

JOSEPH

Music by Etienne-Nicolas Méhul

Libretto by Alexandre Duval

First Performance: Opéra-Comique, Paris, February 17, 1807

Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was sold by his brothers, has by his wisdom saved Egypt from threatening famine; he resides as governor in Memphis under the name of Cleophas. But though much honored by the King and all the people, he never ceases to long for his old father, whose favorite child he was.

Driven from Palestine by this same famine, Jacob's sons are sent to Egypt to ask for food and hospitality. They are tormented by pangs of conscience, which Simeon is hardly able to conceal, when they are received by the governor, who at once recognized them. Seeing their sorrow and repentance, he pities them, and promises to receive them all hospitably. He does not reveal himself, but goes to meet his youngest brother Benjamin and his blind father, whose mourning for his lost son has not diminished by the long years. Joseph induces his father and brothers to partake in the honors which the people render to him. The whole family is received in the governor's palace, where Simeon, consumed by grief and conscience-stricken, at last confesses to his father the selling of Joseph. Full of horror, Jacob curses and disowns his ten sons. but Joseph intervenes. Making himself known, he grants full pardon and entreats his father to do the same.

The old man yields, and together they praise God's providence and omnipotence.