

THE CUNNING LITTLE VIXEN

Music by Leos Janáček

Libretto by the composer, after the novel *Liska Bystrouska* by Rudolf Tesnohlídek

Premiere: National Theatre, Brno, November 6, 1924

Characters

Bartos, the Forester (baritone)

Cricket (child soprano)

Grasshopper (child soprano)

Mosquito (tenor)

Green Frog (child soprano)

Baby Sharp-Ears (child soprano)

Mrs. Bartos (contralto)

Sharp-Ears, the Vixen (soprano)

Catcher, the Dog (mezzo-soprano)

Joey, Bartos' Grandson (child soprano)

Frank, Joey's Friend (child soprano)

Rooster (soprano)

Chocholka, the Hen (soprano)

Badger (bass)

Father Alois, the Priest (bass)

Schoolmaster (tenor)

Mr. Pásek, the Innkeeper (tenor)

Golden-Stripe, the Fox (soprano)

Owl (contralto)

Jay (soprano)

Woodpecker (contralto)

Hypolit Harasta, the Poultry Merchant (bass)

Mrs. Pásek, the Innkeeper's Wife (soprano)

Chorus of animals and villagers.

Offstage chorus

Act I

Deep in the forest on a hot summer afternoon, animals and insects are busy at play. The Forester strolls by and pauses to take a nap. After awakening, he captures a baby vixen, Sharp-Ears, and takes her home as a pet.

It is autumn in the farmyard. The Forester's grandson teases the now-grown vixen, and she bites him. The Forester ties her to the doghouse. In her dreams her spirit soars to freedom. At dawn Sharp-Ears reproaches the Hens for being exploited by the Rooster. She feigns suicide as a feminist protest, but when the Chickens come close, she breaks free, kills them and escapes to the forest.

Act II

Sharp-Ears denounces a Badger for living in a house "big enough for three," calling him a capitalist. When he moves out, she moves in.

At Pásek's tavern, the Schoolmaster, the Priest, and the Forester are drinking and playing cards. The Schoolmaster wants to marry; the Priest warns him against it. The Forester tells him he is too

old for women. The Schoolmaster taunts the Forester about his lost vixen, and the Forester leaves angrily.

Staggering home in the moonlight, the drunken Schoolmaster mistakes a sunflower for Terynka, his beloved. The Priest, wandering down another path, recollects his youth, when his sweetheart falsely accused him of fathering her child. The Forester sees Sharp-Ears and fires a shot at her. In another part of the forest, Sharp-Ears meets Golden-Stripe, a handsome fox. They talk, share a meal of rabbit, kiss, and disappear to make love. The Woodpecker marries them, and the entire forest bursts into song.

Act III

It is a winter afternoon in the forest. Harasta, the poultry merchant, tells the Forester he is marrying Terynka. The Forester baits a trap for Sharp-Ears with a dead rabbit. She appears with Golden-Stripe and her family of little foxes. Hara ta shoots her to make a fox-fur muff for Terynka. At the tavern, the Schoolmaster is broken-hearted at losing Terynka. The Priest, says Mrs. Pásek, is unhappy in his new parish, and the Forester bemoans growing old. "Time has worn us down." he sighs.

On a spring afternoon, the Forester recalls his youth and sings a paeon of praise to the forest. He falls asleep. He sees a Baby Sharp-Ears: "Just like her mother!" he exclaims, in awe of the rebirth of nature. As he stands, he lets his gun fall, and a Green Frog croaks, "My granddaddy used to tell me about you."