

Issue #25
September, 2008

Definitely developed to comfort
the operatically wary, *Issue #25*
was also begat to beneficially
boost the 2008 Opera Carolina
production of *FAUST*



An
Irreverent
Guide[©] for
ENJOYING

**CHARLES
GOUNOD'S**

FAUST

(In some operatic circles, a.k.a. *MARGUERITE*.)

Constructive criticism of *Irreverent Guides*
will be accepted,
(but probably not graciously).

HOWEVER---

With written permission of the author JP Cooney,
any part(s) of the *Irreverent Guides* series,
may be reproduced without charge
by not-for-profit opera-related foundations
for fund-raising and/or educational efforts.

A COMIQUE, but also NON-COMIQUE STYLE OPERA
IN FIVE ACTS AND EIGHT SCENES, or sometimes
FOUR ACTS, SIX SCENES and/or NUMEROUS OTHER CUTS.
(For insightful information about almost all of the above,
see **TRUTH IN ADVERTISING** pp.6-16.)

A black and white etching of Doctor Faustus, an elderly man with a turban and a long, patterned robe, leaning over a table covered with papers and books. He is looking towards a large, glowing magical diagram or sigil on the wall behind him. The diagram is a complex geometric shape with various letters and symbols inside. The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from a window in the background, creating a dramatic and mysterious atmosphere.

CHARLES GOUNOD'S
FAUST
Libretto: JULES BARBIER AND
MICHEL CARRÉ
[based on Goethe's *FAUST* Part I]
Premiere:
THEATRE LYRIQUE,
PARIS
MARCH 19, 1859
Original Language: FRENCH

Facsimile reproduction of Rembrandt's 1652 etching, *Doctor Faustus*.

Acknowledgements

For more than fifty years, I have had a gift that keeps on giving: an all-in-one best friend, editor par excellence and clear-eyed realist spouse. Through all those years and with a flaming red, felt-tip pen, she has diligently pursued and purified my errant or "gone missing" commas, grungy syntax and baroque sentences. She persists in her quixotic editorial quest, as I never learn. As have other **Irreverent Guides**, this one has also been burnished by her beneficial behavior.

In developing the **FAUST Guide** the support, comments and just plain patient toleration of Opera Carolina's Maestro James Meena and Director of Education and Community Relations, Teresa Robertson are greatly appreciated. They significantly improved format, accuracy and educational "mission" of the material. Unfortunately, there was little they could do about the author's senses of humor or taste. Some things are probably beyond help---- but there is always a chance--- tomorrow!

JP Cooney

WHERE DO I FIND?



Truth in Advertising: Flossing fuzzy
FAUST facts. 6

The Do, Re, Mi of Dealing With the Devil OR
Finagling **FAUST** to the Footlights. 17

Finally, the Opera!. 38

Who are these Lieder and Lederhosen-Loving
Laypersons Flinging Florid French Phonics at a
Geriatrically-Challenged German Guy?¹. 39

A Tersely Told Alliterative Analysis of A Tuneful Tale,
(a.k.a. Pap for the Impatient). 41

A Fulsome Feed of **FAUST** 48

- Act I - Our Hero's Faculty Facilities
at Wittenberg U.
- Act II - Leipzig's Town Square.
- Act III - Our Heroine's Garden.
- Act IV
 - Scene 1 - Interior, Our Heroine's
Humble Home.
 - Scene 2 - A Near-by but Neighborly
Medieval Cathedral.
 - Scene 3 - The Town Square, again.
- Act V
 - Scene 1 - Probably, the Brocken area
of Germany's Harz Mountains.
 - Scene 2 - Our Heroine's Prison Cell.

¹ The cacophonious cast!

**TRUTH IN ADVERTISING:
CLARIFYING OUR COVERS' CRYPTIC
COMMENTARIES BY FLOSSING
FAUST'S FUZZY FOLKLORE.**



What is in a Title? FAUST versus MARGUERITE.

Many years ago while living in Germany, we were puzzled by frequent listings in the Munich opera schedule of at least to us, an unfamiliar work, Marguerite. Turned out it was Gounod's devil-dealing Don still musically marauding, but under the cover of a subtle pseudonym. Why? Therein hangs our tale of two titles.

It is probably hyperbole to state, "Goethe is recognized as the greatest German of all time, and his drama-poem Faust is his most important single work."² However, similar phases are frequently encountered in multiple materials dealing with that German poet and Renaissance man.³ Therefore, for purposes of our title tale, we will let it stand.

Goethe began to publish segments of his Faust beginning in 1790; the full epic (Parts I and II) was finally published in 1832, posthumously as the author had requested.⁴ In 1850, the French playwright and operatic librettist, Michael Carré, developed a play Marguerite and Faust based on

² Kaufmann, Walter (Trans.), Goethe's Faust; Anchor Books, 1991 (edition); p.3.

³ George Eliot called him, "Germany's greatest man of letters and the last true polymath to walk the earth."

⁴ As will be discussed, Goethe was not the first nor the last artist to take up the Faust legend. However, at the risk of serious academic dissension, his literary version may be the one with the greatest international and historical impact. While technically a play in form, Goethe labeled his Faust, a closet play. That is, it was a drama intended to be read rather than performed.

a French translation of Goethe's Part 1. For the Gounod 1859 opera, Carré's play was subsequently used as the libretto-base by the playwright and his frequent operatic text-writing partner, Jules Barbier.

The opera was somewhat slow to gain Parisian success. Therefore for promotional purposes, a novice Parisian music publisher, Leon Cavalho⁵ took **FAUST** on extended tour throughout Europe.⁶

The Germans in a burst of off-the-wall xenophobia were horrified with their first view of the touring operatic **FAUST**. The French⁷ had not only co-opted an immortal German work, but they had reduced its philosophical complexities to the level of a cheap love story. Therefore, to avoid contamination of the Goethe masterpiece but still permit the popular opera to be heard but not harassed in German venues, it was re-titled **MARGUERITE**.⁸ By virtue of now long tradition, that name appears to hang tough onto contemporary German performances of the opera.



Eine rose von einem anderen namen? Natürlich!

⁵ More about him later.

⁶ More later about that Continental careening.

⁷ Remember at this time shortly before the 1870 Franco-Prussian War, these two countries were already beginning to build parochial patriotic public opinions.

⁸ The Marquerite name change is also frequently justified by a not too-farfetched claim that the heroine (depending on cuts) has at least as many musical lines as the hero. Finally, just in case the other rationales do not work, it is occasionally claimed that the alternative operatic title is to prevent confusion with Marlowe's Faust play. His stage drama is quite popular in German repertories along with Shakespeare's works. Marlowe's version (1604) escapes the "lack of Goethe's complexity" charge since Marlowe's work predates the Goethe work (1832) and is based on the long-existing Faust legend which does not include the Marguerite material. Maguerite et. al. were not the stuff of legend, but purely an invention of Goethe and his librettists. .

"Variable Acts, Scenes and/or Numerous Cuts."

Truth be told, as operas go, **FAUST** is one long sucker IF presented "in toto."⁹ Therefore, full performances of Gounod's final cut¹⁰ are more honored in the breach than in the observance.

FYI, some of all of the following can be and often are, axed in performance:¹¹

- **Act V's Scene 1**, the Walpurgis Night ballet sequence proves to be the most constant candidate for the cutting room floor. The scene--- largely pure ballet--- advances the plot not a whit and relates more to Part II of the Goethe work than the subject of Gounod's opera drawn from Part I. The ballet is also quite long and expensive to produce.

⁹ It must be remembered that in the 19th century, a night at the opera was a social occasion encompassing not only the on-stage occurrences, but an opportunity to sumptuously and continuously dine and down potent potables in your box or from a basket, schmooze with friends during entr'actes and/or, gamble in the outer lobby. (A considerable portion of Rossini's fortune it is said, came from his cut of the opera houses' gambling table action during performances of his works.)

In those times, the prudent composer spun out sufficient melodies to last past midnight. Length added bonus points to a critic's review and public perceptions.

¹⁰ It also must be remembered that an opera was fair game in those pre- copyright law days for post-premiere revisions not just by the composer, but by imperious impresarios and singers eager to show their voices in full fanciful flight. Such tuneful tinkering frequently and actively continued in the composer's post-mortem life. *Offenbach's Hoffmann*, *Bizet's Pearlfishers*, *Carmen* and *Moussorgsky's Boris* are among the more notorious victims of well-intentioned, grieving "friends" with revisionist designs. Consequently, if truth be told yet again, determining a composer's "final cut" is frequently as factually-fatal as a fool's errand.

¹¹ For a chronological listing of all acts and scenes in a "complete" Faust production, see p.5.

- **Act II** with its grand operatic Kermis (a.k.a. Kermesse) setting and actions, is frequently paired with the shorter **Act 1**. Those two acts respectively become **Scene 1 and 2** of **Act I**. The opera is then played as four acts.¹²

- **Act IV's Scene 1 and/or Scene 2** are also often sent-packing, singly or as a pair. They both focus exclusively on Marguerite and also advance the plot not a whit, other than communicating that our modest medieval maiden has been seduced, abandoned and the whole town is talking.

- On rare occasions, **Acts II and III** are played as a single act, but with no major cuts in the content of either. The same often occurs with **Acts I and II**. Apart from some saved time, the only real impact here is on the audience's coccyx fatigue factor--- and it's not usually positive.

- Separate from the above, or possibly in addition to, there are random cuts frequently made in components of musical units (e.g. aria/ensemble verses, musical bridges or introductions).¹³ The most frequent decapitation candidates are:

- ✓ Marguerite's **Act III** King of Thule aria.¹⁴
- ✓ Marguerite's **Act IV, Scene 1** Spinning Wheel Song. The truncated scene therefore begins, if at all, with Siebel's entrance.
- ✓ **Act IV, Scene 3** and its visually and vocally spectacular Soldiers' Chorus is moved into Scene 1 position; the

¹² Trust you are taking notes as the math can get a bit messy here.

¹³ It should be noted that this type of musical foreshortening is not uncommon among many perennial favorites of the standard operatic repertoire. **FAUST** is not being picked upon singly.

¹⁴ But before you feel too sorry for our maiden, the King's melodic abdication leaves her to regale the audience with the full glory of the Jewel Song, the aria immediately following, It is a usual candidate for the top of sopranos' operatic hit parade.

original Scenes 1 and 2 are now downgraded to Scenes 2 and 3. This rearrangement, it is argued makes the sequence of on-stage events more logical¹⁵ and the off-stage events more explicit (e.g. Marguerite is now pregnant with the Faust-fathered child).

Whichever of the cuts if any, does not appear per se and/or where Gounod originally positioned it for a performance, come prepared to be surprised at on-stage unexpected unfoldings and by-all-means, bring a good pillow.¹⁶

Nota Bene, Opera Carolinians!

As per the previous alert, **FAUST** is not foreign to parsed and re-pasted productions. In defense, such scissoring often succeeds in heightening the emotion and enjoyment of the piece. The 2008 Opera Carolina production does some textual tinkering. Therefore, the following is furnished for your viewing guidance:

- What has been listed on **Guide** page 5 as **Act IV, Scene I** and discussed on page 9, has been exorcised. To express a writer's bias, its absence in no way is a loss musically or in terms of plot continuity. In fact, it may be a point(s) in favor of both.
- In addition, **Act V, Scene 1**, the Walpurgis Night scene and its ballet discussed on **Guide** page 8, have been truncated. The ballet, has been axed. In our view, small loss. But--- could be wrong. This writer is not anti-ballet, but the Faustian dance drama inserted by Gounod, seems tedious and not up to the musical excitement of the opera in toto.
- Finally, the overall production will be performed in three acts instead of the customary five. In Charlotte, Act 1 will encompass both the original Act I (Faust's Study) and Act II (Kermesse). Act III (Garden Scene) of the original will then become Act II. Act III will encompass the original last two scenes of Act IV: the truncated Walpurgis Night and the prison cell finale. Got all that? Hope so as a test will be given later.

¹⁵ Isn't "operatic logic" an oxymoron?

¹⁶ Despite the possibilities of performance cuts, the usually targeted scenes noted above will be included in the **Guide** summary of the opera's plot and music.

