Faust

French Opera in five acts

Music
by
Charles Gounod

Libretto:
Jules Barbier and Michel Carré,
after Wolfgang von Goethe's
***Faust, Part I* (1808), *Part II* (1833)**

Premiere:
Théâtre Lyrique, Paris 1859

Adapted from the
Opera Journeys Lecture Series
by
Burton D. Fisher

Story Synopsis *Page 2*
Principal Characters in the Opera *Page 2*
Story Narrative with Music Highlights *Page 3*
Gounod and Faust *Page11*

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Story Synopsis

Faust, an aged philosopher, has become disillusioned and frustrated in his quest to find the secrets of the universe: in his despair, he decides to end his life by taking poison. Mephistopheles, the devil, appears before him, offering him youth and a young maiden in return for his soul. Mephistopheles conjures up the irresistible vision of the beautiful Marguerite, and Faust accepts his diabolical offer.

Aided by the wiles of Mephistopheles, Faust successfully courts Marguerite and they both fall in love. Later Marguerite believes that Faust has abandoned and betrayed her: she becomes insane, kills her child, and is imprisoned, awaiting death for infanticide. While in prison, Faust urges her to escape with him, however the delirious Marguerite dies. Faust is drawn to the underworld by Mephistopheles as Marguerite is borne to heaven by angels.

Principal Characters in the Opera

Faust	Tenor
Mephistopheles	Baritone
Marguerite	Soprano
Wagner	Baritone
Valentin, a soldier, Marguerite's brother	Baritone
Siebel, student of Faust	Mezzo-soprano
Martha, Marguerite's neighbor	Contralto

Townspeople, soldiers, students, chorus of demons, and chorus of angels

TIME:: 16th century

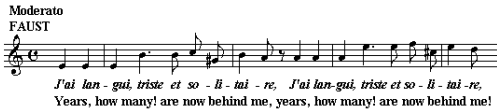
PLACE: Germany

Story Narrative with Music Highlights

ACT I - Scene 1: Faust's Study

Faust is an aged philosopher, alchemist, and practitioner of the magic arts. But life and the pursuit of knowledge have disillusioned him; he has become frustrated and despairing because the secrets of the universe remain an unsolved riddle.

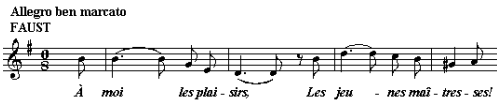
J'ai langui, triste et solitaire,



Old, brooding, and weary of life, he decides to end his life with suicide. He fills a goblet with poison, raises it to his lips, but hesitates when he hears young maidens cheerfully singing from the street, reminding him of the beauty of nature and its inspirations. As he raises the cup again, he pauses to listen to the song of the reapers going to the fields, hymning their gratitude to God. His bitterness increases, and in rage and envy, he invokes Satan.

Faust trembles with fright after sudden flashes of light reveal the gallantly attired archfiend: the devil Mephistopheles. Mephistopheles offers Faust gold and power, but they are declined: Faust only craves youth with its desires, passions, and delights.

À moi les plaisirs,



Mephistopheles promises to fulfill Faust's desires for youth and love in exchange for his soul, his compact specifying that, "On earth I will be your servant, below, you shall wait on me."

Faust hesitates, but when Mephistopheles conjures up the glowing vision of Marguerite at her spinning wheel, he becomes conquered by passion and desire. Rapturously, he addresses the vision of the beautiful Marguerite: *O merveille.* "O wonder."

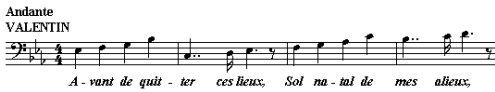
Faust has decided to pawn his soul. He seizes Mephistophele's potion and raises it, toasting the vision of the beautiful Marguerite. Suddenly, Faust undergoes a magical transformation: his gray beard and scholarly garb disappear, and he has become an elegantly clad, young and handsome cavalier. Faust and Mephistopheles leave in search of Marguerite, pleasure, and adventure.

Scene 2: A public Square in the town

A crowd of students, soldiers, and burghers gather to celebrate the Kermesse, the village fair. Soldiers prepare to go off to war, and the crowd prays for a victory and their speedy return.

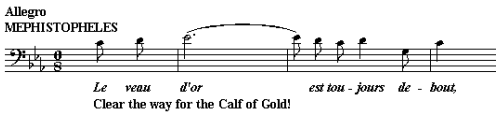
A soldier, Marguerite's brother Valentin, implores his friend Siebel, in love with his sister, to protect her while he is away.

Avant de quitter ces lieux,



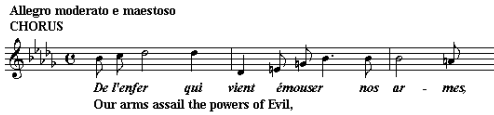
Wagner, a student, begins to sing a lively song, but Mephistopheles interrupts him with an impudent and sinister hymn praising greed and gold, a blasphemous invocation of Mammon and the Calf of Gold.

Le veau d'or est toujours debout,



Mephistopheles accepts a cup of wine, but it is not to his taste, and he amazes the crowd by causing new wine to flow from an old keg. When he makes a toast to Marguerite, the protective Valentin draws his sword, but the devil causes it to shatter, protecting himself in a magic circle he has created. The soldiers, realizing that the stranger possesses the powers of the devil, confront Mephistopheles with their swords raised in a cruciform.

Chorus of Swords



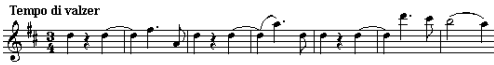
Mephistopheles becomes powerless and recoils in terror, departing with ominous threats: "We shall meet again."

