

MUSIC IN THE PLAYS, AND THE PLAYS IN MUSIC



Emma James as Desdemona
PHOTO © BY AIME DUPONT



Antonio Scotti as Iago
PHOTO © BY MISHKIN



Emma Calvé as Ophelia
PHOTO © BY AIME DUPONT

The Place It Held in His Mind and the Place He Has Filled in Its History

Written for THE NEW YORK TIMES
By Richard Aldrich

SHAKESPEARE lived at a period when England was one of the most musical nations of Europe. Not only did the England of that period produce composers ranked among the greatest, but the love and knowledge of music—a practical and often advanced technical knowledge—was widely spread among people of all classes, high and low. Every person claiming any title to education or social prominence was expected to be able to take his part in extemporaneous part singing; he was also expected to be able to play at sight, and even to improvise according to the rules of counterpoint, in performances on stringed instruments.

Women of the upper classes were generally expert practitioners upon the virginals, a smaller-sized harpsichord; the spinet and harpsichord were no strangers in most houses. Pepys's diary gives an illustration of how much a gentleman of a generation or two later than Shakespeare's time concerned himself with music. Pepys was, as he calls himself, a "lover of Musique"; but he was hardly an exceptional case—he was far less an exceptional case than such a man would be in England or America today.

This universal knowledge and love of music among the people of England—that is, among the audiences who listened to Shakespeare's plays when he produced them—are reflected in the plays themselves. There are few of them that do not contain some reference, often many and copious references, to music; some figurative mention of music; frequent punning allusions to musical terms. Many of such passages are so elaborated and have more than passing significance in the play. Thus, the passage about the "recorders" in which Hamlet turns upon Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; the punning contrast in "The Taming of the Shrew," Act II, between Hortensio and Baptista; Lorenzo's exquisite passages in "The Merchant of Venice," including the allusion to the Pythagorean "music of the spheres"; and numerous others of a similar sort will occur to most lovers of Shakespeare. It is hardly possible to read through any of the plays, especially the comedies, without coming on such.

These facts suggest two things. One is that the incessant allusions to music and puns involving technical terms, which have to be explained in the notes for modern readers, must have been perfectly clear and intelligible to the contemporary audiences. The other is that Shakespeare's musical allusions show the same range of knowledge and accuracy as has been noticed in regard to so many other technical subjects in other branches of art and science. Some of his puns may be far-fetched; discouraging, considered merely as puns. But they never show a faulty technical knowledge. Music had a place and an important one, in the "myriad mind" of Shakespeare.

Among the musical allusions in Shakespeare are naturally not a few to contemporary songs. Mistress Ford, in the "Merry Wives of Windsor," observes that Falstaff's disposition and the truth of his words "do no more adhere and keep pace than the Hundredth Psalm to the tune of 'Green Sleeves.'" Later in the same play Falstaff calls upon the sky to "thunder to the tune of 'Green Sleeves.'" The tune meant is "A new courtly sonnet of the Lady Green Sleeves," a song of Henry VIII's reign, immensely popular then and later. In "Much Ado About Nothing" Beatrice says that she "may sit in a corner and cry 'Heigh ho for a Husband!'; and there is another mirthful reference in the play to this old tune. "Heart's Ease" is urgently called for by the musicians in the fourth act of "Romeo and Juliet" by Peter; another old tune that goes back at least to the middle of the sixteenth century. Twice the tune of "Whoop, do me no harm," is mentioned in "A Winter's Tale," "Malvolio's a 'Peg-a-Ramsey' and 'Three Merry Men Be We,' says Sir Toby Belch in "Twelfth Night," referring to two well-known old songs. In "Much Ado About Nothing" Margaret proposes to Beatrice to "clap us into 'Light o' Love'; that goes without a burden—chorus or refrain—do you sing it

and I'll dance to it." Unfortunately, she did not sing it; and the original words of the song, partly as a consequence of her neglect, are now unknown.

Many other songs are mentioned and quoted in the plays. The inference is obvious that they were all familiar to the audiences, and that Shakespeare's references to them were found apt and suggestive.

Shakespeare calls for songs to be sung in the course of many of his plays. They are too frequent and many of them are too well known to need more than instancing; such as the "Willow" song in "Othello," "O Mistress Mine" in "Twelfth Night," "It Was a Lover and His Lass" in "As You Like It," "Where the Bee Sucks" in "The Tempest." There are many more. It is likely that Shakespeare wrote many of these verses to tunes already in existence and popular at the time; but the investigators have not arrived at certainty on this point.