**Consequences of the Napoleonic Code:
"Comique but also, non-Comique Opera."**

The heydays of European operatic development (circa 1750-1900) were also the heydays of European nationalism. One did not necessarily benefit the other or vice versa. Eventually that caused some collateral damage at least in France.

The artistic community of almost any country is a hotbed of change, usually broader than just artistic.¹⁷ Because of historically demonstrated, revolutionary track records, 19th century governments kept diligent censorious eyes on their artistes.¹⁸

France was especially adept at artistic "oversight." This probably was understandable as the result of their bloody revolution that not completely coincidental, followed hot on the heels of the one wherein the U.S. banished the British.¹⁹

¹⁷ As example, Verdi's early works melodically espoused and subsequently helped fuel Italian nationalism.

¹⁸ For reasons lost in history's dustbin, operatic works were especially suspect more so than other dramatized forms. An unnamed late 19th century composer (protectively preferring anonymity) stated, "The censors permit you to say (on stage) what they would not permit you to sing." Given the variability of operatic diction, one wonders what worried the censors?

¹⁹ In addition, the French government's due diligence of their more free-thinking citizens was continually encouraged by the frequency of the country's royal and not-so-royal rulers being revolutionary-rousted: between the 1789 Revolution and the Nazi 1940 seizure of Paris, six governments rose and fell in France usually accompanied by active revolutionary fervor, both left-wing and right.

The Code Cometh. Despite the bonhomie of the 1789 Revolution's "liberté, égalité, fraternité," Napoleon Bonaparte²⁰ knew better. He talked the talk, but he would be damned when he ruled, if he would walk the walk. As a result, he established a series of legally enforceable edicts (a.k.a. Napoleonic Codes). These eventually provided the government with carrot and stick controls over most aspects of French life: social, political, economic, artistic, etc. Consequently, despite the national political seesaw of 150 plus years, the various and varied manifestations of French government all shared at least one common element: control of publicly displayed morality and political thought.

The Code's Evolutionary Consequences. By the 1850's, the premiere decade of Gounod's **FAUST**, controls of French public art and artists were de rigueur. Censorship was omnipresent and continually in force, irrespective of governmental philosophy, left or right.

The Code had evolved to proscribe not only what could be said but where (venue) and how (genre). These proscriptions covered each and every Parisian theater and the full gamut of performance art: pantomime, spoken drama, musical theatre, opera etc.²¹ In Paris, there was a governmental commission overseeing and approving all proposed theatrical productions.

²⁰ As the first-at-bat, post-Guillotine French ruler.

²¹ As has been noted in previous *Guides* that touched on French operatic "adventures," Paris was the artistic center of France. What occurred or was precluded on the Parisian operatic stage affected similar events throughout the country. This was not the pattern of other European countries.

Genre and Venue. Each theatrical institution was specifically licensed²² to present only a specific type of work (genre).²³ Therefore, when you went to a specific theatre (venue) you knew exactly what you would see and hear (genre). Woe be to the composer who attempted to innovate within those parameters.²⁴ While the Parisian audience was not as overwhelmingly rude as the Italian,²⁵ the end result was the same: Get the hook!

In the Paris of the early 1850's there were three major operatic venues:

- “The” Paris Opera (Palais Garnier; a.k.a. Théâtre Impérial de l’Opéra). The home of grand opera in every sense of that phrase. Works presented here were traditionally five acts. A ballet had to appear, but not before the second act and no spoken dialogue

²²As example, when Offenbach petitioned the government to open his Theatre des Bouffes-Parisiens, that new venue was licensed only to present a genre of “pantomimes and short musical sketches with three characters.” Talk about micro-management!

²³ In this situation “form” and “function” are identical. The type of drama or opera to be offered would only be found in one theatre specifically licensed to present that type. Frankly, this whole thing gets to be a bit circular, but that probably was the controlling point.

²⁴ Such genre “innovation” by Bizet was what partially contributed to *Carmen's* disastrous premiere.

²⁵ Italian audiences are notoriously known as operatically knowledgeable but very often venomously vocal concerning the quality of an observed performance. Those audiences have been known to riot, initiate fistfights and throw food (prepared and unprepared). However, they did not “boo” in the traditional manner. In the 19th century, given the usual presence of large numbers of consumed wine bottles during an Italian operatic performance, when inappropriate sounds emerged from the stage, the audience would blow across the openings of the empty wine bottles and create a theatre-wide hollow, haunting sound. The Italian word for wine bottle is “fiasco”. Therefore, a performance greeted with the hollow, haunting sound became known as a “fiasco.” Today we have kept the word but junked the sound.

was permitted. Recitative was *de rigueur*. To have a work that became part of this institution's repertoire was the goal of almost every serious European operatic composer; it was the top of the musical pecking order, and for the composer, access to considerable personal wealth. However, to attain that lofty perch, a composer must shape his creation to conform to the Code's dictates concerning the genre.

- Opera-Comique (Salle Favart). Less austere and more family-friendly than the Paris Opera, the Opera-Comique originally featured pieces lighter in subject matter (comic opera) than the Garnier. Opera-Comique required spoken dialogue and recitative was taboo.
- Theatre-Italians (Theatre d'Odéon). Generally the home of non-French composers' works past and present performed in their original languages. The Theatre was permitted more musical and textual freedom than the other two institutions. After all, it was presenting "foreign" works.

Breaking the Code's Operatic Constrictions. By the 1850's, the traditional operatic works of the Palais and Salle had frozen into ritualistic formulae. Artistic innovation was largely suppressed, and every work tended to resemble every other work.

Despite the repressive nature of the government, an artistic movement began to encourage development of more innovative operatic forms, especially by French composers. It shortly bore creative fruit.

The first important positive governmental action for the restless French operatic composers occurred in 1853 with the licensing of the Theatre-Lyrique. This institution as it evolved, changed the status quo and

eventually cracked the rigid relationship between operatic genre and operatic venue. Among other cultural objectives, the Lyrique was designed to present previously unproduced works by winners of the Prix de Rome.²⁶ In short order, the products of this venue became recognized and accepted as a third (very free form) Parisian opera genre.²⁷

The "So What?" of All This "Genre and Venue" to FAUST. Both the libretto and music of **FAUST** were designed in the opera comique mold. In that form, the work did have the required spoken dialogue and no ballet. However, its premiere was delayed because of a competing piece elsewhere in Paris. It subsequently premiered on the stage of the somewhat new (1851) and definitely revolutionary Theatre-Lyrique. Its debut was in its original genre form of opera comique.

For its subsequent touring debut throughout Europe, the original comique form was modified by removing the spoken dialogue and adding recitative. Recitatives were more familiar and palatable among non-French Europeans. A ballet, however was still not part of the opera.

After the 1859 Lyrique premiere, **FAUST** was deemed sufficiently successful and potentially showy enough to be elevated to the repertory of the Palais Garnier's hallowed halls. Such an upgrade required a ballet which Gounod, ever obedient to custom, created.

In the space of ten years **FAUST** evolved from the genre of opera comique to that of grand opera!²⁸ Venue (the Palais versus the Salle) was

²⁶ Of which Gounod was a recipient.

²⁷ The Theatre-Italians did not present any genre of French opera nor was it considered a French opera venue. Consequently, it was beyond governmental sanction usually, but not always. However, that is another story and we don't have the time right now.

²⁸ Or perhaps, opera comique and/or grand opera?

the trigger in this evolutionary process. It dictated the form of the opera as we know it today, not compositional revisionism inspired for the sake of art. Just shows to go you, that while the French chains of operatic formalism were bent in the 1850's, they certainly were not totally broken---yet.²⁹

²⁹ That's another story for another place and time.

**THE *DO, RE, MI* OF DEALING
WITH THE DEVIL OR
FINAGLING *FAUST*
TO THE FOOTLIGHTS.**



Opera as any art form, is a product of its society and culture at a specific point in time. As that temporal point regresses into history, the on-stage and off-stage circumstances creating the opera frequently vanish into an archival dustbin.

We argue that such absence is a loss to the understanding and enjoyment of an older opera when heard in contemporary times. Therefore, this background section has been developed to set forth, albeit slightly, the sociology and perhaps anthropology of *Faust*.

Hopefully, it adds to your pleasure through an enhanced understanding of how another time, place and circumstance influenced this artistic product.

What Is in a Name?

The following name-related minutia are offered for use at cozy cocktail parties or other nebbish noshing events where really trite trivia can triumph:

- In German, Faust means “fist.” In Latin, it translates to “auspicious” or “lucky.”

- As the name took on the stuff of legend through the works of several prominent authors, the name came to generally mean in any language, “charlatan,” specifically it is often a synonym for “alchemist,” “astrologer,” or “necromancer.”³⁰
- After several centuries of evolution, the name has become an epithet meaning “one whose hubris leads him/her to his/her³¹ nemesis (a.k.a. just punishment).

Was There a Real Faust-Fellow?

Yes! It appears that there was a real Faust-fellow. Dr. Johann Georg Faust who is thought to have lived circa 1480 to 1540 in an area of Europe that now constitutes west-central Germany. History records that he was at best a dubious magician-alchemist who held a divinity degree from Heidelberg University.³² When his questionable career really began to really roll in his post-graduate days, Faust’s European-wide³³ reputation became one of legendary infamy.

Records indicate that Martin Luther³⁴ was aware of Johann but not surprisingly, regarded him contemptuously because of Faust’s anti-Christian thoughts and practices.³⁵

³⁰ In the times when the real and/or surreal Faust was in full frolic, the terms “alchemist” et. al. did not represent totally tawdry occupations. Western civilization was moving out of its “Dark Ages” onto the edges of scientific birth. Magical meddling in that transition was okay and even the basis for studies at reputable universities.

³¹ Let us make this gender-equitable!

³² Don’t believe he was in the same class though as Romberg’s Student Prince.

³³ Records indicate he made at least one voyage to South America to spread his gospel.

³⁴ Goethe placed his Faust on faculty at Wittenberg University. Some sources also place the real-world Faust on faculty at Wittenberg University where Luther held an

From the Real World to the Written Word.

Printed in 1587, the first complete documentation of Faust's "career" was written by Johann Spies under the truncated title of The History of Doctor Faust.³⁶ That text stimulated the legendary aspect of Faust and throughout Europe. It became the basis of medieval morality plays and publically popular puppet shows. It was also the go-to source for subsequent written versions of the legend.

From Book to the Boards.

Play #1. Christopher Marlowe, the Elizabethan poet, playwright and commercial competitor of Shakespeare³⁷ became aware of the Faustian

academic appointment in theology. It was in the town of Wittenberg where Luther is alleged to have nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the castle church.

Today, the University still exists although merged and renamed as Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg.

As you will recall, other attendees at Wittenberg included Prince Hamlet of Denmark, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Horatio. According to Shakespeare, Horatio was the only one that graduated.

³⁵ Just to muddy the archival waters, there are records indicating that in the 16th century there was in Poland a Pan Twardowski, a German emigrant studying in Krakow. Many of the same social characteristics of Faust are attributed to Pan. In fact they may be one in the same. Faust is known to have studied magic at good old Krakow U.

³⁶ The full title was almost as long as the text: "Historia (sic) of Dr. Johann Faust, the widely acclaimed magician and black artist, how he pledged himself to the devil for a certain time, what strange adventures he saw meanwhile, brought about and pursued, until he finally received his well deserved wages. Compiled and prepared for the printer in several parts out of his own literary remains, as a horrible example and sincere warning for all conceited, clever, and godless people. James 4: Submit to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

³⁷ Both Marlowe and the Bard were born the same year 1564, but Marlowe departed much earlier (1593) than Shakespeare ((1616). Marlowe is alleged to have been

tale when the Spies text was translated into English (circa 1587).³⁸ Marlowe evidently intrigued with the Spies material, began a process of reformulating it into a play.

It is thought, the Marlowe's play was first performed³⁹ in 1592. It was first published in 1604, more than a decade after Marlowe's "maybe" murder.⁴⁰

assassinated by request from a member of the Elizabethan Court. Talk about a determined drama critic!

Marlowe's premature departure from life spawned a mystery that still manages to elude solution today. It is known that Marlowe was involved in some questionable political activities. He was perilously close to arrest when killed in a brawl. The brawl has thought to be a set-up to cover the poet's murder and obviously insure his silence about anti-governmental activities.

