

Fra Diavolo

[Opéra comique, in three acts; text by Scribe. First produced at the Opéra Comique, Paris, January 28, 1830; in English, at Drury Lane Theatre, London, November 3, 1831; in Italian, at the Lyceum, London, July 9, 1857.]

PERSONAGES.

Fra Diavolo, leader of the brigands. Lord Allcash, English nobleman. Lady Allcash, his wife. Matteo, innkeeper. Zerlina, Matteo's daughter. Lorenzo, Zerlina's lover. Beppo, } Giacomo, } brigands.

The scene is laid at the village of Terracina, Italy; time, last century.

The first act of this universally favorite opera opens with the hurried arrival of Lord Allcash, a typical English tourist, and his wife, at the inn of Terracina, kept by Matteo, whose daughter, Zerlina, is loved by Lorenzo, a young soldier. The latter is about to start for the capture of Fra Diavolo, the leader of the bandits, when the action of the opera begins. The English tourists have been robbed on their journey by the band of this same Fra Diavolo, who has followed them in the disguise of a marquis and has been very attentive to the susceptible Lady Allcash. Lord Allcash has a quarrel with his wife on this account in a humorous duet, "I don't object." Fra Diavolo learns that the travellers have saved the most of their valuables, and lays his own plans to secure them. In an interview with Zerlina, she, mistaking him for the Marquis, sings him the story of Fra Diavolo in a romanza, "On Yonder Rock Reclining," which has become a favorite the world over. To further his schemes he makes love to Lady Allcash in a graceful barcarole, "The Gondolier, Fond Passion's Slave." In the finale of the act Lorenzo and his carbineers return, and not finding Fra Diavolo at the inn, where they had hoped to surprise him, resume their search, leaving him to perfect his plans for the robbery.

In the opening scene of the second act Zerlina is in her chamber, preparing to retire. Before doing so, she lights Lord and Lady Allcash to their room. During her absence Fra Diavolo and his companions, Beppo and Giacomo, conceal themselves in her closet, Fra Diavolo having previously given them the signal that the coast was clear by singing a serenade, "Young Agnes," in violation of every rule of dramatic consistency. Zerlina returns, and after singing a simple but charming prayer, "Oh! Holy Virgin," retires to rest. In attempting to cross the room they partially awake her. One of the bandits rushes to the bed to stab her, but desists from his purpose as he hears her murmuring her prayer. Then follows a trio by the robbers, sung pianissimo, which is very dramatic in its effect. At this point the carbineers return again, and the house at once is in an uproar. Lord and Lady Allcash rush in to find out the cause, followed by Lorenzo, who came to greet Zerlina. A sudden noise in the closet disturbs them. Fra Diavolo, knowing that he will be discovered, steps out into the room, and declares he is there to keep an appointment with Zerlina, whereupon Lorenzo challenges him. He accepts the challenge and coolly walks out of the room. One of his comrades is captured, but to secure his liberty agrees to betray his chief.

The opening of the third act finds Fra Diavolo once more among his native mountains. He gives expression to his exultation in a dashing, vigorous song, "Proudly and wide my Standard flies," followed by the pretty rondo, "Then since Life glides so fast away." As he joyously contemplates a speedy meeting with Lord and Lady Allcash and the securing of their valuables, villagers arrayed in festival attire in honor of the approaching nuptials of Lorenzo and Zerlina enter, singing a bright pastoral chorus, "Oh, Holy Virgin, bright and fair." The finale of the act is occupied with the development of the scheme between Lorenzo, Beppo, and Giacomo to ensnare Fra Diavolo, and the final tragedy in which he meets his death at the hands of the carbineers, but not before he has declared Zerlina's innocence. The text of the opera is full of vivacity and humor, and the music so bright and melodious and

yet artistically scored that it made Auber's reputation at the Opéra Comique.