Unfortunately there are only six songs of which we can be at all sure that we possess the music exactly as it was sung in the plays in Shakespeare's time. The Globe Theatre was burned in 1613, and with it were lost most of the performing manuscripts, including the music of the songs. Only one of his class of songs was by a composer whose fame has endured. That is Thomas Morley, distinguished as a writer of madrigals, who is the author of the music of "It Was a Lover and His Lass" in "As You Like It," appearing in the first book of his "Ayres or Little Short Songs," published in 1600. Robert Johnson, a composer and lute player of the early seventeenth century, wrote music for "Where the Bee Sucks" and "Full Fathom Five" in "The Tempest," probably for performance in the play in Shakespeare's lifetime. The other four that are supposed to be contemporaneous and to have been sung as we now possess them are the "Willow" song in "Othello," "O Mistress Mine" in "Twelfth Night," both by unknown composers; "Lawn as White as Driven Snow" from "The Winter's Tale," and "Take O Take, Those Lips Away," from "Measure for Measure," these two being variously attributed to both John Wilson and Robert Johnson.

Musical settings of the songs in the plays are simply legion in later years, and the list of them grows with every year that passes. Shakespeare's songs have been always a strong temptation to composers and began to be, of course, as soon as they were known. Naturally English composers turned to them first. Henry Purcell, besides his complete opera based on Shakespeare, "The Fairy Queen," adapted from "A Midsummer Night's Dream," composed much incidental music for the plays, as for "Macbeth" and for Shadwell's versions of "Twelfth Night," "Timon of Athens" and "The Tempest." From the latter we possess the familiar songs, "Come Unto These Yellow Sands," "Full Fathom Five," and, for chorus, "Hark, Hark, the Watch Dogs Bark." John Banister and Pelham Humfrey found inspiration in Shakespeare even earlier.

To enumerate even the most notable composers and the favorite settings of Shakespearean songs from that time to this would be to set up a catalogue. Dr. Thomas Augustine Arne, composer of "Rule Britannia," among other things, wrote many, some of which are still sung. Sir Henry R. Bishop, most famous, perhaps, as the composer of the melody of "Home, Sweet Home," was remarkably industrious in writing music for the plays. Sir Arthur Sullivan provided music for "The Tempest," "The Merchant of Venice," the "Merry Wives of Windsor," "Henry VIII," "Macbeth," Mendelssohn's music for "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is, of course, better known than any other incidental music for Shakespeare. Sir Hubert Parry and Sir Charles Stanford have in recent years added to the list of Shakespeare songs.

A few of the most beautiful and most famous Shakespeare songs have come to us from Germany. Haydn, whose visits to England brought English verses to his attention, set music for "She Never Told Her Love," which is not among the better known of his English songs. It need hardly be said that two of the most perfect of Shakespeare settings are Schubert's. Best known is probably "Hark, Hark the Lark," that "wonderful sweet air with admirable rich words to it"; that "very excellent, good-conceited thing," as Cloten calls it, when he persuades Imogen to sing it. Unforgettable, too, is the story of its origin, as told by Schubert's friend

Giulia Grisi as Desdemona (FROM THE WENDELL COLLECTION)

Doppler, and thus presented by Sir George Grove:

"Returning from a Sunday stroll with some friends through the village of Wilhring, he saw a friend sitting at a table in the beer garden of one of the taverns. The friend, when they joined him, had a volume of Shakespeare on the table. Schubert seized it and began to read; but before he had turned over many pages pointed to 'Hark, Hark the Lark,' and exclaimed: 'Such a lovely melody has come into my head, if I had but some music paper!' Some one drew a few staves on the back of a bill of fare, and there, amid the hubbub of the beer garden, that beautiful song, so perfectly fitting the words, so skillful and happy in the accompaniment, came into perfect existence."

Hardly less popular and widely beloved than the "Serenade" is "Who is Sylvia?" from "The Two Gentlemen of Verona." The third of Schubert's Shakespearean settings, the drinking song, "Come, Thou Monarch of the Vine," from "Antony and Cleopatra," is much inferior to its companions, and is correspondingly little known.

It is natural that the operatic librettists, an insatiable tribe, rummaging through all the world's literature for their material, should repeatedly have laid violent hands upon the plays. These have served as a basis for more operas than the works of all the other great poets put together. Shakespeare, however, has had his revenge of almost all of the librettists and composers. The quality and substance of the plays have shown themselves to be something that has rarely failed to plant the seeds of more or less speedy death in any perversion of them. Not till the true spirit of the lyric drama came to the consciousness of both composer and librettist was it possible to make a Shakespearean opera that had the breath of life in it and that was in any essential other than an indignity to a masterpiece.