More intriguing is the "spin" on the above. One evidently indomitable conspiracy theory has the brawl and murder as devices to enable Marlowe to disappear from the London scene and live happily ever after elsewhere, far from inquiring governmental spies and questions.

Makes some sense, but that tale has been further embroidered historically. It seems, the theorists confide, that in his new identity, Marlowe became Shakespeare and therefore was the actual author of the Shakespearean canon.

Folks, let us not go there.. It's well beyond the parameters of our Faustian fable, but it is great fun to cogitate about Shakespeare's stolen identity.

³⁸ Entitled, The Historie of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus/

³⁹ Apropos to almost nothing in our current discussion, during one of the marriages of Richard Burton to Elizabeth Taylor, the actor staged at his Oxford U alma mater, a production of the Marlowe play. Burton played Faust and Taylor played Helen of Troy, the most beautiful woman in the world. Talk about type casting!

⁴⁰ The published play has added its own mystery to the Marlowe "enigmas." The play was published twice in two very different versions. The 1604 version is much shorter than the subsequent 1616 version. All this gives scholars much to puzzle about and is similar to the controversy over the correct performance edition of two very different published versions of Romeo and Juliet. Gounod sure could pick dicey sources.

In an early example of international cultural exchange, the Marlowe play was introduced to Germany through a troupe of English actors.

Play #2. Johann Goethe,⁴¹ born in 1749, was probably introduced to the Faust legend through child-charming puppet shows⁴² that were the European-*rage*.⁴³ Whatever the source for his devil-dealing inspiration, he begun work on his epical dealings with the Devil somewhere around 1770. It semi-obsessively occupied him on and off for the next sixty years.⁴⁴

While the play Faust was a central part of Goethe's life, he was not idle otherwise. By 1775, he had made a major anatomical discovery, proposed an important hypothesis in botany, developed a theory of colors and had published his novel Werther. That work became the *rage* of Europe.⁴⁵ In 1775 Goethe also joined the state government cabinet in

⁴¹ See p. 6

⁴² For puppet purposes, the story had been heavily expurgated and transformed into more of a comedic than tragic routine. It should be remembered that slightly later, the tale of the Spanish Don Juan via the same puppet route, had ingrained itself with sufficient popularity into European culture for Mozart and da Ponte to co-opt it as their model for Don Giovanni.

⁴³ It is known that Goethe did read the Marlowe play in an 1818 German translation. In 1829, he paid lavish written tribute to it.

⁴⁴ By age twenty-six (1775), Goethe completed an early version of Faust Part 1. This fragment known at the Urfaust, was unfortunately not discovered until 1887.

⁴⁵ Werther as Faust, also became an object for musical treatment. In this case a continually popular opera by Massenet. Unfortunately, its subject matter of a hero's suicide caused by unrequited love promoted an epidemic of suicide among the youth of western Europe.

Weimar where he earned a reputation of a serious and effective bureaucrat.⁴⁶

In 1790 the public got its first look at Faust, albeit incomplete. Goethe released Faust: A Fragment drawn from pieces of Part 1; it was enthusiastically and critically well received. It appears he then put further consistent efforts on the work aside for almost a decade. Part 1 was finally finished and published in 1808. Part 2 was slower to emerge. Goethe finished it shortly before his death in 1832. At his request, publication of that segment was withheld until after his death. The fully published work became almost an instantaneous international classic.

Goethe's Closet-Drama. In his Faust, Goethe makes the original legend considerably more complex. In this creative effort and in addition to the well-known legend, he drew from other sources including Christian, medieval, Roman, eastern and Hellenic poetry. The final product is an exhaustive hybrid of play and extended poem which, as noted, was designed to be read rather than performed. Hence, the appellation: closet drama.

Devilish Details of the Drama (a.k.a Faust Play #2). The work through Parts 1 and 2 spells out the fate of Faust in his pursuit of the true essence of life. As Part 1 opens, Faust is frustrated with learning and the limits of his knowledge. His frustration attracts the Devil who agrees to serve him until “he (Faust) attains the zenith of human happiness.” At that point, the Devil may take his soul. Faust thinks that “zenith” will never come, so he bets on what he assumes will be a sure thing. Wrong!

⁴⁶ In his professional life as a “polymath,” Goethe’s career was not markedly dissimilar from that of ETA Hoffmann, except for that poet’s notorious alcohol and sex-fueled life style as immortalized by Offenbach.

Much but not all of Part 1, relates to the Gounod opera subject although it is stripped of Goethe's philosophical arguments and other play plot embellishments.⁴⁷ In Goethe, the heroine⁴⁸ and her family are destroyed by the Devil's deceptions and Faust's desires. However, the heroine's soul is saved, and Faust is left in earth-bound shame.

Part 2 is much richer in allegorical poetry than Part 1 and focuses less on soul-selling than social phenomena such as psychology, history and politics. It shows the Spirits of the Earth forgiving Faust his past (a la Part 1). Then, the philosopher and his Satanic sidekick pass through multiple worlds including contemporary reality (e.g. war, politics) and those from the mythological past (e.g. classical antiquity).

In the end, Faust tames the forces of war and nature which results in his "zenith of human happiness." As Faust dies recognizing that epiphany, the Devil, as contracted, makes a grab for his soul. However, God intervenes recognizing the value of Faust's eternal striving. The work ends with Faust carried heavenward while the Devil observes in manic frustration.⁴⁹

Faust, Play #3. In 1850, the French playwright and opera librettist Michael Carré adapted Part 1 of Goethe's Faust into a semi-comedic play, Marguerite and Faust.⁵⁰ It had an adequate run primarily because it

⁴⁷ It is this truncating of the operatic libretto that brought and still brings "purest" criticism down upon the piece.

⁴⁸ In Goethe, the heroine is named Margaret, although in moments of affection she is called Gretchen. Go figure!

⁴⁹ Readers not yet initiated to the Goethe masterpiece, should not resist taking that plunge for fear of arcane and voluminous philosophy and ancient history. True, some of that is there. However, the work is also full of humor and humanity. Try it! You will like it.

⁵⁰ Carré was well aware of what played and paid well; source substance be damned!

appealed to the “boulevard” tastes then currently popular among Parisian audiences.⁵¹ When it closed, that should have been that--- at least for the time being.

A Curious Faust Footnote (a.k.a. Play #4). In 2006, long after any of the above, Oxford University Press published an English blank verse translation of the Goethe epic. The piece was entitled Faustus, From the German of Goethe. The Press attributed the translation to Samuel Taylor Coleridge--- he of Rime of the Ancient Mariner fame. The smoke still has not settled from the donnybrook created by that literary assertion.

Limited and incomplete historical records do assert a Coleridge role in the translation. However, a large question remains as to whether he actually completed that effort. Why Coleridge? The English poet despite his growing affection for opium and other “recreational” substances, was judged the greatest living writer on the demonic. If ever a work qualifies for the label “demonic,” it certainly would be Faust.

Coleridge accepted the translation invitation, but was thought to have quit working on it after only six weeks and never returned to the effort. Coleridge insisted vociferously that he, “Never put pen to paper as a translator of Faust.”⁵² However, Goethe himself believed that Coleridge completed a translation in 1820. The English translation currently

⁵¹ From descriptions, it is to be assumed “boulevard (theatrical) taste” was a fondness for less intellectually demanding entertainments than Offenbach was beginning to perfect at this same time, but certainly without his musical allure.

⁵² Coleridge’s autobiographical statements are notoriously inaccurate as well as creatively self-serving.

attributed to Coleridge, first appeared in 1821 and was credited to George Soane.⁵³

The academic editors of the Press's current Faust present evidence to support their Coleridge claims including several hundred verbal similarities between the translation and Coleridge's works, circumstantial evidence and computer-assisted analyses. So? Pick a side!

After Faust Play #3: The French Second Empire (1852-1870).

Among other things, the short-lived French Second Empire has been noted as, "The key phase in the history of French opera."⁵⁴ ⁵⁵ During this time period, the Parisian operatic world was evolving into full flower. However, like **FAUST'S** Devil-cursed Siebel, the bloom would fade from those operatic flowers--- shortly. For the moment though, **laissez les bon temps roulez!** The creation of Gounod's **FAUST** is an enduring product of those good operatic times.

⁵³ Soane was a popular English playwright and translator of European plays. The printed English translation of Faust appears carrying his name and was performed both in London and New York.

⁵⁴ Herve Lacombe, The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century; University of California Press, Berkeley; 2001.

⁵⁵ Let us hype "hyperbole" beyond just parochial Paris in that decade. At almost that same temporal period, Wagner was maturing in Germany and Verdi in Italy, not to mention composers in other Continental countries. Throughout Europe, not just France, operatic creativity was approaching its watershed. Despite the absence of a Mozart, this decade and the latter part of its 19th century was probably the golden age of opera. While Puccini was not yet born, much less begun composition, when he finally comes to town, his final work, *Turandot*, will be begrudgingly bestowed as the last of the Mohicans, the end of the operatic "golden age." The rationale for this appellation and its legitimacy (or no) are fulsome, fascinating, even though perhaps overheated. However, they far exceed our time and space. We won't go there. So, for the moment, just take our word!

The development of the operatic **FAUST** began shortly after the Carré play closed its modest run. At that point (circa 1852-1855), several operatic-related professional pathways serendipitously intersected more or less coincidentally in the neighborhood of the Theatre-Lyrique. This resultant creative, but casually convened crowd included:

- **Charles Gounod**, the French composer who to date was largely positively recognized for his religious music. However, he was beginning to turn his talents toward the opera “guided” by a leading mezzo-soprano of the day;
- The previously noted **Michael Carré**, now in a writing partnership with **Julies Barbier**. This pair was on the cusp of what would prove to be a two decade plus run as the most “in demand” and successful team of librettists on the Parisian operatic scene;
- Leon **Carvalho**, an innovative, imperious Parisian Impresario and retired operatic baritone;
- Antoine de **Choudens**. At the beginning of our **FAUST** operatic saga, he was a wet-behind-the-ears fledgling in the hard-knock world of Parisian musical publication.⁵⁶ In not too many years, he would emerge as the Don Corleone-like Godfather of the industry. As will be demonstrated, that result was quite literally linked to his partnership with a Devil and fellow travelers.

Suffice to say, the above talent, tenacity and ego would merge and eventually, **FAUST** would emerge! However before that moment, some brief, but relevant biography on these major participants.

⁵⁶ His firm established in 1844 on a shoestring and chutzpah, still successfully continues today.

The Goods (greatly streamlined) on Gounod.⁵⁷ Looking at Gounod backwards over time, it appears to be generally concluded by his friends, foes and musical historians that to say the least, this man had conflicting emotional extremes. He was actively and seriously drawn to a pious and potentially cloistered religious life but also to what he considered, the sinful and tawdry life associated with the operatic stage! Apparently unable to choose exclusively one over the other, he struck a truly Gallic compromise. To assuage the guilt accrued by one behavioral style and as a penance to the other, for every opera he composed, he also immediately composed a mass or oratorio.

Gounod was recognized as a compositional prodigy early in the genteel poverty of his youth, His talents were sufficient to be admitted for study in the Paris Conservatory. While there, his work was of a quality that earned in 1839 the Prix de Rome.⁵⁸

In Rome, the doors to the religious music of the Catholic Church were opened to him for the first time. He was instantly enthralled by that form of music and began to develop prodigious skill in its composition.⁵⁹ His Roman holiday also established his bifurcated base of life style and musical profession. This duality seriously conflicted him through a large part of his remaining life.⁶⁰

Raised largely by a widowed mother, he was protected from the “excesses” of an artistic / bohemian life-style. His student days at the

⁵⁷ For a more detailed background on Gounod see **Irreverent Guide #17** (October 2007), *Romeo et Juliette*.

⁵⁸ As a three year plus all-expense paid sojourn in Italy for purposes of musical study and intellectual broadening.

⁵⁹ His famed Messe Solennelle (St. Cecilia's Mass) was composed during this period, but it was not heard publicly until a London performance in 1851.

⁶⁰ He died in 1883 respected, honored, but still conflicted..

Conservatory were akin to those of a Trappist Monastery. Logically therefore, once unfettered in Rome, it should have been “whoopie-time!” Instead of basking in the bacchanal, he found it off-putting. Especially tawdry to him were both the on-stage and off-stage worlds of the opera. The choir loft and organ were more to his tastes; he began to consider entering a religious order.

