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Mignon

Mignon's Song

Ambroise Thomas

Adapted and Edited with Instructions as to Interpretation
and Method of Study by

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Biographical Sketch, General Information and Glossary by
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MIGNON ROMANCE — "MIGNON'S SONG"

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH—AMBROISE THOMAS.

*Born at Metz, Alsace-Lorraine, August 5, 1811.
Died in Paris, France, February 12, 1896.*



AMBROISE THOMAS was the son of a musician. He showed talent for music at a very early age, it being said that he learned his notes with his alphabet. Entering the Paris Conservatoire at the age of seventeen, he carried off the first prize for pianoforte the following year, and in 1830 the first prize for harmony; but the crowning achievement of his precocious youth was his winning of the *Prix de Rome* in 1832. This entitled him to three years' study in Italy, where he divided his time among the principal Italian cities.

From 1837 to 1843 he composed nine works for the operatic stage, none of them being particularly successful. Discouraged by his failure to please the public taste, he wrote nothing for a period of five years. Then followed six more operas, equally unsuccessful. However, in 1866, when fifty-five years of age, he composed *Mignon*, which at once created a furore in Paris. This opera and *Hamlet*, produced two years later, established his reputation throughout the world. These operas compensated him for his many failures, even though it was only by perseverance and untiring energy that he eventually realized his ambitions.

He had been a teacher of harmony in the Conservatoire since 1852, and it was but natural that, with the death of the popular operatic composer Auber, in 1871, he should be appointed director of that institution, for not only had he attained fame as a composer, which entitled him to the honor, but he had, moreover, devoted nearly twenty years to the welfare of the Conservatoire. He was also successively appointed chevalier, officer, and finally commander of the Legion of Honor. This last distinction came in 1894, two years before his death.

GENERAL INFORMATION: The opera *Mignon* was produced November 17, 1866, at the Opéra Comique in Paris. Its success was instantaneous, it having kept its place in operatic repertoire ever since its first performance. *Hamlet*, produced two years later, was also very popular, but it has never attained the same universal recognition that has favored *Mignon*. The plot was taken from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, the text having been written by Barbier and Carré.

THE STORY: The scene of the first two acts is laid in Germany, while that of the third and last act is in Italy. *Mignon*, a child of noble family, has been stolen from her parents in her childhood by a band of gypsies. Her mother dies as a result of her unhappiness at the loss of her daughter, while her father, disguised as a wandering harper, roams for years in the search of Mignon. A troupe of actors is resting at a German country inn, among them the actors Felina and Laertes.

The gypsy band arrives and regales the dramatic company with dancing and song. Little Mignon is commanded to perform the egg dance, but weary with traveling, she refuses. The leader of the band, raging at such disobedience, rushes toward her when the old harper Lotario attempts to defend her; he in turn meets with abuse from Giarno, the gypsy, until Wilhelm Meister appears and rescues both Mignon and Lotario.

Taking pity upon the pretty child, Wilhelm Meister engages Mignon as his page. He imagines himself in love with the actress Felina, little realizing that he is adored by his newly appointed page. All arrive at the castle; Mignon, overcome by jealousy, attempts to drown herself in the neighboring lake, but hearing the tones of Lotario's harp, she hesitates, and finally hurries to him for advice, calling down vengeance upon all within the castle.

Ano. 445-3

The theatrical entertainment is finished, and the actors come out upon the terrace; Felina has forgotten the flowers which have been given to her and sends Mignon back for them. But Lotario secretly sets fire to the castle, hoping thus to aid Mignon. It is only through the bravery of Wilhelm Meister that she is saved from the flames.

The last act presents Lotario's home in Italy. Mignon is there; Wilhelm has followed her to that beautiful land, now understanding and returning her love. Through the aid of a long concealed casket and a prayer which she repeats, Lotario recognizes in her his long-sought daughter. Deliriously happy at his discovery, he bestows his blessing upon the union of Mignon and Wilhelm Meister.

The Romance from which this Adaptation is made is sung by Mignon after Wilhelm has freed her from the leader of the gypsy band. Wilhelm asks, "Were I to break these chains and set thee free, to what beloved spot wouldst thou take thy way?" She replies, "Dost thou know that fair land?" The original French text and a literal English translation follows:

Connais-tu le pays où fleurit l'oranger,
Le pays des fruits d'or et des roses vermeilles,
Où la brise est plus douce et l'oiseau léger,
Où dans toute saison butinent les abeilles,
Où rayonne et sourit, comme un bienfait de Dieu,
Un éternel printemps sous un ciel toujours bleu?

Hélas!—que ne puis-je te suivre
Vers ce rivage heureux d'où sort m'exila!
C'est là,—c'est là que je voudrais vivre,
Aimer, aimer et mourir!—
C'est là que je voudrais vivre, c'est là! oui c'est là!