This achievement was made by an Italian, with the invaluable and indispensable aid of another Italian, both of whom assimilated the spirit and meaning of Shakespeare as no other dramatic composer and librettist before them had ever done. They were Giuseppe Verdi and Arrigo Boito; and their joint works, "Otello" and "Falstaff," are today the only Shakespearean operas that really represent in the lyric drama the full significance of their great prototypes.

It is not from want of trying that innumerable masterpieces in Shakespearean operas have not been composed. The first of a great number appears to have been Henry Purcell's "Fairy Queen," based on "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The libretto was adapted by an anonymous writer, and the opera was first played in 1692. One peculiarity of the libretto is that not a single line as Shakespeare wrote it appears with Purcell's music. The score was lost in 1700, and a reward was offered for it in that year. By an extraordinary turn of events, it was found in the library of the Royal Academy of Music in London in 1901, and it has since been published.

Perhaps the first of a long and venturesome line of musicians outside of England to evolve a real opera from a play of Shakespeare's was Francesco Gasparini, who composed an opera, "Amleto," which owes its origin to "Hamlet." It was first heard in 1705 in Italy and was one of the pieces produced in London by Handel in the course of his disastrous experiences there as an operatic manager. Another "Amleto"—so spelled this time, and one of a number from Italy in the early eighteenth century—was by Domenico Scarlatti. It was first given in Rome in 1715; and though its composer is known to all musical amateurs as the composer of harpsichord music that still lives and is enjoyed, "Amleto" has long since gone to the limbo that was awaiting other operatic "Amlets."

Max Maretzek, still remembered in New York as an operatic manager in the freebooting days of Italian opera, composed a



Leo Slezak as Otello, Frances Alda as Desdemona as Otello
PHOTO BY WHITE

"Hamlet" that was once performed in Germany. The one "Hamlet" that is still known is that of Ambroise Thomas, a French "Hamlet," whose libretto by Barbier and Carré, responsible for many things of the kind, is a shocking and foolish perversion of the great tragedy. It has been heard in New York as lately as 1912, but because any one wanted to hear it, and because Titia Ruffo wanted to sing it, and "baritone's operas" are not abundant. It is a soprano's opera, too, and Emma Calvé, in a still memorable way, found in it a congenial opportunity, as did earlier Christine Nilsson and other great sopranos.

Better known to opera-goers of the present day, and somewhat less injurious to the source from which it is derived, is Gounod's "Roméo et Juliette," the libretto of which was written by the same ruthless pair of collaborators, Barbier and Carré. This is not yet ancient history, though it has not been in the list of the Metropolitan Opera House for some four years; but the glory that was shed upon it in the days of Jean and Edouard de Reszke, of Mme. Malba, of Mme. Eames, not to go back further, does not seem likely to be restored.

More than almost any other play of Shakespeare "Romeo and Juliet" offers operatic material appetizing to the composer and librettists; and they have not neglected it. The last "Romeo and Juliet" that preceded Gounod's was "I Capuletti ed i Montecchi" of Bellini, first disclosed in

1850. It soon gained great popularity, owing partly to the singing in it of Giuditta Pasta, for whom, though a soprano, it was curiously enough as it seems in these days, the part of Romeo was written, and of Grisi as Julietta and Rubini as Tebaldo, a character considerably more prominent in the opera than in the play. In that historic and momentous operatic season of 1826, when Manuel del Popolo Garcia brought his family to New York, and with them Italian opera for the first time in the New World, he produced among many other things, a "Romeo e Giulietta" by Bellini's master, Niccolò Zingarelli, one of whose titles to fame is that he was the favorite composer of Napoleon. The libretto of this opera, in accordance with a custom not then entirely obsolete, Bellini afterward made use of, unchanged, for his.

Richard Wagner wrote a Shakespearean opera, though the world has not been allowed to become acquainted with it since its single performance. This opera, "Das Liebesverbot," was a version of "Measure for Measure," freely treated. As in all his other lyric dramas, he himself wrote the libretto. The opera was finished in 1836, when he was 23 years old and was musical director of a theatre at Magdeburg. There was one disastrous performance there, and then the opera was shelved. He himself in later years spoke of its weakness; of the "reflex of modern French"—that is, the modern French of 1836—and, as concerns the melody, of

Italian opera, upon my violently excited senses." Of the score only one or two short extracts, and of the libretto nothing, have been published, although most of the scraps, even of his other early efforts, have been religiously put into print. Wagner called "Das Liebesverbot" a "youthful indiscretion." Apparently it was so indiscreet that it cannot be allowed out of the "archives of Wahnfried."

