

LES CLOCHES DE CORNEVILLE

Music by Jean-Robert Planquette

First Performance: Folies-Dramatiques, Paris, April 19, 1877

The first act presents an attractive picture of village life with the annual fair at Corneville. The old Marquis de Villeroi has returned after a long absence from his estates, and the village population is therefore celebrating this event. Everybody is at the fair, old gossips and rustic lovers in particular. Their tongues wag most about Serpolette, a pert village beauty, and Gaspard, an old miser, whom folks envy and curse because of his wealth for which he is said to have sold himself to the evil one. It is mainly because of old Gaspard's cruel treatment of his niece, Germaine, that he is hated and despised. He wants to force her to marry the sheriff, an elderly and unattractive person, whereas she herself inclines much more to Jean Grenicheux, a bold young fisherman, who once rescued her from drowning. As servants are hired at the fair, Germaine and Jean both engage themselves to the marquis, hoping in this way to escape the sordid plans of old Gaspard.

The Marquis has resolved to restore thoroughly his château, fallen into decay during the many years of his absence, and popularly believed to be haunted, so that the villagers have held it in great fear. At the beginning of the second act the marquis has therefore given orders that the whole of the immense building be completely overhauled. In doing this Gaspard, the old miser, who had purposely fostered the notion of spooks in the cellars because he has there kept his bags of gold, is found gloating over his treasures. The sudden interruption, together with the grief of being found out and perhaps losing all his gold, weigh so much on his mind that he runs off into the cold night a shrieking maniac.

The last act is presented at the banquet hall of the château, which now has been entirely restored and embellished. The marquis is feasting the whole village, and joy runs high among his guests. Serpolette is most conspicuous, and Jean, who formerly scorned her, assiduously is wooing her, for after the flight of Gaspard documents were found among his papers which seem to prove that she is the heiress to the miser's wealth. Gaspard himself has all this time been strolling about bereft of reason. The marquis on his part has fallen in love with Germaine, although she fills but the place of a servant in his household. The day comes, however, when the miser recovers his senses, and then everything changes, for it is then shown that, after all, Germaine is his niece and rightful heiress, and so the marquis may wed her. Serpolette steps down from her height and contents herself with an ordinary husband.