

Les Huguenots

Opéra en cinq actes
First performance:
29.2.1836,
Paris, Opéra



In *Les Huguenots*, for the first time, Meyerbeer transfers the kind of drama of ideas he had developed in *Robert le Diable* to a historical subject. The revolutionary exuberance of the crowd scenes and the significant use of the Lutheran chorale "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott" give the work a novel political-religious flair which his contemporaries found exemplary in terms of modern drama. Embedded in the historical event of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre is the tragic fate of a pair of lovers. Among the most brilliant parts of the score are the scenes involving the Huguenot warrior Marcel, "an iron statue, clad in buffalo hide, his soul alight with divine fire" (George Sand), and the Valentine/Raoul "Grand Duo" from Act IV, whose auratic "Tu l'as dit" phrase has been described as "Meyerbeer's immortal melody" and the "melody of the century".

The critical edition is based on the text of the autograph in Cracow, and the first printed edition of 1836. It also takes account of the performance material from the Paris Opéra and the Royal Theatre Covent Garden, as well as numerous autograph sketches and elaborations. Previously unknown material is presented here for the first time, and can be incorporated into performances.

Critical Edition, edited by Milan Pospíšil and Marta Ottlová

Text:

Eugène Scribe, Gaetano Rossi, Emile Deschamps

Characters:

Marguerite of Valois, betrothed of Henri IV (s)
Count of Saint-Bris, a Catholic nobleman (b)
Valentine, his daughter (s)
Count of Nevers (b)
Cossé (t)
Thoré (b)
Tavannes (t)
De Retz (b)
Méru (b)
Raoul of Nangis, a Protestant nobleman (t)
Marcel, his servant (b)
Urbain, page to Queen Marguerite (s)
Bois-Rosé, a Protestant soldier (t)
Maurevert (b)
A maid of honour to the queen (a)
A servant of the Count of Nevers (t)
2 Catholic girls (s, a)
2 gypsy women (2 s)
An archer (b)
A student (t)
3 monks (t, 2 b)

Silent role:

Henri IV

Mimes

Corps de balle

Chorus

Extras

Orchestra:

Picc, 2 fl, 2 ob (2nd also c.a), 2 cl, b cl, 4 fg, 4 hn, 4 tpt, 2 valve-tpt, 3 tbn, ophicleide, timp, perc (bs dr, cym, trg, mil dr, tambourine, tamtam), 2 hp, strings (with obligato vla d'amore); stage ensemble: picc, 2 ob, picc cl in F, 6 cl, 2 fg, 4 hn, 4 tpt, valve-tpt, 2 tbn, ophicleide, bs dr, cym, trg, dr, mil dr, 3 bells in F, C' and A'

Place and Time of the Action:

In Tourraine and Paris, August 1572

7 scenes:

Act I: Hall in the Count of Nevers' castle
Act II: Castle and garden of Chenoncaux
Act III: Prè-aux-clercs on the banks of the Seine
Act IV: Room in the Count of Nevers' civic palace
Act V: Ballroom of the Hôtel des Nesle
Cemetery
Paris street