"Macbeth" has attracted many ambitious composers; but not one has been able to make for it a musical setting that has been kept alive. The most significant is Verdi's, which he wrote in 1847 to a libretto by Francesco Piave, who purveyed librettos for a number of his operas, including "Rigoletto" and "La Traviata." Verdi rewrote the opera for performance in Paris in 1865. It had not been very successful before, and was not successful then in its new form.

Among other attempts at a "Macbeth" that of the French composer Chérard in 1827 is notable only because the libretto was written by Rouget de l'Isle, who gained immortality as the author of "La Marseillaise."

Verdi's "Otello" seems to have had only one predecessor, also emanating from Italy and enjoying a large measure of favor in its day. That was Rossini's. It was first produced in Naples in 1816, less than a year after "Il Barbiere di Siviglia." The principal soprano part was written for Mme. Colbran, whom he afterward married. The opera became greatly popular and seemed destined at one time to outlive "The Barber," which has just celebrated its hundredth birthday. It was considered to have "very dramatic music"; some compared it favorably, in part at least, with "Don Giovanni" and "Fidelio," but it differed—how much operas are apt to differ!—from Shakespeare. Iago was a quite subordinate character and Roderigo a prominent one. The instrumentation was thought to be shockingly noisy; and the easygoing dramatic standards of its time are illustrated by the anecdote of a listener whom the denouement of the opera caused to cry out in excitement, "Good God! the tenor is murdering the soprano!"

The "Merry Wives of Windsor" has appealed strongly to constructors of operas in the comic vein, many of whom have attempted it. The liveliest of all of "Falstaff's" predecessors is Otto Nicolai's the "Merry Wives of Windsor," which can almost lay claim to the title of a real Shakespearean opera. It is not unknown in New York in recent years.

We are to have this season at the Metropolitan, if promises are kept, an opera based on "The Taming of the Shrew"; Hermann Goetz's "Der Wilderjäger Zühmung," which has also been heard in New York already. The title of another one is preserved, "La Capricciosa Corotina," composed in 1785 by one Martin y Soler, once considered a rival of Mozart, of which the chief point of interest is that the libretto was by Lorenzo da Ponte, who tasted of immortality through the three librettos he wrote for Mozart, and who lived his last years, died, and was buried in New York.

A certain interest attaches to Hector Berlioz's one Shakespearean opera, "Beatrice et Bénédict." It is, of course, based on "Much Ado About Nothing." Berlioz was one of the few Frenchmen of his time who really understood and admired Shakespeare. Shakespeare was, indeed, one of his passions; and to be one of Berlioz's passions meant something. He himself arranged the libretto. It must be said, however, that notwithstanding his reverence for Shakespeare, he departed widely from his play. He reduced all the subordinate characters to mere "feeders" for the two principals, and introduced a new one, intended to burlesque his redoubtable enemy, Fétis. But the opera has made very little stir upon the musical waters, even in the great patriotic Berlioz cult that has arisen in France since 1871. Sir Charles V. Stanford has added to the Shakespeare operas a "Much Ado About Nothing" that was produced at Covent Garden, in London, some years ago, and has left no sign. At least twenty "Tempest" operas, all forgotten, might be enumerated.

The orchestral works, overtures, tone poems, and other symphonic illustrations of Shakespeare that have had a more or less prominent place in modern music are many. Some of the most famous may be named, as "Fischow's" "Romeo and Juliet" and "Hamlet" overtures, also incidental music to "Hamlet"; his "Tempest" fantasia; Berlioz's "King Lear" overture and his elaborate "Romeo and Juliet" symphony, with solos and choruses; Liszt's symphonic poem "Hamlet," Dvorak's "Othello" overture, Elgar's "Falstaff," Joachim's "Hamlet" overture, MacDowell's "Hamlet" and "Ophelia" symphonic poems, David Stanley Smith's "Prince Hal" that has been played here this winter; John K. Paine's "As You Like It" overture and his symphonic poem on "The Tempest," Richard Strauss's symphonic poem on "Macbeth," Felix Weingartner's on "King Lear," and Coleridge-Taylor's on "Othello." Among the curiosities, scarcely more, may be mentioned the fact that "William Shakespeare" wrote an orchestral overture called "After Seeing Rossi's Play 'Hamlet.'" William Shakespeare is a well-known teacher of singing in London.