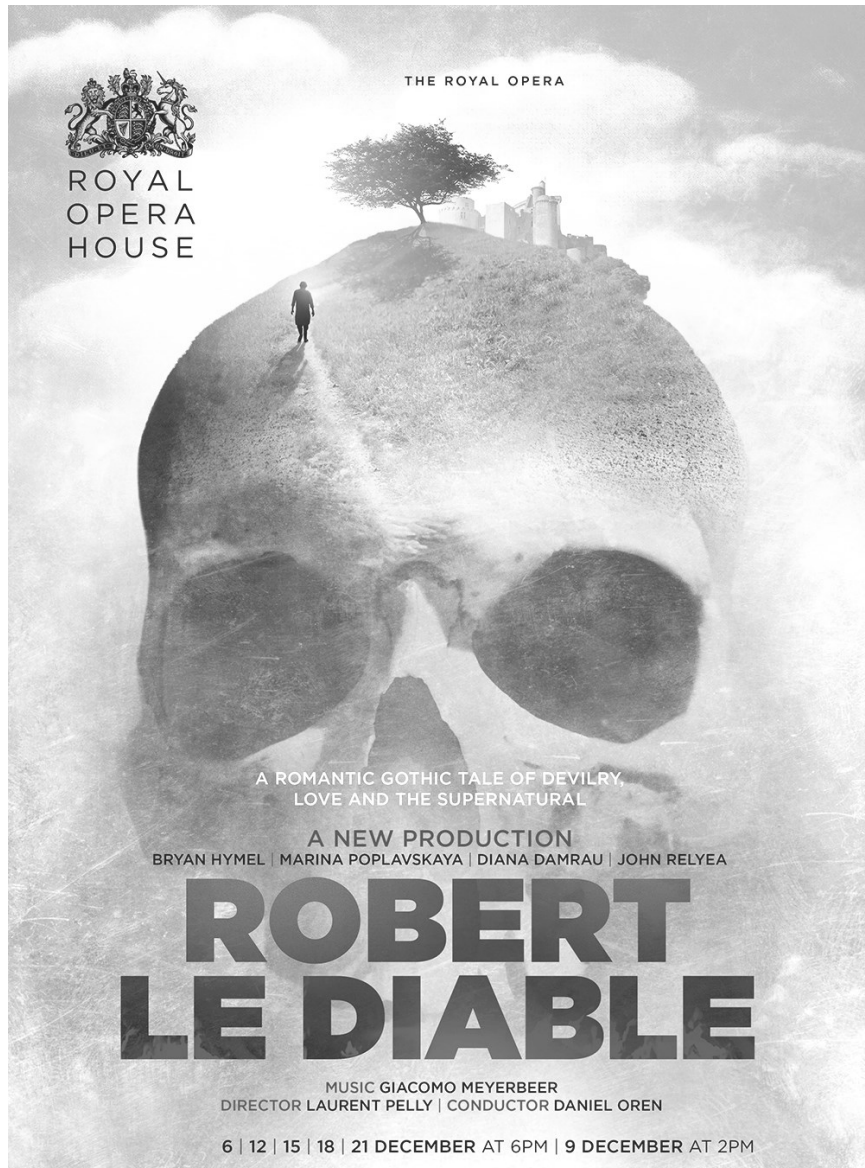


# PROBLEM OPERAS SOLVED



## 7. THEATRICAL THRILLS

31 October, 2023

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GIACOMO MEYERBEER (1791–1864) was born and trained in Germany, gained practical experience of opera in Italy, and then moved to Paris where, in 1831, he premiered *Robert le diable*, a triumphant success that established him as the premier composer of *grand opéra*—a new genre uniting Italian vocalism and German orchestration to the French appetite for spectacle, theatrical effect, and sumptuous use of the chorus and ballet.

