

JEAN DE PARIS

Music by François Adrien Boieldieu

Libretto by C. Benjamin Godard d'Aurour

[Aurourt] de Saint-Just

First Performance: Opéra-Comique, Paris, April 4, 1812

The scene takes us back to the seventeenth century, and we find ourselves in an inn of the Pyrenees. The young and beautiful Princess of Navarre, being widowed, and her year of mourning having passed, is induced by her brother, the King of Navarre, to marry again. The French Crown Prince has been selected by the two courts as her future husband, but both parties are of a somewhat romantic turn of mind, and desire to know each other before being united for life. For this purpose the Prince undertakes a journey to the Pyrenees, where he knows the Princess to be.

In the first scene we see preparations being made for the reception of the Princess, whose arrival has been announced by her Seneschal. In the midst of the bustle there enters a simple page to demand rooms for his master. As he is on foot, the host treats him spitefully, but his daughter Lorezza, pleased with his good looks, promises him a good dinner. While they are still debating, the numerous suite of the Prince comes up and, without further ado, takes possession of the house and stables which have been prepared for the Princess and her people. The host begins to feel more favorably inclined towards the strange Seigneur, though he does not understand how a simple citizen of Paris (this is the Prince's incognito) can afford such luxury.

By the time "Monsieur Jean de Paris" arrives the host's demeanor has entirely changed, and seeing two large guests, hoping that he shall have prosecuted his journey before the arrival of the Princess. But he has been mistaken, for no sooner are Jean de Paris's people quartered in the house than the Seneschal, a pompous Spanish Grandee, arrives to announce the coming of the Princess. The host is hopelessly embarrassed, and the Seneschal rages at the impudence of the citizen, but Jean de Paris quietly intimates that the house and everything in it are hired by him, and courteously declares that he will play the host and invite the Princess to his house and dinner.

While the Seneschal is still stupefied by such unheard-of impudence, the Princess arrives, and at once takes everybody captive by her grace and loveliness. Jean de Paris is fascinated, and the Princess, who instantly recognizes in him her future bridegroom, is equally pleased by his appearance, but resolves to profit and to amuse herself by her discovery.

To the Seneschal's unbounded surprise she graciously accepts Jean's invitation. In the second act the preparations for the dinner of the honored guests have been made. Olivier, the page, shows pretty Lorezza the minuets of the ladies at court, and she dances in her simple country fashion, until Olivier seizes her, and they dance and sing together.

Jean de Paris, stepping in, sings an air in praise of God, beauty, and chivalry, and when the Princess appears, he leads her to dinner, to the unutterable horror of the Seneschal. Dinner, service, plate, silver, all is splendid, and all belongs to Jean de Paris, who sings a tender minstrel's song to the Princess. She sweetly answers him, and telling him that she has already chosen her knight, who is true, honest, and of her own rank, makes him stand on thorns for a while, lest he be too late, until he perceives that she only teases in order to punish him, for his own comedy. Finally they are enchanted with each other, and when the people come up, the Prince, revealing his true name, presents the Princess as his bride, bidding his suite render

homage to their mistress. The Seneschal humbly asks forgiveness, and all unite in a chorus in praise of the beautiful pair.