2012 the RSNO welcomed British-Canadian musician and conductor Peter Oundjian as its latest Music Director and Danish conductor Thomas Søndergård as Principal Guest Conductor. 2012 also saw the appointments of two new Leaders, James Clark and Maya Iwabuchi. The RSNO has a worldwide reputation for the quality of its recordings, receiving two Diapason d'Or de l'année awards for Symphonic Music (Denève/Roussel 2007; Denève/Debussy 2012) and eight GRAMMY® Awards nominations over the last decade. Over 200 releases are available, including the complete symphonies of Sibelius (Gibson), Prokofiev (Järvi), Glazunov (Serebrier), Nielsen and Martinů (Thomson), Roussel (Denève) and the major orchestral works of Debussy (Denève). The RSNO is one of Scotland's National Performing Companies, supported by the Scottish Government.

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## Lance Friedel



American conductor Lance Friedel is currently enjoying an active career in Europe and the United States. He has won wide critical acclaim for his recordings of music by Carl Nielsen, with the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra in Denmark (MSR Classics MS1150), and by Josef Bohuslav Foerster, with the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra (Naxos 8.557776). He has served as Music Director of the Providence Chamber Orchestra in Rhode Island and Assistant Conductor of the Peabody Symphony Orchestra in Maryland, and has also directed numerous orchestras throughout the world. Lance Friedel was awarded first prize at the 2001 Mario Gusella International Conductors Competition in Pescara, Italy. As a result of this prestigious prize, he has been engaged to conduct concerts with orchestras throughout Europe. A graduate of Boston University, he has also studied at Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, the Hochschule für Musik in Vienna, and the Mannes College of Music in New York. He has attended the Mozarteum Summer Academy in Salzburg, the Aspen Music Festival, and Tanglewood. His conducting teachers have included Gustav Meier, Michael Charry, and Georg Tintner.

The flourishing genre of the comic opera had its roots in eighteenth-century Italian *opera buffa*, whose irrepressible brio was soon taken up outside the country's borders. In France it produced *opéra comique* and operetta, and in German-speaking countries *Spieloper* and Viennese operetta. Some of the world's most popular comic opera overtures, filled with gorgeous tunes, brilliant orchestration and race-to-the-finish endings, are presented here. They include staples of the concert repertoire such as Hérold's dramatic *Zampa*, the textual delicacy of Wolf-Ferrari's *Il segreto di Susanna* and the vivid colour of Lortzing's *Zar und Zimmermann*.

## GREAT COMEDY OVERTURES

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|-----------|--|-------------|
| <b>1</b>  | <b>Ferdinand Hérold (1791-1833): Overture to <i>Zampa</i> (1831)</b>   | <b>8:27</b> |
| <b>2</b>  | <b>Otto Nicolai (1810-1849): Overture to <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i> (1849)</b>                                  | <b>8:22</b> |
| <b>3</b>  | <b>Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari (1876-1948): Overture to <i>Il segreto di Susanna</i> (1909)</b>                               | <b>3:06</b> |
| <b>4</b>  | <b>Ambroise Thomas (1811-1896): Overture to <i>Mignon</i> (1866)</b>   | <b>8:24</b> |
| <b>5</b>  | <b>Emil Nikolaus von Rezniček (1860-1945): Overture to <i>Donna Diana</i> (1894)</b>                                   | <b>6:01</b> |
| <b>6</b>  | <b>Friedrich von Flotow (1812-1883): Overture to <i>Martha</i> (1847)</b>  | <b>8:24</b> |
| <b>7</b>  | <b>Daniel-François-Esprit Auber (1782-1871): Overture to <i>Fra Diavolo</i> (1830)</b>                                 | <b>8:13</b> |
| <b>8</b>  | <b>Albert Lortzing (1801-1851): Overture to <i>Zar und Zimmermann</i> (1837)</b>                                       | <b>6:05</b> |
| <b>9</b>  | <b>Domenico Cimarosa (1749-1801): Overture to <i>Il matrimonio segreto</i> (1792)</b>                                  | <b>6:43</b> |
| <b>10</b> | <b>Adolphe Adam (1803-1856): Overture to <i>Si j'étais roi</i> (1852)</b>  | <b>7:18</b> |
| <b>11</b> | <b>Peter Cornelius (1824-1874) (arr. Felix Mottl, 1856-1911):<br/>Overture to <i>Der Barbier von Bagdad</i> (1858)</b> | <b>8:39</b> |



**Royal Scottish National Orchestra • Lance Friedel**

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