While amidst Roman ruins, he was introduced to Fanny Hensel, Mendelssohn’s sister and a talented musician in her own right. Fraulein Hensel significantly broadened Gounod’s “young innocent abroad” demeanor into a broad understanding and appreciation of European art and culture.⁶¹

He returned to Paris (circa 1843) and for the next few years concentrated on religious composition, organ recitals and conducting choral and orchestral performances. Given his almost constant immersion in the milieu of the church, it was no surprise that he continued to be drawn towards entering a religious order. Gounod finally took the plunge in 1847 when he entered a Carmelite monastery.

About that same period, sex reared its ugly head and Gounod’s “new” religious lifestyle took on a notorious reputation. He became known as the “philandering monk,” waffling between monastic religious ecstasies and voluptuous seductions that were said to encompass large segments of “the ladies in the neighborhood.”⁶² Mama fortunately knew best. She

⁶¹ Although the couple traveled extensively throughout the continent, historical archives remain discretely silent on the potential of a romantique liaison pour deux. Significant to later events, she introduced him to Goethe’s Faust.

⁶² Franz Liszt somewhat at the same period was even more notorious than Gounod in juggling religion and seduction, except Liszt did make a choice that Gounod would (could?) not. In the younger part his life, Liszt played more than the piano, and held a

recognized that Gounod was no candidate for the permanent, full-time religious life and successfully exerted considerable pressure on him and members of the clergy to keep her boy a “civilian.”

In her campaign, Mama appears to have been non-conspiratorially aided by a famous mezzo-soprano of the time. That lady is alleged to have convinced Gounod that composing those “tawdry” operas for her would be more rewarding than sackcloth and ashes.⁶³

Gounod’s first opera, *Sapho* composed for the maneuvering mezzo, was not a big winner publicly or critically. In 1852, Gounod was 34 years old, the French Second Empire⁶⁴ was beginning its run, and the composer’s second opera, *Ulisse*, did well enough to inspire him to slug ahead in that musical direction. His next effort, an operatic attempt on the “grand” scale convinced him that the Parisian style of very grand opera was not his strength. As a consequence, he down-sized his compositional efforts to operas in the less formalistic and free-winging style of the Theatre-Lyrique.

Tawdry or not, let’s leave Gounod for the moment, at the cusp of his operatic career for a quick once-over of others named in the Theatre-Lyrique’s **FAUST**-related traffic-jam. It may clarify the coming chaos,

A Short-stop for Carré and Barbier’s Joint-Résumé. During the Second Empire, Paris was awash with many of the French operatic repertoire’s most famous composers. Unfortunately, that artistic stable

wildly sybaritic reputation. However, in his later years, he appears to have been exclusively and ascetically monastic.

⁶³ Well if you want names named, “she” was Pauline Viardot-Garcia.

⁶⁴ Remember, this brief period has been characterized as the keystone of French opera.

was less well-stocked with pedigreed librettists.⁶⁵ However, there was some wholesome wheat among all that word-smithing chaff. Two of the most notable, theatrically articulate, and successful librettists in that Parisian⁶⁶ operatic wheat field were Jules Barbier (1822-1901) and Michel Carré (1819-1872).

Usually, but not always, working as a team, the pair co-authored the librettos for Thomas's *Mignon* and *Hamlet*, Meyerbeer's *Dinorah*, and Gounod's *Faust* and *Romeo et Juliette*. Carré without his usual partner, also developed the libretto for Gounod's *Mireille*.

In 1851, the pair wrote a highly successful play based on the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann. Thirty years later and after the death of Carré, that earlier play was adapted by Barbier (also crediting Carré) as the libretto for Offenbach's *Les Contes des Hoffmann*.

Highly successful in their time, the team understood the Parisian opera "crowd." To them, these folks were largely non-intellectual, tolerating only modest plots, pretty tunes, glamorous singers and spectacular scenic effects. As a direct consequence, the two librettists' geared their work to be simple, direct and stay out of the way of the artistes and the music. Criticized frequently today for conventionalizing and sentimentalizing complex works (e.g. Goethe's *Faust*), the pair's textual (re)works are undervalued. However, in their day, they ruled!

Back to pre-FAUST. When we left Gounod, he was looking for his new operatic subject. However, archives do not accurately articulate

⁶⁵ A case on that point is the turgid South Seas, soap-opera text dumped on Bizet to musically resuscitate as *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*.

⁶⁶ In the 19th century, Paris was "the" center of the French opera world. Unlike Italy, Germany etc., there were no "major" operas houses from which to garner musical reputation except those in the country's capital city.

happened next. We do know that Faust was suggested to the composer as the subject. The question that remains because of conflicting accounts, is who suggested it: Carré or Carvalho?

Carré had approached Meyerbeer to create an opera from the librettist's 1850 play. The composer reacted with horror at the thought of turning a German literary masterpiece into musical theater. Carré then made a similar proposal to Gounod, who proved to be less squeamish.

An alternative version suggests that Carvalho already had his Impresario eye on Gounod as a promising young operatic composer. Sources indicate the now Director of the Lyrique himself proposed the devilish subject to Gounod, probably for two reasons: it would make "good opera," and coincidentally, it would have a great role for his recently acquired operatic soprano wife. Who knows (or cares)?⁶⁷,⁶⁸ The die was cast, the subject was confirmed.

The opera was to be presented at the Lyrique and work began immediately, using the Carré play as the libretto base.⁶⁹ Carvahlo imperialistically micro managed the overall effort.

⁶⁷ As noted, Fraulein Hensel also had introduced Gounod to the Goethe closet-drama during their European grand-tour. They are alleged to have read it aloud to each other.

⁶⁸ There are also records indicating Barbier may have introduced the subject to Gounod. We are sure you have the general picture by now. So we aren't even going to explore that variation on a theme of discovery.

⁶⁹ Interesting to note, while Carré may have been the instigator of the operatic subject with his play, when the operatic work actually began, it was his partner Barbier that carried the lion's share of the effort. Carré largely demurred on the grounds he had already done that. It is known, however, that he did contribute the texts for Marguerite's "King of Thule" aria and Mephistopheles' "Calf of Gold." For

Carvalho's Career, Quickly. Léon Carvalho has been described as, “One of the most important Parisian opera figures during the second part of the 19th century.”⁷⁰ That reputation began in 1850 with his successful career as a baritone at the Opera Comique. Significantly, especially for Gounod’s later operatic glory, the baritone met and in 1853, married the popular Parisian, operatic soprano, Marie Caroline Miolan.⁷¹

In 1855, Carvalho retired from the operatic stage, at least as a singer. However, he became a “Big Boss” as Director of the Theatre-Lyrique.⁷² He is said to have had an unflinching instinct about what would play, sing and look well on the operatic stage. As a result he did not hesitate to revise a composer’s work or impose other types of major production changes.⁷³ It appears he was seldom successfully challenged.

At the Lyrique, he enlivened the repertoire with non-French works by Beethoven, Mozart, Rossini and Weber. More importantly, he opened the Theatre’s door to French composers including Berlioz, Gounod, Bizet,

those he received full and permanent co-authorship billing. What an agent he must have had!

⁷⁰ Lacombe, see [Jacques Offenbach and the Paris of His Time](#).

⁷¹ She would later premiere the role of Marguerite in **FAUST** and Juliette in *Romeo et Juliette*. Carvalho served as the stage director and Impresario for both these operatic productions. Now, wasn't that convenient?

⁷² As previously noted, the Lyrique had been established in 1851 to encourage French operatic composers, especially those awarded the Prix de Rome, and to “free” native operatic forms from rigidities imposed by overzealous bureaucrats and a docile public.

⁷³ The changes Cavalho imposed on *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, especially in the few weeks between Offenbach's sudden death and the premiere, forced the opera into perhaps unfortunate directions that only have been revised in recent years with the discovery of previously unknown score-related materials. However, in Cavalho's favor, he did get *Les Contes* on stage and a success; he kept it there until the score-saving revisionists appeared. That is another story though. For that one, see **Irreverent Guide # 16 - Les Contes d'Hoffmann** (April,2007).

Saint-Saens and Delibes. This, after all, was the *raison d'être* of this new Parisian operatic venue,

In the Parisian operatic pecking-order, Carvalho subsequently moved up a significant level, when he was named Director of the Opéra-Comique (1876). There he continued to promote both the creation of many new works as well as his “unfailing instincts” and dictatorial ways with new works.

Unfortunately, his Comique career hit a serious speed bump in 1887 when the Theater burned during a performance; there was a major loss of life.⁷⁴ Cavalho was held responsible, arrested for negligence, found guilty and imprisoned. On subsequent appeal, he was acquitted and reinstated as Director of the Comique in 1891 where he continued to successfully nurture à sa manière, new talents and operas until his death in 1897.

Back to Organizing FAUST and Assuring It's Success. As we have seen in periods of other operatic creations, the overall work effort appears to be very quickly accomplished, especially in the view of those of us not tunefully talented. **FAUST** was no exception, although it benefitted especially from the existence of a libretto framework. Speed, however, does not guarantee peaceful progress. Carvahlo continually demanded additions and deletions. Gounod and Carré continuously and

⁷⁴ Theater fires during the 19th century were unfortunately a common fact of life given gaslight illumination and too many fire-based special effects. As example: two ill-fated attempts for a German premiere of Offenbach's *Les Contes* were greeted by both theaters burning to the ground. As a consequence, the opera was thought “cursed” and withheld for twenty-five years from further German production.

During Cavalho's Directorship of the Lyrique, that facility also burned. However, it was torched by a mob during the excesses of the Paris Commune following the Franco-Prussian War, not rowdy first-nighters or really caustic critics.

quickly acquiesced. Barbier, however, often fought successfully for what he perceived as the integrity of their creation.

Hold it! There's one more Faust Play (# 4). The often acrimonious debates among the four men were braked to a temporary truce when it was discovered another Faust would shortly be playing in Paris.

Adolphe Dennery, a popular Parisian playwright of melodrama, was in the throes of finalizing an imminent production of his spin on the Faust legend. Carvalho felt two theater-pieces on the same subject were not in the interest of boffo box-offices. Gounod's **FAUST** was voluntarily put on hold.⁷⁵

A Doctor was in the House! Never one to condone a hiatus, Carvalho proposed an operatic treatment of Moliere's Le médecin malgré lui to his available and idle creative team, Gounod, Barbier and Carré, as requested, developed such an opera in the comique style.⁷⁶ The production achieved some notoriety as the Comédie-Française⁷⁷ attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to block the production.

The opera was only a modest success and remains somewhat of a curiosity piece today. In its defense, the opera has been revived by the Opera Comique several times since its premiere. However, it is rarely performed today.

⁷⁵ While a prudent business action, it turned out to be probably unnecessary. Dennery's play was not a success.

⁷⁶ Operatic arias, ensembles and choruses supplemented with spoken dialogue based on actual text from Moliere's play.

⁷⁷ As the historic holders of the original "rights" to the play.

Back to Finalizing FAUST. The opera finally premiered in March of 1859. What can we say? The work was not a success!^{78, 79} However, Carvalho trusted the work. He kept it in the Theatre's repertoire for the next four months (fifty-seven performances) at his own expense and with his wife still in the female lead. Then both Carvalho and the Lyrique went bankrupt! Now comes the time for Choudans's entrance into our tuneful tale to turn it into a triumph!

Choudans, a Condensed Career. In 1844, Choudans launched his fledgling Parisian music publishing venture. Focusing almost exclusively on vocal music, he began to build his "stable" from promising composers young in their careers. He evidently had an uncanny sense of who and what would succeed (eventually) both in artistic and economic terms. As evidence of his prognostication potential: among his early protégées for publication were Bizet, Berlioz, Offenbach and Gounod. It was said, "His flair for business and lack of generosity made him a rich man."

As will shortly be described, he scored big (pun!) with Gounod's **FAUST**. From that point forward, he did not look back and could not be held back. The man died in 1888, disliked but wealthy. His firm continues quite successfully today,⁸⁰ although it has been recently

⁷⁸ Do not despair readers. We have not been leading you down a primrose path to a shaggy-dog story ending. Keep turning these pages, the best part is just ahead.