French, Italian, and even German opera composers vied to follow in Meyerbeer's footsteps for most of the 19th century, but while many of their operas remained in the repertoire, his didn't; they were too cumbersome, too expensive, and no longer appealed to popular taste. Recently, however, they have been making a comeback, not least in the hands of directors like **Laurent Pelly**, who realize that Meyerbeer's particular secret was knowing how to give audiences a good time! *rb.*

**Meyerbeer: *Robert le diable*.** Royal Opera House 2012 (DVD).

Patrizia Ciofi (Isabelle), Marina Poplavskaya (Alice), Bryan Hymel (Robert), Jean-François Borras (Raimbaut), John Relyea (Bertram); Daniel Oren (c), Laurent Pelly (dir), Chantal Thomas (des)

### ACT ONE

**Robert** is in Sicily, hoping to win the hand of Princess Isabelle in next day's tournament. He and his companion **Bertram** (whom he does not yet know is his own father, and in league with the Devil) are drinking incognito in a tavern with other knights.

#### Opening chorus

When **Raimbaut**, a minstrel from his own country, Normandy, tells a scurrilous story about Robert's birth, he reveals himself and threatens

to have the man killed, until he learns that he is engaged to his own foster-sister **Alice**, who now enters and tells him of his mother's death.

**Opening scene, continued (Raimbaut, Robert, chorus)**

**Romance (Alice)**

[*Alice agrees to take a letter to Isabelle. Meanwhile, Bertram, who does not want Robert to succeed with the princess,*] encourages him to gamble, [*knowing that he will lose his money, horse, and sword.*]

**Sicilienne (Robert, chorus)**

## ACT TWO

[*Isabelle, who loves Robert, is disappointed not to have heard from him, but cheers up when Alice brings his letter.*] Robert declares his love, but confesses that he has lost his horse and weapons. Isabelle gladly provides substitutes.

**Duet (Isabelle, Robert)**

[*Bertram brings a purported challenge from the Prince of Grenada, Robert's chief rival for Isabelle, to a duel outside town. So Robert goes off...*] and is not present for the tournament, over which Isabelle presides, although mystified by her lover's non-appearance.

**Act II finale**

## ACT THREE

[*Raimbaut comes to a rocky gorge to meet Alice, but Bertram intercept him and bribes him with money to give her up.*] He then goes into a cave for an audience with the Devil, who orders him to recruit Robert to his service by midnight, or be dragged down to the flames of Hell. [*Alice enters, looking in vain for Rimbaut.*] On emerging from the cave, Bertram realizes that she has overheard, so threatens her to silence.

**Valse infernale (Bertram, chorus)**

**Duet (Bertram, Alice)**

[*So Alice does not warn Robert, who now enters, but leaves him prey to Bertram, who tells him that he can still win Isabelle if he takes a magic*

*branch from the tomb of Saint Rosalia in a nearby deserted cloister.*] Heedless of the sacrilege, Robert eagerly agrees.

**Duet (Bertram, Robert)**

The scene now changes to the cloister, where the ghosts of nuns who have broken their vows emerge from their tombs. Bertram charges them to seduce Robert.

**Invocation and Bacchanale (Robert, Nuns)**

[*Robert, however, succeeds in stealing the magic branch. In Act Four (not played), Robert uses the branch to delay Isabelle's marriage to the Prince of Grenada. Then, horrified at what he has done, he confesses that he had been using magic, and is imprisoned.*]

## ACT FIVE

[*Bertram has freed Robert from the guards and the two come to the cathedral in an attempt to stop Isabelle's marriage. He tries to get Robert to sign a document in which he promises to serve Bertram for all eternity. When he learns that Bertram is his true father, Robert decides to sign the oath from filial devotion. But before he can do so, Alice appears with news that the Prince has been prevented from marrying Isabelle.*] Alice prays for divine help, and hands Robert his mother's will. Robert reads his mother's message, in which she warns him to beware the man who seduced and ruined her. Though Robert is still wracked by indecision, midnight strikes and the time for Bertram's coup is past. He is drawn down to hell.

**Trio (Alice, Robert, Bertram)**

[*Robert is reunited with Isabelle in the cathedral, as Alice is with Raimbaut, to general rejoicing.*]

For materials used in each class, see the instructor's website:

<http://www.brunyate.com/problem-operas/>

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