

## **Mireille**

plot summary by George P. Upton

"Mireille," a pastoral opera in three acts, words by M. Carré, the subject taken from "Mireio," a Provençal poem by Mistral, was first produced at the Théâtre Lyrique, Paris, March 19, 1864.

In December, 1864, the opera was reduced to three acts, in which form it is still given. In this abridged shape, and with the addition of the waltz now placed in the finale, it was brought out in London with Titiens, Giuglini, Santley, and Trebelli in the cast. In English it is always given under the title of "Mirella." The first scene opens in a mulberry grove, where Mireille is rallied by the village girls upon her attachment to Vincenzo, the basket-maker, and is also warned by Tavena, the fortune-teller, against yielding to her love, as she foresees that her father, Raimondo, will never consent to the union. In the next scene she meets Vincenzo, and the warning of Tavena is soon forgotten. The lovers renew their pledges, and agree to meet at the Chapel of the Virgin if their plans are thwarted. The second act introduces us to a merrymaking at Arles, where Mireille is informed by Tavena that Vincenzo has a rival in Urias, a wild herdsman, who has openly declared his love for her, and asked her hand of her father. Mireille repulses him when he brings the father's consent. Ambrogio, Vincenzo's father, accompanied by his daughter, Vincenzina, also waits upon Raimondo and intercedes in his son's behalf, but is sternly refused. Mireille, who has overheard the interview, declares to her father her irrevocable attachment for Vincenzo. Her declaration throws him into such a rage that he is about to strike her, but she disarms his anger by appealing to the memory of her mother.

The last act opens on a barren, sunburnt plain. Andreluno appears, singing a pastoral song to the accompaniment of his bagpipe, followed by Mireille, who is toiling across the hot sands to meet her lover at the Chapel of the Virgin. She is met by Tavena, who assures her that Vincenzo will keep his appointment, and then returns to Arles to plead with the father in Mireille's behalf. The poor girl toils on through the heat, and at last arrives nearly prostrated by sunstroke. Vincenzo soon appears, and is shortly followed by Raimondo, who, seeing the sad condition of his daughter, is moved to pity and gives his consent to the union of the lovers. The sudden joyful change of affairs restores her wandering senses and the happy pair are united.

The music is in no sense dramatic, but lyric and pastoral throughout, and is specially marked by the beautiful French chansons with which it abounds. The first act opens with a delightful pastoral chorus of the maidens under the mulberry-trees ("Facciam carole, o giovinette"), which is very fresh and graceful. The second begins with an equally delightful chorus and farandole ("La Farandola tutti consola"), followed by the beautiful Provençal folk-song, "Dolce una brezza, intorno olezza," which is full of local color. Tavena sings a quaint fortune-teller's roundelay ("La stagione arriva"), and in the next scene Mireille has a number of rare beauty ("Ah! piu non temo fato"), in which she declares her unalterable attachment to Vincenzo. The finale of this act, with its strong aria ("Qui mi prostro innanzi ate"), is very spirited, and in fact may be considered the only dramatic episode in the whole work. The third act opens with the quaint little song of Andreluno, the shepherd boy ("L'alba tranquilla"), with oboe accompaniment. It also contains a plaintive song for tenor ("Ah! se de preghi miei"), and closes with a waltz song ("O d'amor messagera"), which is fairly gorgeous in bravura effects, and Hanslick says was a concession to Miolan-Carvalho, like the jewel song in "Faust" and the waltz song in "Romeo and Juliet." In the original libretto the song had its place in the first act, and indeed numerous changes have been made in the libretto since the opera first appeared; as in the original, Mireille dies in the arms of her lover, and Urias, Vincenzo's rival, is drowned in the Rhone. When it first appeared, however, great objection was made to several of the situations, and the libretto was declared fantastic and uninteresting; hence the changes. As a lyric drama, delightfully picturing the quaintness and simplicity of provincial life, not alone in the tunefulness of the music, but also in its pastoral naïveté and what may be termed its folk-characteristics, it will hold a high place upon the stage as long as young and fresh voices can be found to sing it.