

## **LES NOCES DE JEANNETTE**

Opera comique in 1 act

Music by Victor Massé

First Performance: Opéra-Comique, Paris, February 4, 1853

The setting is extremely simple and naive; it might be subtitled "a woman's desire," especially that of a woman in love! About to sign the marriage license, Jean, the village boy, changes his mind, leaves the guests and returns home. The bride, Jeanette, both pretty and wise, is still in love despite the humiliation and promises to win back the man she wishes to marry. She achieves her aim during some amusing scenes, at first fast moving, then slowing down until the final reconciliation. What threatened to be a mediocre story of peasant life, turned into a charming work of art by virtue of the sometimes light music, but always distinguished, touching, spirited and full of cheerful turns. Many tunes still enjoy lasting popularity.

The overture is a significant example with the opening bars recalling the peeling of bells, followed by the rapid development of some of the themes of the plot. The curtain opens on one of the rooms in Jean's house. Jean enters, delighted to have escaped marriage, and he sings the well-known and rhythmical tune: "Let another marry, I regain my faith," preceded by the solo: "Alone at last, at home at last." After this warning, and intent on leading a bachelor's life, Jean is surprised to be visited by Jeanette. The girl does not take him to task, but only wants to know the reason for his sudden refusal. "I love you with all my heart, but marriage frightens me" is Jean's reply. then he runs off to meet his friends.

Left alone, Jeanette sadly sings the romance: "Of all the lovers." Then far away we hear Jean courting Margot: "Margot! Margot! Take off you shoe;" gay lines in a happy setting. Then in a brisk allegro, Jeanette expresses her disdain and promises to seek revenge.

Returning home, Jean is first displeased to see his ex-fiancée, but soon becomes anxious when learning that her father, a stubborn army sergeant, is preparing to pay him a visit to demand justice, armed with a pistol. To escape this threat, Jean signs a document which Jeannette hands to him. Unable to read, Jean does not know that he has signed the marriage contract. Jeannette also signs.

The couple are at last married. Not very legal, but in the theatre, such details are unimportant. When Jean finds out the truth, he becomes angry: "Ah! You tried to sound out a husband." He sings the spirited lines: "Ah! If only you knew, my dear." As Jeannette does not seem moved by this declaration of matrimonial war, the young man smashes the furniture and climbs up into the attic to have a nap. Alone, courageous but saddened, the new bride mends her husband's torn garment. There follows the well-know romance: "Run, my needle, through the wool." The furniture tune succeeds this touching melody. When Jeannette informs her father, the latter sends her beautiful furniture which she had as a young girl, to replace the broken pieces.

Drawn from his sleep, Jean is dumbfounded to see such a change. He is even more surprised to hear his wife sing while laying the table the famous tune of the Robin with such flowing harmony. This music may be considered among the most demanding and difficult ever written for a coloratura. Victor Massé therefore provided another tune to replace it, the duet: "He is in the village." It is scarcely used today.

This vocally flowing melody nicely prepared the finale. At first charmed by the music, then surprised by the so tidy, delighted to see the table laid, Jean finally realizes that his wife is young

and pretty and that, although married against his will, he will be a happy husband. The couple then fall into each others' arms.

A short final chorus brings the opera to a close. The kisses of Jean and Jeannette in the final bars provide the real conclusion to the pleasant Wedding of Jeannette.