Connais-tu la maison où l'on m'attend là-bas?
La salle aux l'ambris d'or où des hommes de marbre
M'appellent dans la nuit en me tendent les bras?
Et la cour où l'on danse à l'ombre d'un grand arbre,
Et le lac transparent, où glissent sur les eaux
Mille bateaux légers pareils a des oiseaux!

Hélas!—que ne puis-je te suivre
Vers ce pays lointain d'où le sort m'exila!
C'est là,—c'est là que je voudrais vivre,
Aimer, aimer et mourir!
C'est là que je voudrais vivre, c'est là, oui c'est là!

Dost thou know the land where the orange-tree blooms?
The country of golden fruit and of deep-red roses,
Where the breezes are most soft and the birds most gay,
Where the bees go pillaging all the seasons through,
Where the sun radiantly smiles like a blessing of God,
One eternal springtime under a sky forever blue?

Ah me!—Why may I not roam
To that happy shore from which fate has exiled me!
'Tis there,—'tis there that I would live, love and die!
'Tis there that I would live, 'tis there! Yes—'tis there!

Dost thou know the house, where one awaits me there?
The halls with golden ceilings, where the forms of marble
Call to me in the night, extending their arms to me,
And the court where one dances, in the shade of a great tree,
And the lake, transparent, where there glide upon the water
A thousand dainty boats,—like birds!

Ah me!—Why may I not roam
To that distant land from which fate has exiled me!
'Tis there—'tis there that I would live, love and die!
'Tis there that I would live! Yes—'tis there!

LESSON: The student, in playing measures 3-18 inclusive, should observe that the single notes and chords, which serve as harmony in the lower voice (or voices) of the treble, always remain subdued; the ear must be trained to very careful listening in order to discover any excess of tone volume in these accompanying voices. Notice that the repetition of the first phrase is marked "pp" (see m. 11). The beautiful change from D major (m. 15) to C sharp major (m. 16) is worthy of remark. In measures 19 and 20 the voice sings the repeated E's, given by the thumb of the left hand, and the words here are, "where the sun radiantly smiles like a blessing of God;" this will suggest to the student the quiet, lovely mood of these measures.

After the hold in m. 24 the key changes from A major to A minor, thus reflecting the sadness of the sentiment here:

"Ah me!—Why may I not roam
To that happy shore from which fate has exiled me!"

The ominous E flat in the left hand of m. 27 occurs in the original under the French word "sort," or "fate." In a song of this character the short notes must never be shortened; if anything, they may be slightly lengthened, as there must be a feeling of peace throughout. The exquisite phrase, which enters at the end of m. 29, introduces the text, "'Tis there, 'tis there that I would live, love and die." The student will observe how beautifully the composer has expressed this yearning of the homeless Mignon. In m. 35 notice the poignancy of the accented C. The voice part of the original actually ends with m. 37, after which comes the single phrase with the beautiful close in measures 40-41, played by the orchestra.

NOTE TO THE TEACHER—The aim of the editors is to have every department of their work as perfect and complete as possible, and they have been governed by this principle in making the annotations to the Educational Adaptations. Although nothing superfluous has been included, the teacher must use discretion as to the amount of text material that the student is capable of assimilating at the time.

GLOSSARY.

NAMES

Ambroise Thomas,	pronounced,	Ām-brwās Tō-mā.
Mignon,	"	Mēe-nyōn (nasalized).
Conservatoire,	"	Cōn-sēr-vā-twār.
Auber,	"	Ō-bēr.
Opéra Comique,	"	Ō-pē-rū Cō-mēek.

TERMS

andante,	pronounced,	ān-dān-tě, - in moderate time, moving quietly.
dolce,	"	dōl-tshě, - softly, sweetly.
sempre,	"	sēm-prě, - always.
marcato,	"	mār-cā-tō, - marked.
rall. (rallentando).	"	rāl-lěn-tān-dō, - slackening the time.
rit. (ritenuto),	"	rē-tě-noo-tō, - detained, slower.
a tempo,	"	āh tēm-pō, - in time.
Prix de Rome,	"	prēe dē Rōme, - prize of Rome, a prize awarded by a national conservatory to the composer of the best musical work of the year.

EDUCATIONAL ADAPTATIONS

Opera Series

Mignon

(Romance-Mignon's Song)

Adapted and edited by Leopold Godowsky.

AMBROISE THOMAS

Andante. ♩ = 52-63

The musical score consists of four systems of piano accompaniment. Each system contains two staves (treble and bass clef) and is numbered 1 through 16. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Andante' with a metronome marking of ♩ = 52-63. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and fingerings. Dynamic markings include 'p' (piano) and 'dolce' (softly). The piece concludes with a final cadence in measure 16.

17 18 19 *pp* *sempre dolce marcato*

20 21 22

23 24 *p*

25 26

Mignon, 2.

