

The Fencing-Master

[Comic opera, in three acts; text by Harry B. Smith. First produced at the New York Casino, November 14, 1892.]

PERSONAGES.

Francesca, Torquato's daughter, brought up as a boy. Torquato, fencing-master of the Milanese court. Pasquino, private astrologer to the Duke. Galeazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan. Count Guido Malespine. Filippa, the Duke's ward. Marchesa di Goldoni. Theresa, daughter of a Milanese money-lender. Pietro, an innkeeper. Michael Steno, Doge of Venice. Rinaldo, Captain of the Doge's Guards. Fortunio, rightful heir to the ducal throne.

[Students in Torquato's Academy.]

The scene is laid in Milan and Venice; time, the first quarter of the fifteenth century.

The heroine of this opera is Francesca, daughter of a fencing-master, who has brought her up as a boy and taught her fencing among other accomplishments. She is in love with Fortunio, rightful heir to the throne of Milan, who believes her to be a boy. Fortunio in turn is in love with the Countess Filippa, and the Marchesa di Goldoni, a young widow, is in love with Francesca. The bankrupt and usurping Duke of Milan and his private astrologer, of whom he has purchased so many horoscopes as to deplete his exchequer, furnish the comedy element of the opera. The Duke has mortgaged one room after another in his palace to money-lenders, and has also employed a regularly organized stock company of Venetian bravos to remove Fortunio. The first act closes with the departure of Fortunio and Francesca to Venice on political business.

The second act opens in Venice. Filippa has been sent there to be married, but Fortunio plans an elopement with her and entrusts the secret to Francesca. The jealous Francesca betrays the plan to Guido, his rival, who abducts Filippa. When Fortunio discovers what Francesca has done, he challenges the supposed young man, whose identity is revealed after he has wounded her. Fortunio is arrested by the Duke and is about to be taken to prison, when Francesca declares herself as the real traitor and is imprisoned in his stead.

In the last act Francesca escapes through the connivance of the Marchesa, who still believes her to be a man. At a fête Filippa is expected to name her future husband. Fortunio has made an appointment with her, but meets Francesca disguised as the Countess, in a mask and domino like hers. She learns from Fortunio that he really loves her and not Filippa. The opera closes with the downfall of the usurping Duke and his astrologer and the restoration of Fortunio to his rights.

The music has the Italian color, the first act containing a graceful tarantella and chorus, "Under thy Window I wait"; a duet, gavotte, and chorus, "Oh, listen, and in Verse I will relate," sung by Theresa and Pasquino; a lively song, "The Life of a Rover," by Fortunio; a charming habanera and quintette, "True Love is a Gem so Fair and Rare"; and a waltz quintette, "Lady Fair, I must decline." The second act opens with a barcarole, "Over the Moonlit Waves we glide," and contains also a graceful maranesca, "Oh, come, my Love, the Stars are bright"; a humorous serenade for the Duke, "Singing a Serenade is no Light Task"; a sentimental romanza for Francesca, "The Nightingale and the Rose"; and a brilliant finale in which the music accompanies the historic ceremony of the marriage with the Adriatic. The principal numbers of the third act are a graceful carnival scene with chorus opening the act; the serenade for the Marchesa and cavaliers, "Wild Bird that singeth"; a will-o'-the-wisp song by Francesca, "Traveller wandering wearily"; and a melodious duet for Francesca and Fortunio, "Dwells an Image in my Heart," leading up to a short finale.