⁷⁹ Amid all the critical brickbats was a left-handed compliment worth reviewing. One critic thought the work was so compositionally advanced over Gounod's previous efforts that the critic via the public press, accused the composer of not having written the piece. Gounod challenged the man to a duel, but the "charge" was publically withdrawn before any guns/épées were discharged/unsheathed.

⁸⁰ With the compositional catalogue built by the original M. Choudens and including Bizet's *Carmen*, Gounod's *Faust*, Offenbach's *Les Contes* and Berlioz's *Les Troyans*, why wouldn't it succeed and persevere?

“acquired” by another larger publisher--- a la mode of today’s modern marketplace.

Choudans's Cash Cavalry Scores a Coup and FAUST Flies High!

Technically, **FAUST** was not a failure; it just was not a success.⁸¹ An optimistic Gounod attempted to find a publisher of the score in the face of no further performances. His initial efforts were not productive until he encountered Choudans.

The publisher was in the fledgling stage of his business, but he sensed a success yet-to-be had with **FAUST**. He purchased the opera’s publication rights for 10,000 francs.⁸² Choudans then underwrote a European tour of the opera (Germany, Belgium, Italy, and England). Mme. Carvahlo tagged along still spinning out a successful vocal and acting portrayal of the modest medieval maiden.⁸³ Gounod also created recitatives to replace the original spoken dialogue.⁸⁴

It returned to Paris in 1862 as an international success. It shortly became a Parisian success at the now re-financed Theatre-Lyrique with Carvalho still at the leadership helm. In 1869 it was deemed successful enough,

⁸¹ Believe me, there is a difference here. Don't fight it!

⁸² Alleged to be the full available capital of his firm.

⁸³ Prior to *Faust*, Mme. Carvahlo was not noted for either great acting skill or vocal ability. However, she was the impresario's wife and as such was forced upon the composer and his librettists. Turns out she was a sensation in the role and probably accounted for a share of the opera's eventual triumph.

The original tenor in the Paris production was also not to Gounod's liking, so much so the composer proposed to replace the tenor with himself. Luckily, that did not happen. The tenor carried out almost as well as Mme. Carvahlo. From that, Gounod gained insight into the true meaning of "Shoemaker stick to your last!"

⁸⁴ Outside of France, operatic recitative was demanded even in the comique-opera mode.

especially with a ballet sequence added, to appear on the hallowed stage of the Théâtre Impérial de l'Opéra. It achieved over 500 performances by 1887, an unheard of performance record and it became the most frequently performed opera at that venue. Today, it is regarded as one of the three best French operatic products of the 19th century.⁸⁵

When it finally hit its critical and public popularity stride, **FAUST** opened New York City's new Metropolitan Opera House (1883).⁸⁶ It subsequently played there so frequently, one critic dubbed the venue, the "Faustspielhaus." Edith Wharton opened her famed Pulitzer-prize winning novel, *The Age of Innocence*, at one of those frequent Met performance's of the Gounod opera.

Apart from its eventual musical entrance into operatic Olympus, Choudans's **FAUST** investment has also become the stuff of investment legend. Within thirty years, his initial 10,000 franc investment had returned in excess of 3,000,000 francs in royalties to his Firm!

Gounod after FAUST. As previously noted, early in his musical life, Gounod regarded the opera and its world as tawdry. However, by the end of his life more than three decades after the **FAUST** premiere, he had come to regard the opera as, "the only one route to be followed to make a name for yourself (in music)."

He composed a baker's dozen of operas. Only two of these, *Faust* and *Romeo and Juliette*, achieved quite incredible international operatic fame for him. However, the rest of his operatic works are perhaps best left to almost total obscurity.

⁸⁵ The other two concern a gallivanting gypsy gal named *Carmen* and a dipsomaniacal tale-teller named *Hoffmann*.

⁸⁶ Sung in Italian. There is a story here, but not now.

Not to worry though! Despite Gounod's opinion, his musical immortality sans opera, could be guaranteed alone by his catalogue of religious works: motets, canticles, cantatas, oratorios, requiems and masses.⁸⁷ In commenting on this catalogue, no less an authority than Debussy stated, "The church music of Gounod seems to come from some kind of hysterical mysticism and has the effect of a sinister force." Devil-driven perhaps?



⁸⁷ One of his most perpetually popular church pieces continues to be the *Ave Maria* based on a Bach-borrowed theme from the First Prelude of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.

**WHO ARE THESE LIEDER AND LEDERHOSEN
LOVING LAYPERSONS,
GARGLING FLORID FRENCH PHONICS
WITH A GERIATRICALLY-CHALLENGED
GERMAN GUY?**



FAUST (tenor). In the course of our operatic opus, this fellow fandangos from wizened Wittenberg (U) Don to hedonistic, hunky hero. Hell-bent in more ways than one, he achieves admirably, his glowing soul-selling goal.

MÉPHISTOPHÉLÈS (bass). Devilish in demeanor, this "bait and baste" buddy of our hell-bent hero, handles some terrific tunes. However from gaining his second soul goal (our friend Faust's being the first), he is magnificently mis-manuvered by a modest medieval maiden, Miss Maggie (a.k.a. Marguerite).

MARGUERITE (soprano). The opera's main maiden, Miss Maggie⁸⁸ is a modest medieval-type Macguffin.⁸⁹ She credibly sings but ceaselessly with the charm of a crazed canary. Sad to say, she is bed-bested by our hunky hero but by golly, she bravely bests his brimstone buddy. When last seen in the Scene, she is gambling up them Golden Stairs.

⁸⁸ Hereinafter frequently referred to as "Sis." or "Miss Maggie."

⁸⁹ The cause that gets the plot in gear.

WAGNER (baritone). A Faustian student or perhaps friend,⁹⁰ he musically muses briefly. but operatically early, about a ribald rat. His tune is truncated by our devious Devil, who then fatally forecasts this friend's battlefield bye-bye.

VALENTIN (baritone). Our medieval Miss Maggie's bivouac and battlefield-bound brother. This baritone belts beautifully, but he is finally and fatally finished by a friend of our fiend in medieval mien.

SIEBEL (soprano).⁹¹ A serious student of the devil-dealing Don (a.k.a. our fast-time Faust), this girl in guy's get-up and genes is seriously smitten with the modest medieval Miss Maggie. Unlucky in love, he/she also learns flower arranging is not his/her forte.

MARTHA SCHWERLEIN (contralto). A careless companion-chaperon for our modest medieval Miss Maggie and definitely, an over-the-hill hottie, Hell-bent for a date with the Devil.

SOLDIERS, STUDENTS, YOUNG GIRLS, MATRONS, BURGERS, INVISIBLE DEMONS, AT LEAST ONE CHURCH CHOIR, WITCHES, QUEENS AND COURTESANS OF ANTIQUITY,⁹² CELESTIAL VOICES, ETC. All the usual crowd of a medieval marketplace, choral-ling and occasionally chortling, in collective cacophony.

⁹⁰ The libretto seems to want it both ways or needs a copy editor.

⁹¹ Another one of those pesky, gender-bending operatic habits of girls-in-trousers playing boys-in-trousers. This occurs more for the resultant vocal sounds en ensemble than common sense. Remember this is opera and you must give it a LOT of leeway.

⁹² Patience! All will be explained, eventually.

**A TERSELY TOLD
ALLITERATIVE ANALYSIS OF
A TUNEFUL TALE.
(a.k.a. PAP* FOR THE IMPATIENT).**



*FYI, according to Webster's *New World Dictionary* (2nd ed.),
PAP= "any oversimplified or tasteless writing." Got the picture?

In response to long ago whiny whimpers, **A Tersely Told Alliterative Analysis of A Tuneful Tale** was begrudgingly developed as a standard section for each Guide. In all honesty, it is a seriously stripped-down synopsis of our operatic objective targeting two potential, but commonly impatient, sub-classes of our ribald readership: 1. those who have severely short spans of attention AND/OR 2. those who spent their educational years (and probably beyond) insisting they only had sufficient time to scan synopses of assigned materials and only at the last moments before a critical confrontation with reality like "the final exam" OR later in life, the stockholders' meeting or--- an operatic performance (both on-stage and off).
Why the alliteration you ask? Judging from its "rah-rah" reception, we have a really weird readership.

Act I.

- In a moldy, medieval milieu, a garrulous greybeard gabs grumpily about the down-side of geriatric life. Suicide seductively summons this sour puss sage, but then---
- Satan suddenly sweeps in seeking souls. Suckered by Satan's mouth-watering mirage of a modest, medieval maiden, our sage swiftly sells his soul for a romp in the hay with our heroine plus other unsung fringe benefits.

- The Devil's dark deed done, he and his dupe randily rush off to sow their sinful seeds among an unsuspecting citizenry. **Curtain!**

Act II.

- Battle banners are blossoming in the middle of a medieval mercantile milieu. A festive frolic is starting to ferment among a crowd of choral-ing, but feeling-no-pain fellows. Soon, soldiers and students are sloshed from swilling seedy sauterne.
- Our leading lady's battle-bound brother wails weepingly about departing his domicile. He baritone-ishly broods about securely sheltering his Sis from seducers during his scheduled sabbatical-for-slaying.
- That conundrum is comfortably concluded when a shy but Sis-smitten student is selected to secure her shelter from seducers. Bad choice Bro!
- The Devil drops in to dazzle the local denizens by declaiming dourly about a soon-to-come, combat-killing of a Faustian friend and the future finish of Sis's big brother by a friend of the Fiend (guess who). For a flourishing fearful finish, the Fiend forbids fresh flowers foraged by the Faustian student smitten with Sis. Nosegays are a no-no.
- Done with his declamation, the Devil then dumps the village's vinegary vin ordinaire and magically musters a much mellower merlot.
- Well, that winds the whoopee up as the wondrous wine is determine-ly downed, but then---

- Our sardonic Satan sauterne-ly salutes the name of our battle-bound brother's Sis. Well! That sure enough starts the soldiers' swords a- swinging. But hey---
- The brother's blade breaks when swung at Satan!
- Swiftly surmising a satanic ruse, the bright brother swings up the shattered sword's cross-crowned shaft. The other soldiers swiftly follow suit.
- Satan now surrounded by a devil-driving Christian symbol is subdued as the sauterne-swillers swiftly skedaddle from the scene. Meanwhile---
- Couples conjugate to commence a wildly, whirling WALTZ! While---
- Our hedonistic hero, who's just been hopefully hanging around this hometown's hoe-down, hones in on our heroine who is hustling homeward from churchly communion.
- Sis parries his "come-thither" thrust--- but politely. Checkmate --- so far!
- Now flummoxed, the Faust-fellow fumes. However, his fiend friend who has been skulking in the back of the Square, prognostic-ally states to his soul-selling sidekick that there will soon be success with Sis. That said ---
- The still-waltzing, conjugated couples now warp-ishly whirling, take command of the stage, **Curtain!**

Act III.

- Wandering in Sis's scented-ly seductive spring garden, our seriously smitten (but still shy) student picks some posies to make a nosegay meant for our medieval

maiden. Bummer! As prognosticated by our satanic sly-guy, the posies perish.

- This student is not stupid, so he hangs his hand in a handy holy-water holder. Voila! That vessel vests a power to prevent new posies from perishing. New petunias and their petal-laden pals are promptly picked and prettily placed to pump-up our heroine's pleasure.

- Since playing Peeping Tom is a puerile pastime of our brimstone buddies, the student's scented success was seen by that satanic set.

- The Devil, certainly not to be devotionally defied by a shy student, counters the floral cornucopia with a casket of baubles, bangles and beads. "Flower power be damned," declaims the determined Devil!

- Sis soon sweeps on stage and swiftly starts her omnipresent spinning wheel while singing a folksy sonnet or so.

- Suddenly she sees the casket of cabochons and collection of calla lilies conjointly.

- Which to choose? (Truly, a Lady or Tiger conundrum!)

- No contest! The tilt is toward the Tiffany-trinkets!

- Well, bedecked with the bespoke beads, our belle belts with bell-like brilliance about her bauble-built beauty. In her glee, she is joined by her nose-y next-door neighbor, a slightly randy romantic and Sis's occasional, but careless chaperon.

- Well, this proves to be one of those "careless chaperon" coincidences. The Devil first dismays the dubious duenna by declaring her spouse slain in a siege somewhere.

