

Excerpts from Edward Loder's opera *THE NIGHT DANCERS* (1846)

Performed at Smith Memorial Room, University of Illinois, Urbana, 10 October 2015

Director: Nicholas Temperley

Piano accompanist: Meng-Chung Chen

Recording engineer: Frank Horger

MARY (soprano)	Eleanora Benedict
GISELLE (soprano)	Eleanora Benedict
BERTHA (mezzo-soprano)	Dawn Harris
ALBERT (tenor)	Michael Patterson
FRIDOLIN (bass)	Adrian Sanchez

Programme Note by Nicholas Temperley

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The Night Dancers was by far Loder's most successful opera in his lifetime. It had the advantage of a superior libretto by George Soane (discussed by David Chandler in *Musicians of Bath and Beyond*, chap. 11), a version of the same story as Adolphe Adam's still popular ballet *Giselle*. The opening production at Covent Garden in 1846–7 ran to 43 performances. It was revived several times in London and spread to other cities in England and abroad. After a revival at Covent Garden in 1860, an anonymous correspondent wrote: 'If LODER were not an Englishman, I would say that this opera is replete with grace, melody, tenderness, harmony, colour, sparkle, *chic, élan, ensemble*, and *verve*, but of course all those pretty words (and whatever they mean) must be reserved for Frenchmen and Italians. . . . MR. LODER has, of course, been kept in his proper place, that is to say, entirely neglected, by managers, for many years, but that is no reason why, if an Englishman has somehow contrived to knock out a fine work, we should not go and enjoy it, meaning, I am sure, no disrespect to M. M. VERDI, FLOTOW, HALÉVY, [Giulio] ALARY, and the rest of the deities of music.' (*Punch*, vol. 39, p. 204).

The Night Dancers consists of an Induction and two acts. The action takes place in a village in Silesia. In the Induction, we are in 'A Gothic Chamber, with a large window at the back opening upon a moonlit lake'. Giselle the daughter, and Mary the niece, of Godfrey, a miller, have been finishing their dresses for the wedding of Giselle and Albert, due to take place the following day. Mary completes hers as she sings a ballad, while Giselle is already trying hers on and waltzing in it. Godfrey enters, good-humoredly laughs at the enthusiasm of young girls for weddings, and assures Mary she will marry Fridolin, the local beadle, when he becomes 'a man of substance'. Albert serenades Giselle from the lake; Giselle declares herself too happy and excited to go to bed, but after singing and dancing she finally falls asleep on the couch.

In Act I, we see Godfrey's mill on one side of the stage, Albert's cottage on the other. It is the following day. Albert has been living here for six months, and is apparently a

forester, but Fridolin, who is spying on him, suspects he is really 'some nobleman in disguise'. Albert, coming out of his cottage, asks Mary for a friendly kiss, prompting a pompous expression of disapprobation from Fridolin:

1 Accompanied Recitative

MARY: Pshaw! here's a fuss about a kiss.
I'd give a dozen and you'd not miss
A single one of all the number.

ALBERT: No sound within! she still must slumber.

(singing at Giselle's window):

Wake, my love, all life is stirring
In the air, the wood, the—

MARY *(to FRIDOLIN)*: Fool! don't you see you're in the way?

FRIDOLIN: A moment, yet a moment stay—
Methinks I hear the fair Giselle.

MARY: How, blockhead! do you dare rebel?
Take that, and that! *(slaps his face)*

FRIDOLIN: *(spoken)* Ye gods! a blow!
(sung) Farewell the dignity of place,
And all that lent a beadle grace:
The gold-capt scarf, the plumèd hat,
The chain, the medal, and all that:
Poor Frid'lin's occupation's gone!

Serenade

ALBERT *(singing at Giselle's window):*

Wake, my love, all life is stirring
In the air, the wood, the lake:
And the sun flames high o'er the mountain;
Wake, dearest, wake, oh, wake.

Come, my love, beneath thy lattice
Must I still a ling'rer be?
Weary minutes grow to hours:
Come, dearest, come to me.

