

## PAUL ET VIRGINIE

Music by Victor Massé

Libretto by Jules Barbier & Michel Carré

Opéra-National-Lyrique, Paris, 15 November 1876

### Overture:

**Act I.** Margeurite's cottage. She and Mme. de la Tour are discussing their children, Paul and Virginie, who have always been like brother and sister, but are now unconsciously drifting into a deeper feeling. Marguerite talks of sending Paul to India for a time. Domingues, a trusted slave, starts up, protesting. Laughter and shouts are heard when a ship from France is sighted; Mme. de la Tour hurries off, thinking it may bear news of the forgiveness of a wealthy aunt. Domingues talks of Paul and Virginie, wondering what changes the money will cause, and, as a storm arises, goes to seek the young people, who presently enter, laughing, shielded from the storm by a great banana leaf, held above their heads. Virginie seats herself; Paul throws himself on a rug at her feet. As they innocently sing of their love and innocent pleasures, Meala enters, footsore and weary. She is wounded by the lash of a whip. Virginie gives her food; they cannot keep an escaped slave, so Virginie offers to intercede for her with the planter.

Change of scene: Plantation of St. Croix. St. Croix appears, followed by two huge Negroes with whips. He kicks and cuffs the slaves, and orders bloodhounds set on Meala's sweetly asks his forgiveness for the slave, kneeling at his feet. St. Croix, moved by her girlish beauty, grants what she asks, with a mental reservation. they turn to depart. St. Croix asks them to stay and rest after their long walk. The negroes sing, dance and play for their amusement. Meala now sings alone, and in her song warns Paul that Virginie will be in danger if she stays, as St. Croix is drinking heavily. they hurry away. St. Croix in a rage turns on Meala and orders her to be lashed while she can stand. He drinks himself into a stupor. Meala screams wildly, and St. Croix, rousing himself, orders the slaves to sing louder to drown her voice.

**Entr'acte.** In the forest. **Act II.** House of Mme. de la Tour. Virginie is arrayed in festival attire and decked with jewels. Domingues sits on the floor, weaving a mat. Virginie's mother hands her a mirror. Domingues, shaking his head, declares that the gold will bring sorrow. Virginie in to go to France, and she is overcome with grief, because she now realizes her love for Paul. Domingues advises her in a song not to go. Paul is at the door. He enters, but does not recognize the grand young lady before him as Virginie. She remains silent as he reproaches her, then hurries away. Marguerite, calling Paul, tells him that there is a stain upon his birth. They decide to depart forever. Meala warns them of the coming of St. Croix, who now appears. Virginie, entering, buys Meala from him with some of the gold. Meala warns Paul to keep watch, or St. Croix will carry Virginie off. Change of scene: A fountain beneath the trees; sea in the distance. Virginie enters, singing a joyous song, then falls asleep, while Meala hums a lullaby. She sees in a vision the planter's house in flames. The governor brings an order from the king for Virginie's deportation. they waken her, and she is swiftly carried to the ship.

**Act III.** The seashore. Paul, now melancholy, stands looking out to sea. He is half-crazed by grief. His mother is in despair. Paul receives a letter, in which Virginie tells of her loneliness and love for him. He sees in a vision a ballroom, with Virginie dancing a minuet, amid splendid surroundings. Her harp is brought in; she sings and her voice is wafted to her lover. He sings in unison with her, begging her to sing once more. Their voices seem to mingle regardless of intervening space. St. Croix appears in the room beside her; she repulses him, and refuses his hand. Paul is entranced, and tells Domingues what he has seen. A ship is seen on the horizon approaching the island. A storm arises, causing it to be wrecked. Paul hears Virginie calling him, and at last her body is washed up upon the shore at his feet.