Then, he deftly dupes the Dame into some make-out mischief. This leaves the hunky hero to hustle the heroine.

- This seamy scene is surfeited with sumptuous singing despite its slimy seduction-seeking subject.
- Surprise! Seduction succeeds and, as definitely dictated by discretion, the **curtain** drops.

Act IV, Scene 1.

- In the haven of her humble house, our heroine is now seen still schlepping with that silly spinning-wheel, securely secreted from sin-seeking nosy neighbors. You see, she is assuredly stuck with a soon-to-be-suckling souvenir from our hunky hero, he who is now "hasta la vista."

- The nasty neighbors, unseen in the outside street, snarkish-ly sing of Sis's sinful situation,
- Soon, she is sweetly soothed by the shy-student, but seeking more significant sin-soothing solace, she skips out to slip into a nearby nave. Circumspect **curtain**.

Scene 2.

- In the nearby nave, Satan shouts "Sinner!" at Sis who is praying penitently in a pew.
- To the Devil's cutting cacophony, a non-celestial choir chimes in cruelly. Thus punishingly pummeled, the poor penitent collapses, much to the consternation of the congregation. Quick **curtain!**

Scene 3.

- Triumphantly, the Teutonic Troops troop back into town. There is always a festive flourish to feverishly finalize their brio battling.
- Brother is sadly saluted by the now sullen, but still shy student. Is there something sinisterly secretive swirling about Sis? Brother hastens home to hear.
- Darn it! The devilish duo drops in to scandalizing-ly serenade Sis's sin. Terrible timing! Sure enough, trouble is swift to surface.
- Brother rushes rapidly to reputation-rescue his seduced-sibling. A duel develops between the bristling brother and the hunky hero.
- Bummer! The brother is mortally mauled. He curses his sinful but solace-seeking Sis as he soars off to that sky-situated slain soldiers' shelter. Our brave brother needs no boost from Brünnhilde to vault into that Valhalle. **Curtain!**

Act V, Scene 1.

- The big ballet boogies on heralding a hedonistic hoe-down and overly-active orgy. Every historically famous fun-loving floozy flounces frantically to bed our Hell-bound hunky hero boy. However---
- Sensory overload soon short-circuits his wanton wishes.
- Our medieval maiden's mirage has magically manifested. It implies the imminence of her deadly demise. The hero sobs. "I must succor Sis in her sad situation." The

Devil kow-tows and complies with his companion's call for caring. **Curtain!**

Scene 2.

- Sis has been sentenced to die at dawn for doing in the suckling souvenir. Our hero, satanically hied hence, hopes to help her hustle the hangman.
- An ennobling ensemble ensues. However---
- Our well-over-the-edge heroine demurs to a devilish-designed escape. To add insult to injury, she also denies a helpful hand from our now definitely hapless, Hell-bent hero.
- All that being sung, Sis succumbs.
- The Devil dashes to salvage her soul as his. Hold on!
- A heavenly combo with accompanying organ and choir, chimes in to claim Sis's soul, now saved, as theirs.
- Off she goes. Up them golden stairs companioned by crashing chords and celestial choir. Meanwhile---
- The has-been hero is hauled to Hell by our delighted Devil amid an orchestral onslaught.
- S'il vous plait--- a definitive drop in the **curtain!**



PROST!



For those who oppose terse alliteration,
but ache for an arcane,
devilish dump of detail-dense detritus,
we deliver the following:

A Fulsome Feeding of FAUST.

(The opera on-stage and in the footlights.)

Introduction / Prelude. As originally written, the opera began with a tone poem reflecting Faust's geriatric grumpiness. This unsung musical litany about the usual suspects of ache-filled aging then segued into the Act I action, but---⁹³

When the opera was on that original Choudans-financed continental tour,⁹⁴ the baritone scheduled to perform the role of Valentin in London had an especially remarkable voice and was a known crowd pleaser. Gounod, no fool he, expanded the role with an additional aria. Known popularly (en anglais)⁹⁵ as "Even Bravest Heart Will Swell," it became the popular hit of the opera.

In the mode of the day, the tune became omnipresent: music halls, Busker street performances, church services, parlor musicales etc. Gounod, again knowing a good deal when it was presented, expanded the opera's original Introduction with the aria's melody. It follows the geriatric tone poem; that is how we hear the Introduction today.

⁹³ In Opryland, there always seems to be a "but."

⁹⁴ See p. 36.

⁹⁵ More about this linguistic sleight of hand, later.

As the aria's melody fades, the tone poem returns, the curtain usually is raised as the music continues and the Act I action begins.⁹⁶

Act I.

Setting: Faust's dark, dank and dungeon-like digs at good ol' Wittenberg U.⁹⁷

Time: Near dawn, probably on an Easter Sunday, circa 1540.

Faust is first observed as a wrinkly old-guy galumphing among his Frankenstein-ian lab cum study carrel. He is vocally unhappy with life as well as with arcane academic analyses.. **(Rein! En vain j'interroge / Nothing! In vain do I question---**).⁹⁸

Since death seems slow to come to him, suicide seems a more swift solution. So--- he raises a goblet of poison.⁹⁹ However a happy, happy chorus of yodeling youths interrupt his hustle down-the-hatch. Damn! Spoils the mood so, back to grumping. Proves to do no good, so back to

⁹⁶ Because of this direct link of the opera's introductory music into the Act I action, it technically qualifies as a Prelude in the Wagnerian sense. However, for reasons probably best known to French linguistic purists, the piece seems to perform (pun?) with shifting labeling: Introduction, Prelude and/or Overture. Your choice!

⁹⁷ The Act 1 setting usually elicits some cynical audience chuckles especially among a university crowd, when they observe Faust's modest faculty housing. It usually encompasses the whole of a normally very large stage. Just one of those opera "things."

⁹⁸ In the usual **Guide** custom, the bold font type-face texts are the opening words of the music of the moment, albeit in the language of the opera; the un-bolded type-faces contain an approximate English translation.

⁹⁹ Again, a slight operatic chuckle offered for the audience. Stage directions indicate Faust is to first pour poison from-filled beaker into a goblet and then start to drink from the goblet. Why? If you are on the way out, you don't worry about etiquette, you just down the damn beaker. Right?

the goblet gambit! Then cacophony from a covey of crooning cuties down-in-the off-stage valley. Enough already!

Faust calls on Satan to succor him. (**Maudites soyez-vous. A moi, satan! /A curse on you! Satan, come to me!**). No sooner asked than answered, Méphistophélès¹⁰⁰ appears.¹⁰¹ (**Me voice! Here I am!**)

In a duet, our devil and his dupe begin negotiations. Faust does not want the usual “stuff”. He wants youth! That can be a done deal, he is assured. But, what in exchange? Only your soul. Old Scratch will serve our Scholar “here,” but “there” our Scholar will be a baking butler. A mirage of Miss Maggie is manufactured to sweeten the bargain.¹⁰² Magnificent! Where do I sign?

The dirty deed is done. In a puff of simple stage magic,¹⁰³ the grumpy guy is transformed into our hot-to-go hero. Then, the dubious duo depart

¹⁰⁰ In the interest of carpal-tunnel syndrome prevention and also, borrowing from Stephen Vincent Benet, this sulfurous scented cast-citizen will hereinafter be referred to as “Old Scratch.”

¹⁰¹ Stage directors can really get creative is how Old Scratch stumbles on-stage. Usually through a convenient fireplace, conveniently unlit. Although, we have seen our devil rise from a sheet-covered cadaver on an autopsy cart. Be surprised!

¹⁰² As cued to us by this Act I view of our heroine, Sis must be paid by the skein-piece rate for her spinning as that wheeled machine is at her side in almost every scene. However, it is missing in the final dungeon scene. That is probably for the best though. It would have been a bit awkward for her to try to cart the damned thing up them Golden Stairs. In truth though, the spinning wheel as her constant companion is because Sis is practicing for her understudy role in Leipzig High School’s annual production of *Rapunzel*.

¹⁰³ Unusually involves dashing behind a high-back medieval chair and tossing off a voluminous cloak that had been sheltering our scholar from head to toe; then reappearing as the yearning youngster.

Usually one tenor plays both the young and old Faust, Cheaper!

to drink, dance and debauch. (**A moi les plaisers / Then, pleasure will be mine.**)

CURTAIN

Act II.

Setting: The Municipal Square,¹⁰⁴ Leipzig.¹⁰⁵

Time: Later in the Act I Morning.

Via the orchestra, a jolly martial-like tune introduces the Act. As the curtain is raised, a Kermesse¹⁰⁶ is in progress with a large festive crowd filling the Square with movement and color. A group of soldiers shortly to leave for battle, and Wittenberg students are actively depleting the inventory of the Gasthaus. Among this alcoholic assemblage is

Some tenors are really quite skilled in vocally and physically delineating between the young and old Faust. Although, one memorable performance is recalled where the tenor confused the two. The Devil got no bargain in him!

¹⁰⁴ The usually scenic contents of the Square include: a Gasthaus with a very prominent sign of the wine god Bacchus; with a great deal of "curb appeal," Marguerite's humble home and walled garden; and, the neighborhood Cathedral.

¹⁰⁵ Interesting to note, for works of legend and fiction the Faust writing-fathers all appear to stick to a common geographic reality. Whatever the textual source, the locations are always: Wittenberg, Leipzig and the Harz Mountains. These are obviously all real places and they all are in sufficient geographic proximity to make physical movement among them logical and feasible, even if Devil-driven.

¹⁰⁶ A kermesse (kerme) was originally a Dutch term denoting a church (kerk) mass (mis) traditionally celebrated on the anniversary of the foundation of a church (or the parish) and in honor of the patron saint. By the time of the opera, it had broadened into the church celebration with a town-wide festival. Over time, the emphasis was placed more on the festival than the Mass. The kermesse associated with the Faust legends et. al. is by tradition, assumed to be on Easter Sunday.

Wagner¹⁰⁷ a friend of Faust. In the ensuing ensemble. (**Vin ou biere---** / **Wine or beer---**), Wagner plays the Harold Hill music man role for the soldiers and young men's chorus.

The ensemble is a dynamic exhibition of Gounod's skill especially with counterpoint. The composer fractionates the sections of the chorus into different groups of Leipzig Bürger. Each group has their own varying view of life and accompanying melody: basses (soldiers), first tenors (male shopkeepers), young girls (first sopranos), young students (second tenors) and matrons (second sopranos). Their happy, but diverse opinions and melodies rise to a grand climax.

The chorus is cued to be quiet and then, appearing from Miss Maggie's house is her battle-bound brother, Valentin. Among the festive folk, he is clearly not a happy camper, although he is carrying a protective religious medal just given to him by Sis.¹⁰⁸ (**O santé medaille./ Oh, holy medal.**)

His major worry however is not the coming blood-letting battle, but leaving Sis without an adequate on-site guardian. From among the town's randy rowdies, there is no shortage of volunteers, but our shy Sis-smitten student Siebel gets the brotherly nod. That task ticked off his "to-do" list, Valentin faces the fact of leaving home for the fighting front. His thoughts coalesce into one of the major musical triumphs of the opera. (**Avant de quitter ces lieux / Before I leave this town---** [a.k.a. Ev'n bravest heart may swell---]).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ In Goethe's Faust, Wagner plays a comparatively major role. However, Carre and Barbier made his operatic role quite short and implicitly, terminal,

¹⁰⁸ Watch that medall! It will come back to bite the siblings shortly.

¹⁰⁹ The popular English translation of the aria for reasons unknown, does not even remotely resemble the French text. That text is basically a prayer for the protection of Marguerite; the translation, more of a lachrymal reflection on the sorrow of leaving

That being sung, attention shifts back to the sousing soldiers and students. Wagner proposes and then initiates, a drinking song. (**Un rat plus poltroon que brave. / A rat, more cowardly than brave---**.) He is quickly interrupted by Old Scratch, who has just sidled on-stage. Scratch has a better song and launches into a pagan paeon. (**Le veau d'or---** / **The calf of gold---**.) The male rowdies missing the irreligious point of the aria join happily and heartily in the choral refrains.

