

ROBERT LE DIABLE

Music by Giacomo Meyerbeer

Libretto by Eugène Scribe & Germain Delavigne

First Performance: Opéra [Académie royale], Paris, November 21, 1831

Robert, son of Bertha, daughter of the Duke of Normandy (who has been seduced by the Devil), wanders to Palermo in Sicily, where he falls in love with the King's daughter, Isabella, and intends to joust in a tournament to win her. His companion, Bertram (in reality his satanic father), forestalls him at every juncture. A compatriot, the minstrel Raimbaut, warns the company about Robert the Devil, and is about to be hanged when Robert's foster sister Alice appears to save him. She has followed Robert with a message from his dead mother; Robert confides to her his love for Isabella, who has banished him because of his jealousy. Alice promises to help and asks in return that she be allowed to marry Raimbaut. When Bertram enters, she recognizes him and hides. Bertram induces Robert to gamble away all his substance. Alice intercedes for Robert with Isabella, who presents him with a new suit of armor to fight the Prince of Granada, but Bertram lures him away from combat, and the Prince wins Isabella. In the cavern of St. Irene, Raimbaut waits for Alice but is tempted by Bertram with money, which he leaves to spend. Alice enters on a scene which betrays Bertram as an unholy spirit, and in spite of clinging to her cross, is about to be destroyed by Bertram when Robert enters. The young man is desperate and ready to resort to magic arts. Bertram summons up the spirits of sinful dead nuns, who attempt to seduce Robert. Under their spell, he steals a talisman cypress branch, which he uses to bewitch Isabella. But her tears move him and he breaks the branch, whereupon the awakened soldiers seize him. Bertram saves him and the two go to the cathedral, where Bertram hopes to induce him to sign the fatal contract at last, revealing his parentage and appealing to his filial instinct. Thinking all lost, Robert is about to agree when Alice once more intervenes, producing his mother's will which entreats him to save his soul. The time is up for Bertram, who sinks defeated into hell, while Robert is restored to an honorable life.