

## **The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein**

[Opera bouffe, in three acts; text by Meilhac and Halévy. First produced at the Variétés, Paris, April 12, 1867.]

### PERSONAGES.

Grand Duchess. Wanda, a peasant girl. Iza, maid of honor. Olga, maid of honor. Prince Paul, neglected suitor of the Duchess. Gen. Boum, in command of the army. Baron Puck, Court chamberlain. Baron Grog, emissary. Fritz, a recruit. Nepomuc, aide de camp.

[Lords and court ladies, pages, soldiers, vivandières, country girls, etc.]

The scene is laid in the imaginary Duchy of Gerolstein; time, the year 1720.

"The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein," though in some respects inferior musically to "Orpheus," by the same composer, is altogether the most perfect type of the opera bouffe. For the drollness of its story, the originality of its characters as well as of its music and obstreperous gayety, dash, and geniality mixed with occasional seriousness and grace, this work when it first appeared was unique, though Offenbach rose to his highest achievement when dealing with the gods and goddesses of Olympus in his "Orpheus," which revealed his powers of musical burlesque at their best.

The first act opens with a grand review of the army of the duchy, commanded by the pompous General Boum, at which the Duchess is present. In its ranks there is a recruit, known by the name of Fritz, who has already aroused the General's jealousy by his attentions to Wanda, a peasant girl. He continues still further to add to this jealousy when the Duchess, attracted by his good looks, singles him out for her regard and promotes him to the post of corporal. When she learns of

his relations to Wanda, she raises him to the rank of lieutenant, evidently to separate him from Wanda by the new elevation. The review over, the Duchess studies the plan of a pending campaign against a neighboring enemy. She summons General Boum in the presence of Baron Puck, her court chamberlain, Prince Paul, a feeble and neglected suitor of the Duchess, and Lieutenant Fritz, who is now her special body-guard, and asks him for his plan of campaign, which he states, much to the disgust of Fritz, who declares it to be sheer nonsense. The Duchess then asks the latter for his plan, and is so much pleased with it that she appoints him general and raises him to the rank of baron, much to the discomfort and indignation of the others.

The second act opens with the return of Fritz. He has been victorious, and at the public reception given him he tells the story of his adventures. Subsequently at a tête-à-tête with the Duchess, she makes open love to him; but he is so occupied with thoughts of Wanda that he is insensible to all her advances, which puts her in a rage. Overhearing a conspiracy between Puck, Paul, and the deposed General Boum against his life, she joins with them, and the act closes with a wild, hilarious dance.

In the third act Baron Grog, emissary of Prince Paul's father, appears upon the scene to expedite the marriage of the Prince to the Duchess. He joins the conspiracy against Fritz, and so ingratiates himself with the Duchess that she finally consents to marry the Prince. In the mean time she countermands the order for Fritz's assassination, and gives him permission to marry Wanda. The conspirators, however, play a practical joke upon Fritz by a false message summoning him to the battle-field. He leaves at once on the wedding-night, but through the connivance of General Boum is waylaid and badly beaten. While the betrothal of the Duchess is being celebrated, Fritz returns in sad plight, with the sabre which the Duchess has given him in a battered condition. She adds to his misfortunes by depriving him of his command and bestowing it upon Baron Grog, but learning that he has

a family, she reinstates General Boum. In the dénouement Fritz is restored to his Wanda and the Duchess marries Prince Paul.

The music is in keeping with the drollery of the situations, and abounds in vivacity and odd descriptiveness, defying all accepted laws and adapting itself to the grotesquerie and extravagance of the action. The principal numbers in the first act are the pompous "Pif, paf, pouf" song of General Boum; the Grand Duchess' air, "Ah! I love the Military" ("Ah! que j'aime les militaires"); the regiment song for her and Fritz, "Oh! what a Famous Regiment" ("Ah! c'est un fameux régiment"); the couplets of Prince Paul, "To marry a Princess" ("Pour épouser une Princesse"); and the famous sabre song, "Lo, here the Sabre of my Sire" ("Voici, le sabre de mon père"). The best numbers of the second act are Fritz's spirited rondo, "All in Good Order, Colors flying" ("En très bon ordre nous partîmes"), in which he tells the story of his victory; the romanza "Say to him" ("Dites lui"), a delightful little song, and so refined that it hardly seems to belong to the opera; and the conspirators' trio, "Max was a Soldier of Fortune" ("Max était soldat de fortune"), which is irresistible in its broad humor and queer rhythms. The musical interest really reaches its climax in the second act. Outside of the chorus work in the third act, there is little of interest except the Duchess' ballad, "There lived in Times now long gone by" ("Il était un de mes aïeux"), and Fritz' song to the Duchess, "Behold here, your Highness" ("Eh bien, Altesse, me voilà!").