Old Scratch now having everybody's attention, gratuitously offers some prognostications that are conversations-stoppers: Wagner will be killed in battle; any flowers Siebel gathers will wilt, no nosegay gifts for Marguerite; Valentin will be killed, not in battle but by an unnamed friend of Old Scratch. Well, all that puts a pall on the party.

To change the subject, Scratch complains about the Gasthaus provisioned wine. He offers his own brand that at his command gushes forth from the Bacchus sign. That gets everyone's attention, but the wine is definitely five star. So, what the hell! We will drink with the Devil.

Scratch proposes a toast to Miss Maggie with the nouveau vin. The battle-bound brother bristles. The sharp ends of swords are shown. Old Scratch draws a circle around himself. As Valentin thrusts his weapon towards in encircled Devil, the sword shatters.

Well, there is certainly a message in that mess! The Leipzig lads may have missed the message with the Golden Calf, but the shattered sword is certainly the work of Satan. These quick-thinking musketeer-types swiftly reverse their swords and surround Satan showing the cross-end

home. Go figure! However, the translation was popular in American and English Sunday afternoon parlor musicals.

haft of the weapons. Old Scratch cowers before the Christian cross-shape as the chorus begins to intone a powerful religious chorale.¹¹⁰ (**De l'enfer qui vient emousser. / We cannot repel the spells of hell.**) As the music swells, the soldiers and students continue to show their sword hafts as they slowly back off-stage away from the still cringing Scratch.

The newly retooled Faust now puts in an appearance complaining, "Where's the mirage maiden?" Somewhat soothed, Scratch counsels patience; she will shortly saunter by, so stand still!

As Faust impatiently fumes, with fiddlers in tow, the younger half of Leipzig rushes on ready to waltz.¹¹¹ (**Ainsi que la brise legere / Just as the light breeze---**)

The sequence beginning with the waltz and ending at the Act's curtain, illustrates a cinematic-like genius of Gounod.¹¹² The sequence moves back and forth between a "long-shot" of the waltzing and chorusing town folk to a "close-up" of the principals for a brief recitative exchange and then back to the all-encompassing, long-shot.

As the first portion of the waltz concludes, Siebel enters. He knows Miss Maggie comes this way back from church. The silent swain wants a look see at his fantasy sweetheart and if his shyness subdues, maybe a brief

¹¹⁰ Between the calf of Gold aria and the chorale, the dialogue is all musical recitative. Remember, the original spoken dialogue was replaced with traditional operatic recitative when **FAUST'S** continental tour was launched.

¹¹¹ As outlined in **Guide # 20, Die Fledermaus**, the waltz contrary to urban legend, did not appear from the brains and pens of the Family Strauss. It began as a middle European peasant-circling dance. In **FAUST**, Gounod uses the dance in that original peasant form and not its later ballroom gliding guise

¹¹² Almost two decades before the motion picture was loosed on an unsuspecting public.

exchange of sweet nothings. Old Scratch is ahead of him though and scares him off.

Miss Maggie finally enters modestly. Faust makes his move. (**Ne permettez-vous pas / Will you not allow me---**?). His offer to escort her home, is properly but coolly refused, much to the amazement and amusement of the observing stadt-volk.

Old Scratch sees he has much wooing education to do with his protégée. However, for the moment let's dance! Back to a wildly, waltzing long-shot!

Curtain

Act III.

Setting: Miss Maggie's Garden attached to her Humble Home. ¹¹³

Time: Evening, the same day as Acts I and II.

Prelude. The musical introduction is reminiscent of a light wind blowing through a grove of trees. The orchestra continues as the curtain is raised on Sis's garden. Siebel enters and in a quite lovely but excitable aria, asks the flowers to carry his message of love to Sis. (**Faites-lui mes aveux / Confess to her for me---**) He then begins to appropriate Sis's flowers for his gift bouquet to her!¹¹⁴ In any event, as predicted by Old Scratch, no sooner petals picked than petals perish. Siebel putting his college education to work, figures out a solution by dropping his hand

¹¹³ "Humble" you understand is a relative term in Opryland. Given the expanse of most opera stages, the heroine's home is usually on a scale with Versailles' Le Petit Trianon.

¹¹⁴ This kid's too cheap to get his own flowers from the Stadt Blumenhändler!

into a convenient container of holy water. Then to test, he picks another poesy. Voila, it survives!

As he moves excitedly to harvest in another part of the garden, the dynamic devilish duo enters. They watch Siebel as he returns with his purloined poesies, and place them on Sis's stoop. The boy then leaves hurriedly believing he is now on the road to romance.

Old Scratch, not to be cowed by some callow kid's calla lilles, heads out to collect on behalf of his client, a more delightful billet doux. Left alone, Faust begins to romanticize about Sis and her life style.¹¹⁵ **Salut! Demeure chaste et pure / Hail! Cottage chaste and pure---**).

Old Scratch returns with a casket and settles it on the stoop next to Siebel's token of tulips. Promising Faust the casket will trump the tulips, the duo disappear behind a convenient cover of corn flowers as Sis sweeps on for her big singing scene.

Gounod pampered his girl singer with not just one but two potentially show-stopping songs for this scene.¹¹⁶ It is only the sourest of sopranos that cannot coerce a crowd to crazily clap for at least one of these Gouno-esque gifts.

¹¹⁵ The aria has truly a head-shaking line, "What wealth in this very poverty. / Que de richesse en cette pauvreté.") Sounds like a poorly thought through political slogan!

¹¹⁶ Such a double gift of contiguous and potentially show-stopping arias, it not a usual operatic occurrence. The only one that comes readily to mind is Puccini's similar gift to Liu in the last act of *Turandot*. However, that only occurred because the maestro was trying to get back at his pathologically jealous wife. Will get that story out a little later on in the Opera Carolina season. So! Let's move on for now.

The first is sung while Sis spins that omnipresent spinning wheel.¹¹⁷ In fact, the aria's musical rhythm somewhat mimics the sound of the wheel. (**Il était un Roi de Thule / There was a King of Thule**). The song quite gently tells a tale from folklore about a king so in love with his dead wife that he had a golden cup created in her memory. He uses it constantly and his last earthly gesture is to drink from it when death comes to call. Interspersed with this bittersweet ballad though are Sis's asides concerning the handsome stranger from the Square.

As she finishes off the king and his cup, she notices the casket. Well, the Devil certainly knew what he was doing! The surprised Sis bedecks herself delightedly with the diamonds while admiring herself with a thoughtfully included mirror. (**Je ris de me voir / I laugh to see myself**).¹¹⁸ Her singing soars up to the stratosphere and similar spots. That nasal noise it appears, attracts the attention of her careless chaperon and nosey next-door neighbor Martha; that matron marches on from amid the marigolds. These delighted damen then both go quite ga-ga about the jewels with an applauding audience usually joining in the joy when the scale scaling is shortly thereafter, silenced.

As the two women finish their Tiffany-tinted tune. Old Scratch and Faust appear. Scratch introduced himself as the bearer of bad news. Martha's husband is dead! The matron greets the news with great equanimity. She appears more interested in the romantic potential of the messenger than the mournful message presented.

An Ensemble begins among the four principals. It is a long, musically complex but quite an enthralling piece. For their part, Martha and Scratch somewhat replicate a similar situation in *Don Giovanni*;

¹¹⁷ Why it was left sitting out in a damp garden is a good question, but not for now.

¹¹⁸ The aria is frequently referred to simply as The Jewel Song.

specifically wherein Leporello disguised as the Don, alternatively romances Donna Elvira and attempts to escape from her. The musical exchanges of the **FAUST** counterparts, more in recitative mode than Mozartian, reflect the cynical Devil's romantic ruminations as a device to distract Martha from interfering with the "love in bloom" moments of Sis and Faust. Martha for her part, is quite oblivious to the reality and hellbent (a pun, if you will!) on a romantic rendezvous with the dashing Devil. A lot of finding and losing each other in the darkened garden occurs during Scratch and Martha's share of the Ensemble. By its end though, Martha has been dispensed from both from the scene and, as it will turn out, almost all of the remaining opera.

The Devil is left in the scented shadows to direct unimpeded, Sis's swift decent into sin. He balefully summons his evil forces to corrupt innocence. (**O nuit, etends sur eux ton ombre! / Oh night, spread your dark veil over them**). "Her soul will be mine," he exults. He is counting his chicken before they hatch, as things turns out. However, we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Meanwhile, back in the sinfully scented garden, the young lovers-to-be mixing exquisite duet-ing with recitative, are melodically merging their emotions. Faust initiates a musically passionate albeit brief, love duet (**O nuit d'amour, ciel radieux! / Oh, night of love, radiant sky!**). At its climax Sis senses, this was the moment her now deceased Mother, warned her about. So she prudently tells her Faust-fella, to get lost, take a cold shower and come back tomorrow! She then dashes into her domicile.

Our Faust frustrated, flares at his fiendish friend's failure to follow through and facilitate a romantic finality. "Wait a minute," Satan subtly

suggests, “The fat lady ain’t yet sung!”¹¹⁹ No sooner said than sung. Sis is seen singing from her window, a German translation of “*Lover Come Back.*” Well, he does. Then they do, as the Devil delights and the damask drapery descends. **Curtain.**

Act IV, Scene 1.

Setting: Sis’s Spinning Solarium.

Time: About nine months after Act III.¹²⁰

Prelude. The music opening the scene is dolorous, to say the least. I’m sorry to report the melodic mood does not improve as the scene progresses.

As the action begins, Sis still spinning, buys into the sad orchestral theme with her ultimate “poor little me” aria. (***Je ne trouvais pas d’outrage assez fort--/ I never found words strong enough--***[a.k.a. *Spinning Wheel Song.*]) In it she lets us know, it is sport for the local ladies to sarcastically serenade their former “sisters” who have now fallen into sinful ways. Sis says she was formerly an enthusiastic member of that puerile pack. However, the shoe is now on the other foot. As if to second Sis’s “*a la recherche du temps perdu,*” the pack is heard palavering outside. Bummer!

To change the subject, Sis turns her tune towards her lover who seems to have left permanently; she sensibly concludes, “He ain’t comin’ back!” If truth be told, all this melodic exposition is very enervating. To the point, it is very long and depressing, even if you do not understand the language!

¹¹⁹ Remember, Old Scratch was speaking metaphorically, as most soprano’s seen singing Sis are svelte!

¹²⁰ Wink, wink! Nudge, nudge!

Operatic hope springs eternal though. To a rather bouncy beat, Siebel enters---, maybe things will lighten up? Wrong! He confesses he shares her emotional mood swings; happy when she is happy, sad when she is sad. (**Si le Bonheur a sourire t'invite--**. / If happiness invites you to smile--.) Since Sis is sad, we know what that means in terms of Siebel's singspiel. His aria is almost as long and lachrymose as her was tediously tearful. It proves too much, even for Sis. She certifies that although Siebel's succor is sweet, she needs to be off to offer pew-based prayers for her kid so-to-be. Oh!

Curtain.

Act IV, Scene 2.¹²¹

Setting: A Nurturing Niche in the Neighborhood Cathedral.

Time: A short walk after **Act IV, Scene 1**.

The scene is opened by a very somber orchestra. It is shortly joined by an organ in solo virtuoso performance. As it fades to the background Sis is seen at prayer. Almost immediately, Old Scratch chimes in forbidding prayer to the distraught penitent. (**Non! Tu ne prieras pas!** / No! You shall not pray!)

(**Souviens-toi du passé--**. / Remember the past--.) Old Scratch then reminds her with the assist of alternating demonic and churchly choirs, what it was like in her past sinless state. Well, those days are gone! She is now high on Hell's most wanted list. An unseen but saintly choir immediately follows his wrathful rant. It offers a more blessed message.

¹²¹ It should be noted that over the long haul, Gounod was more noted for his catalogue of church music than his operas. In this scene, we are given a small sampling of his skill with religious themes (pun!).

(Quand du Seigneur le jour luira--/ When the day of the Lord dawns--.)

Sis, against unseen choral attacks and the Old Scratch onslaughts, attempts to keep her cool and pray for forgiveness. No dice! The Devil has the last words: **(A toi Malheur! A toi l'enfer! / A curse on you! Hell awaits you!).**

The final devilish assault cum curse is too much. With a shriek, Sis collapses. The congregation now gathers round her, having become concerned with the unseeingly scene. The organ takes command musically and with all stops out, ends this set-to. **Curtain.**

Act IV, Scene 3.

