

LES PERCHEURS DE PERLE

(Pearl Fishers)

Composed by Georges Bizet

Libretto by Carre and Cormon

First Performed : Thibtre Lyrique, Paris, 30th Sept. 1863

Act I

On a beach in Ceylon. The pearl fishers, preparing for the fishing season, choose a new leader, Zurga ("Sur la greve en feu ... Amis, intercompz vos danses"). They await the consecrated Virgin, who will offer prayers to protect them from storms. As they wait, Zurga and Nadir meet, after a long separation ("C'est toi!"). They recall the night in front of the gates of Candi when they saw a woman whose beauty captured both their hearts and almost led to their falling out. Instead, the two men swore to renounce her in order to preserve their friendship (Duet: "Au fond du temple saint").

Leila, the Virgin, and Nourabad, the High Priest, approach, accompanied by the pearl fishers. Leila is led to a lonely rock, from which she is heard singing the prayers ("Seule au milieu de nous"). Nadir recognizes her voice (Recitative: "A cette voix quel trouble") and pours out his undying love for her (Aria: "Je crois entendre encore"). Leila prays to Brahma, as Nadir rushes toward her ("O Dieu Brahma!").

Act II

Night. Nourabad reminds Leila of her vow of celibacy. Leila recalls an incident from her childhood when she risked her life to protect a fugitive, who gave her a necklace as a token of his gratitude ("Les barques ont regagane la greve"). Alone, Leila senses the presence of the watching Nadir and sings a cavatina to him ("Me voila seule ... Comme autrefois"). He answers her by singing of his love for her ("De mon amie"), and the two swear their love ("Leila! Leila! Dieu puissant!"). A storm erupts, and Nourabad returns with his fakirs, who seize the veiled Leila and Nadir. They are dragged before Zurga, who at first pardons them. However, when Nourabad unveils Leila, Zurga recognizes her, and in fury at Nadir's deception and betrayal of him, withdraws the pardon ("Ah, revenez a la raison!").

Act III

Alone, Zurga's anger subsides, and he regrets condemning Nadir ("L'orage s'est calme ... O Nadir"). However, when Leila comes to him, pleading for Nadir and asking that only she die, his jealousy is revived, and he rejects her pleas ("Je fremis ... Qu'elle est belle!"). Leila then turns to a young fisherman and gives him the necklace, asking that it be returned to her mother. Zurga recognizes it as the necklace he gave to a young girl who helped him when he was a fugitive. The lovers are prepared for their execution, as Nourabad and the fisherman prepare for the sacrifice ("Sombres divinites"). However, a fire spreads, destroying the pearl fishers' camp. As the fisherman scatter, abandoning their prisoners, Zurga appears. He cuts their bonds and urges them to flee (Trio: "O lumiere sainte"). He is alone when the fisherman and Nourabad return ("C'est lui le traître!").