

LA MUETTE DE PORTICI

Music by Daniel-François-Esprit Auber

Libretto by Eugène Scribe & Germain Delavigne

First Performance: Opéra [Académie royale], Paris, February 29, 1828

During the period when the people of Naples rose against the Spanish occupation, Alfonso d'Arcos, son of the Spanish Viceroy, has seduced a dumb Neapolitan girl, Fenella, who still loves him in spite of his decision to marry the Spanish princess, Elvira. Fenella disappears, but later returns to seek Elvira's protection. After the royal wedding, Elvira learns that it is her bridegroom who betrayed the helpless girl. Fenella's brother Masaniello and his friend Pietro call the fishermen to arms, both to rescue their country and to revenge Fenella. Alfonso has persuaded Elvira that he loves only her and wishes to redress the wrong he did Fenella. With the best intentions, Alfonso sends Selva, captain of the guard, to fetch Fenella, but victories lead to looting and excess bloodshed, which Masaniello deplors. Fenella comes home to her brother's hut, where soon Alfonso and Elvira appear, fugitives. The royal couple's pleas for mercy touch brother and sister, who vow to save them; Masaniello gives them safe conduct in spite of Pietro's objections. Pietro turns against his friend and poisons him. Already insane and dying, Masaniello leads his former followers against a new siege by Alfonso. He is able to save Elvira's life but is himself struck down. Fenella in despair kills herself (in one version leaping from the palace into the Bay of Naples, in another casting herself into the molten lava of the erupting Vesuvius). Note: Auber's celebration of the revolutionary hero (in reality Tommaso Aniello) contains a patriotic duet which is said to have caused the outbreak of Belgian revolution against the Dutch after a performance in Brussels in 1830.