Setting: Back in the Leipzig Municipal Square.

Time: The mid-day of St. Walpurgis Night, an indeterminate number of days or so, after Sis's Cathedral crisis.

This scene is Gounod's gift to the Palais Garnier grand opera thrill-seeking audience. Before the curtain rises, the orchestra intones the Soldiers Chorus. As the curtain rises, and with a blessing of a burgeoning budget, a stage band will appear picking up their Soldierly "ohm-pah" cues from the orchestra. The Square will fill with the citizenry, banners will wave, soldiers will march, women will faint, men will cry and kids will enlist as a full glory of vocal and visual opera¹²² unfolds. **(Glorie immortelle de nos aieux--/ Immortal Glory of all our archestors--.** [a.k.a. Glory and love to the men of old. or, The Soldiers' Chorus])

¹²² "Opera" literally means "the works." In this grandiose Faustian scene, the fortunate audience usually will be gifted with those "works."

As the Chorus ends with its ear-shattering climax, the orchestra continues the tune but at a rapidly decreasing volume. In the dispersing Valentin encounters Siebel. In the ensuing recitative, Siebel is understandably evasive about Sis's status.¹²³ Despite some vague reassurances, Valentin presages the worse and makes a break for the cozy cottage.

The square is left momentarily empty and then our dynamic duo drop in, bent of raising a bit of Hell-raising (not a pun). Old Scratch, carrying the medieval equivalent of a gee-tar, initiates an insulting serenade to Sis. (***Vous que faites l'endormie--*** . / You who pretend to sleep--.)

Well! As the ballad is concluded with mocking laughter, a not-amused and bristling Bro appears. (***Que voulez-vous, messieurs?*** / What do you wish, sirs?). In an ensemble among the on-stage trio, Valentin demands satisfaction! Faust reluctantly responds.¹²⁴

With devilish devices favoring Faust, it is “no contest.” Adding to Bro's bad odds is the fact that just before the first sword swishes, he curses and trashes the Sis medallion from Act II.¹²⁵ When the epee exchange ends badly for Bro, Old Scratch sourly sings, (***Voici notre heros etendu sur la sable*** / There lies our hero sprawled in the dust.) Bro is bleeding brusquel; shortly it will be “bye-bye baby Bro” time.

Before a mangling and mauling-bent, medieval mob can be mustered, Old Scratch shoos his soul-pledged pupil off to the Brocken. After all, it is Witches' Sabbath night!

¹²³ After all. Bro is armed, still in a fighting frame and noted for anger management problems .

¹²⁴ After all he's being challenged by his schatz's bruder and his to-be-kinder's oncle. That could start a really dysfunctional family situation.

¹²⁵ Remember?

Attracted by the set-to in the Square, Sis appears. Brother is not in a forgiving mood. He swears savagely at his sad sibling. (**Eccoute-moi bien, Marguerite! / Listen to me well, Marguerite!**)

In a majestic prayerful chorus, on-looking locals chime in to chide him for his careless cursing. (**O terreur! O blaspheme!**) Not a good attitude Bro when you are only moments away from the Pearly Gates and your Sis, momentarily expecting!¹²⁶

Valentin succumbs unrepentant, Sis collapses showing signs of a mental melt-down, while the orchestra concertedly (pun!) concludes the civil chaos by melodically reprising the choral prayer. (**Pardonnez si un jour vous voulez être pardonné!** Forgive, if you want one day to be forgiven!)

Curtain.

Act V, Scene 1.

Setting:¹²⁷ By tradition, the Wurmberg.¹²⁸

Time: St Walpurga's Feast-Day Night (flexibly, April 30 or May 1).¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Do not want to go too far into the obstetrical aspects of this situation. Some stage directors really put the whole thing in your face: Maggie is medieval maternity muslin or Maggie playing several of her last scenes with a babe in arms, etc. In any event, at Valentin's fatal finale, the girl either has or shortly will become an unmarried mama. Bro needs to be more supportive of Sis!

¹²⁷ Usually, a knock-off of Disney's *Night on Bald Mountain* sequence from *Fantasia*.

¹²⁸ The highest peak in the Harz Mountains' Borcken area of Germany's Lower Saxony.

¹²⁹ In real world truth, this event is really quite an ecumenical roll up of a Catholic Saint's Day, a pagan holiday of undetermined origin, the day the Vikings celebrated Spring and a Satanic free-for-all day. Your pick!

There is a sharp, short orchestral introduction. The curtain is raised on a covey of witches and the local neighborhood demons celebrating their Sabbath. (**Dans les bruyeres---** / Through the heather---.) The hoe-down is interrupted by racing, desperate music. Then, the dynamic duo drop in. Faust is not a happy camper at what he sees and what he thinks he might see.

To oblige his curiously craven companion, Old Scratch switches the scene.¹³⁰ Instead of the wild peak of a hostile mountain, we are in a glittering palace where a feast of antiquitarian¹³¹ queens and courtesans is on-going.¹³²

As the banquet progresses, the ladies of the evening¹³³ are introduced to Faust by Old Scratch and an obliging chorus. (**Que les coupes s'emplissent.** / Let the cups be filled.) As Faust is plied with magical wine, he too gets into the spirit of things! [Possibly, a pun.] (**Vains remords! Risible folie!** / Idle remorse! Preposterous madness!)

At some point in this orgiastic occasion, the ballet boogies on. It consists of seven sections, each one with a different contingent of dynamic

¹³⁰ Accompanying the transformation, there frequently is a lengthy orchestral interlude that is rather sinister, overall. As it approaches a climax, the music is transformed into a lyric processional and lady-like drinking-song!

¹³¹ Historically speaking. We are not counting tree rings here.

¹³² This type of operatic stage magic was the rage of the French Second Empire and the pride of the Palais Garnier. Remember, there was no modern technology to assist the transformation(s). Also, not only was there a lot of scenery going on and off-stage, but large numbers of supernumeraries. Where do you think the phrase "cast of thousands" came from?

¹³³ Some working the trade, some not.

danseurs and really built beauties. Included are Cleopatra, the Trojan women, Phryne,¹³⁴ Nubian slaves and so forth.

As the steamy situation becomes more seductive and with Scratch as the sommelier, Faust becomes super-soused. However, an image of Sis detained in Durance Vile, slides onto the scrim. Well, that sobers him up swiftly. Wow! She has a red line around her neck! Looks just like the souvenir of an executioner's axe.¹³⁵ Faust now frantic, demands the Devil deliver him to Durance Vile to succor Sis. Old Scratch complies.

Curtain.

Act V, Scene 2.

Setting: Leipzig's local Lock-up, the Women's Wing.

Time: Just before Dawn, post-Walpurgis Night.

The final scene is preceded by a rather lengthy **Prelude**. Musically, it models itself unhappily after an executioner's or possibly, funeral march. Whatever! That soon evolves into wistful simplicity but then, back to dolorous da-dums. Hold on though! The hasty horses tune from the previous scene canters on as the curtain goes up.

Sis is sleeping as the dynamic duo drops in. Old Scratch then tells our hell-bent hero that only a human hand can help our heroine hie hence from Durance Vile.¹³⁶ So, now off the hook, Scratch skedaddles.

¹³⁴ Today, remembered fondly as history's first sliding-scale courtesan.

¹³⁵ Don't want to get ghoulish about this. However, in the next scene we hear Sis is to be hung, not decapitated. So why the red line, you ask? Probably more scenically sensible than the remnant of a ratty rope.

¹³⁶ In this case, I guess the Devil is not in the details!

That set-up is a song cue and sure enough, Faust launches forth into a slow reflective aria. (**O source de regrets et d'éternels remords! / Oh, wellspring of regrets and eternal remorse!**)¹³⁷ In his morose musings, he quite thoughtfully and also musically, tells those of us in the audience--- who may not have read the book--- that Sis is now certainly certifiable. In her mental morass, she has killed their child.¹³⁸ The town took umbrage to that and now she is tumbrel-bound.

What with the citizens hammering together a scaffold and Faust's caring cacophony, the noise wakes Sis up. However, it seems she neither sees nor hears the Faust that is in her cell; rather, she images him visually and verbally from their "past." With the Kermesse waltz echoing in the orchestra, Sis vocally verbalizes their first meeting in the Square; then, on to the garden get-together.¹³⁹

Faust pleads with the unhearing girl to come with him and escape. (**Viens! Viens! / Come! Come!**). Still, she continues to moon over matters long gone. Old Scratch then enters announcing that time, it is a-wasting! Get the girl and let's go! (**Quittons ce lieu somber! / Let us leave this dark spot!**) With all that thundering forth, Sis suddenly sees and hears Satan. More to the point, she wants him driven from her cell and begins to pray for God's protection!

Another bias--- musically, now begins one of the loveliest and most effective ensemble trios in all Opryland. Regardless of what your spouses have been whispering in your ears--- let's go, I've an early morning meeting--- for the last two and one-half acts, you absolutely must hang in to hear these fantastic final moments.

¹³⁷ He is sort of a day late and a dollar short on the "regret" response scale!

¹³⁸ Memories of Medea?

¹³⁹ Musically, this sequence is a non-duet duet. Symbolically, the voices never meet.

Sis sings the opening lines as she prays for the protection of angels and her delivery to God. (**Anges purs, anges radieux---**, / Pure and radiant angels---.) Within the trio, Faust adds his voice pleading with the girl to escape with him! Old Scratch now highly excitable, sings that if we do not go now we will all be medieval road-kill! These mixed messages are repeated three times, each at a higher octave.

At the trio's shattering climax, Sis turns on Faust: (**Pourquoi ces mians rouges de sang? Ve! Tu me fais horreur!** / Why are those (Faust's) hands red with blood? Go away, you fill me with horror!). Her damning done, our much persecuted heroine "passes."

Old Scratch delightedly dashes for her body thinking her sinful soul is his, as well as the hunky hero's.¹⁴⁰ Wrong! A celestial choir thunders forth that salvation is Sis's! (**Sauvee!** / Saved!)

In a grand hymn of praise (**Christ est ressuscite!** / Christ is resurrected!), the choir continues to thunder forth majestically over the orchestra and now in addition, the organ. Sis rises to heaven! As for Faust and his fiend friend, **ils vont en enfer!**

Curtain! (Just in time for breakfast.)

¹⁴⁰ Two for the price of one!

Irreverent Guides Series

(Issues already released or scheduled to be shortly released,
onto a potential but skittish opera-going public.)

COMPOSER	OPERA	ISSUE	DATE
Bernstein*	Candide	#21	4.08
Bizet	Les Pêcheurs de Perles	# 7	10.05
Blitzstein***	Regina	#24	6.08
Britten*	Albert Herring	# 8	4.06
De Falla	La Vida Breve	# 13	1.07
Donizetti***	L'Elisir d'Amore	#22	6.08
Donizetti	Lucia di Lammermoor	# 2	5.04
Gilbert & Sullivan	The Pirates of Penzance	# 15	4.07
Gounod**	Faust	#25	9.08
Gounod**	Roméo et Juliette	#17	10.07
Leoncavallo	Pagliacci	# 12	1.07
Mozart**	Le Nozze di Figaro	#27	3.09
Mozart	Die Zauberflöte	# 6	5.05
Mozart**	Don Giovanni	#19	3.08
Offenbach*	Les Contes d' Hoffmann	# 16	4.07
Poulenc*	Dialogues des Carmélites	#28	4.09
Puccini	Madama Butterfly	# 11	7.06
Puccini	Tosca	# 5	3.05
Puccini**	Turandot	#29	4.09
Rossini**	Il Barbiere di Siviglia	#26	1.09
Rossini	La Cenerentola	# 10	3.06
Saint-Saëns	Samson et Dalila	# 4	2.05
Strauss**	Die Fledermaus	#20	4.07
Verdi**	Aida	#18	1.07
Verdi	La Traviata	# 9	1.06
Verdi	Macbeth	# 3	10.04
Verdi	Nabucco	# 1	10.03
Verdi	Rigoletto	# 14	3.07
Verdi***	Un Ballo in Maschera	#23	6.08

Developed to benefit: *Atlanta Opera Theater
 **Opera Carolina
 ***Des Moines Metro Opera.