When Giselle appears, she asks Albert if he believes in dreams and tells him of a dream, or nightmare, she has had:

2 Giselle's Dream: Grand Scena

GISELLE: I dreamt we stood before the Altar,
 With joyous hearts and lips that falter,
 To celebrate the Nuptial rite.
 Yet, strange to say,
 It was not day,
 The full Moon shone round and bright,
 And, save her rays, no other light
 Was beaming on the shrine,
 When, as I was about to utter
 The holy words that made me thine,
 Low distant thunders 'gan to mutter,
 The Priest had gone, I knew not where,
 And in his place was standing there
 A Lady so surpassing fair
 Who claimed thee for her own.
 E'en while I gaze
 In wild amaze
 Upheaves each monumental stone,
 And the pale Wilis rise around,
 With tresses to the breeze unbound.
 Begins the Phantom dance:
 Caught by their Fairy-glance,
 I join the revel too.
 To-whit, to-who!
 Then round we fly,
 While the Owlets cry,
 Around we spin,
 Now out, now in,
 Round, round we reel
 In giddy wheel,
 While the dazzled Star winks
 At our flight and shrinks.
 Was ever night so mad!
 But hark! the bird of day!
 The Wilis fade away;
 And I awake so sad.

Albert asks who the Wilis are, and Giselle explains that they are 'the Night-dancers': 'maiden brides that have died before their wedding-day, and cannot rest in the grave, from their insatiable passion for the waltz'. Those drawn into their 'magic circle', Giselle warns, are forced to dance until they die. Godfrey tells them the

wedding has to be postponed for one day, as the pastor is ill. Fridolin brings news that a rich stranger has just arrived, with a party of huntsmen and 'such a handsome young lady'. Albert shows signs of alarm when he hears a description of the newcomer and quickly takes off for a day's hunting in the forest. The stranger, now appearing, turns out to be the Duke of Silesia with his daughter, Bertha. They have travelled a long way in the course of a hunt and decide to rest in the village. Fridolin seizes the chance to enter Albert's cottage in an attempt to find incriminating evidence and later, when the villagers are all celebrating the vintage, he triumphantly declares Albert an imposter, holding up a hat and diamond pendant which seemingly prove him 'a noble in disguise!'. The Duke then adds more, identifying the supposed forester as his own nephew, and revealing that Albert is betrothed to Bertha. Aghast at these discoveries, Giselle falls dead in Albert's arms.

Act II begins with Bertha, and then Albert, visiting Giselle's grave by the lake:

3 Beginning of Act II

Intrada

Recitative

BERTHA: What is the charm dwells in this mournful spot
 That ever draws me to it when the eve is bright
 O'er lake and mountain? Ah!
 I feel so sadly happy when I linger here.
 Ah, yes! Forgive me, dear, dear, Giselle
 If with the tears I offer at thy tomb
 A selfish thought is mingling:
 Not mine the guilt of thy too early death,
 Not mine the fault that on thy grave are waving
 The flow'rs that should have decked thy bridal couch.

[Enter ALBERT.]

ALBERT: Thou here, good Bertha.
 Ah, 'tis kindly done; if her spirit,
 Her gentle spirit lingers near us still,
 She'll not be angry with the brother's kiss
 Which for her love I press upon thy lips.

Duet

BOTH: Peace to the dead! if aught in truth
 So good, so beautiful, can die;
 But sure thy spirit's only gone,
 To add another star on high.
 Peace to the dead! The holy dead!
 The dead whose requiem's said
 By night winds o'er their lonely bed.

 As with each season some new flow'rs
 To hide thy grave will bloom above,
 So thoughts of all thy worth shall grow
 Till grief's forgotten quite in love.
 Peace to the dead! The holy dead!
 The dead whose requiem's said
 By night winds o'er their lonely bed.

Godfrey, Mary, Fridolin and other villagers come to join the mourning. Mary warns that "Tis almost the hour / When the Wilis have power", and all leave except Albert, who hopes to see Giselle transformed into a Wili. Suddenly overcome with tiredness, he falls into an enchanted sleep. The Wilis now appear; Giselle rises from her grave and joins them, surprised to find herself with wings. They dance. Fridolin returns, drawn back by curiosity. The Wilis dance with him, then lure him into the lake, where he is drowned. Albert awakes; Giselle tries to warn him away, but feels inside her a 'fatal power' compelling her to pull him into the 'death-dance'. The Wilis dance with Albert and draw him towards the lake, but as the sun rises they lose their power and fade away. Clouds now cover the stage and when they clear we are back in the 'Gothic Chamber' of the Induction, with Giselle asleep on the couch. Everything which has occurred since she fell asleep has been a dream. She gets up and prepares for her marriage to Albert, her 'own true forester'.