

## **HENRY VIII**

Music by Camille Saint-Saëns

Libretto by Léonice Détroyat & Paul Silvestre

First Performance: Paris, Opéra, March 5, 1883

The first act shows a hall in Westminster. The Spanish ambassador, Gomez, acknowledges to the Duke of Norfolk that he is insanely enamored of Anne Boleyn, a fact of which Queen Catherine is aware. He adds that he has in his possession a letter from Anne wherein she confesses her love for him. Norfolk tells him to beware, for King Henry himself is smitten with the charms of the fair Anne. News comes that King Henry has condemned the Duke of Buckingham to die. When the king enters all save Gomez, Norfolk, and Surrey leave the hall. Henry speaks of the new maid of honor, Anne Boleyn, to the great consternation of Gomez. There is a change of scene. Henry converses with Surrey concerning the Pope's unwillingness to grant him a divorce. Catherine is summoned and dares to intercede for Buckingham. the king refuses; she chides him for his lack of consideration towards herself, whereupon he retorts that mortally their married union has been wrong from the first. When Anne Boleyn presents herself, the king is assiduous in his attentions to her and makes her Marchioness of Pembroke. From outside come the sounds of the funeral march for Buckingham, who has just been executed. Anne says this is a fateful omen. Act II takes place at Richmond Park, where Gomez appears, soon followed by Anne, who is accompanied by a number of ladies. She expresses her love for Gomez. But the king pursues her and to his wooing Anne makes reply that she will marry him if he will make her queen. The king promises. Queen Catherine strongly reproves Anne for her godless ambition, but she is obdurate and turns to King Henry asking him to help her out of her straits. A royal messenger arrives in great haste from Rome, -the bearer of evil news. However, Henry postpones receipt of his message until the next day and bids those present to enjoy the moment with dancing and banqueting.

In the third act Henry confers with the legate from Rome, who upholds the spiritual suzerainty of the Pope, which is met by Henry with bold defiance. Anne Boleyn enters and Henry betrays jealousy of her very palpably. After more talk with the papal legate Henry threatens to make a direct appeal to his subjects, announces himself head of the Church in England, and makes Anne his wife.

The fourth act passes in the apartments of the new queen, where Norfolk and Surrey are discussing the suspicions which the king has of her. Gomez brings a singular letter to the king from the former queen, Catherine, who is still in possession of the compromising letter from Anne. Henry rages and bids Anne to quit his presence and Gomez to leave England. A change of scene. Catherine, who is dying, with her last strength casts Anne's love letter into the fire.