Marguerite appears, reading her prayer book as she returns from church. Siebel yearns for her love but he is impeded by the diabolic Mephistopheles.

Faust becomes enamored with Marguerite. He approaches her and respectfully offers to join her and escort her home. Confused and blushing, Marguerite refuses. As she walks on, Faust watches her with passion, murmuring that he has indeed fallen in love with her. Mephistopheles observes that Faust seems coy and inexperienced, and cyncially suggests that Faust will need his expert aid in winning Marguerite.

The crowd resumes the Kermesse Waltz, the square animated with whirling dancers lost in carefree gaiety.

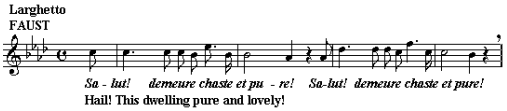
Kermesse Waltz



ACT II: The garden before Marguerite's house

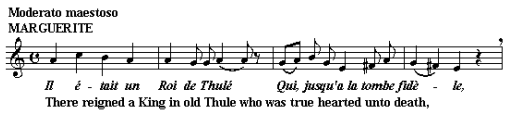
Siebel visits Marguerite's house and leaves a bouquet of flowers at the threshhold. Faust and Mephistopheles appear, and Faust becomes overwhelmed by the beauty of her humble dwelling.

Salut! demeure chaste et pure!



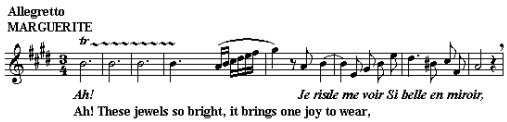
Mephistopheles returns and replaces Siebel's flowers with a casket of jewels. Marguerite sits at her spinning wheel and sings a ballad about the King of Thulé, a romantic legend about a king who made a cup of gold for the woman he loved, however, she continually interrupts her song, her thoughts returning to the stranger she met at the Kermesse.

Le Roi di Thulé



Marguerite notices the box of jewels and becomes dazzled by their brilliance, exploding into girlish rapture and delight as she adorns herself with the treasures.

The Jewel Song

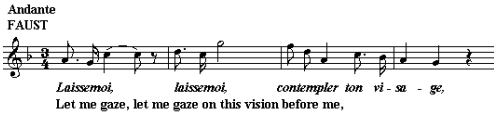


Mephistopheles appears and gallantly salutes both Marguerite and her guardian, Martha, flirting and drawing her away so that Faust can become more intimate with Marguerite. Mephistopheles

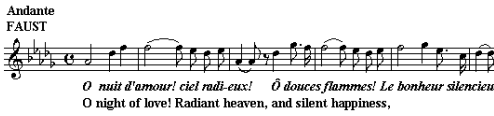
invokes an evil incantation, calling upon the powers of evil to inspire Marguerite with passion, his diabolical design to capture Marguerite's soul.

As night falls, Marguerite and Faust are alone. Marguerite confesses her love for Faust, and the newfound lovers passionately echo their eternal love for each other.

Laissemoi, laissemoi, contempler visage,



O nuit d'amour! ciel radieux!



Marguerite is suddenly overcome with maidenly scruples and urges Faust to leave. She throws him a kiss, and runs to her house, promising to meet him the following day.

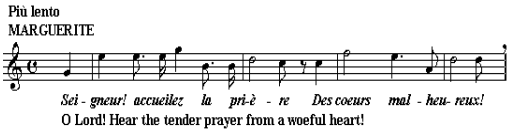
Faust and Mephistopheles both watch and listen to Marguerite as she soliloquizes from her window about the rapture of the night, Marguerite crying out to Faust, "hurry back to me my beloved." Faust rushes to her, and she sinks into his arms. While the lovers are ecstatically embraced, Mephistopheles, the arch-fiend, laughs triumphantly and sardonically.

ACT III - Scene 1: A church

Marguerite believes that Faust betrayed and abandoned her: in a moment of hysterical madness, she killed their child. All have spurned her, and filled with guilt and fear for her salvation, she enters the church to pray and repent for her sins, and for Faust.

In the church, a voice from the shadows cries out, “No, you shall pray no more. You shall not be forgiven”: it is Mephistopheles condemning her to hell; “Farewell, nights of love. Marguerite, your soul is damned,” Mephistopheles tormenting Marguerite with curses and threats. Crying in despair, Marguerite collapses and falls prostrate to the ground.

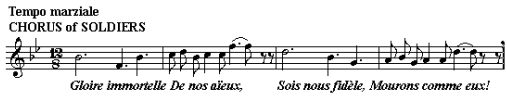
Prayer: Seigneur! accueilez la prière,



Scene 2: A square outside the Church

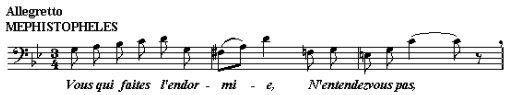
In the town square, Valentin and his comrades have returned from war and praise those heroes who were slain in battle.

Soldiers Chorus: Gloire immortelle De nos aïeux,



The sinister Mephistopheles and his pupil Faust approach. Faust is torn by remorse and shame, realizing that he brings only disaster in his wake. Mockingly, Mephistopheles sings an insulting and ribald serendade to Marguerite, each stanza ending with a taunting and sarcastic laugh.

Serenade: Vous qui faites l’endormie,



Valentin steps forth to defend his sister's honor. With sword raised, he challenges Faust to a duel, the man he condemns as responsible for Marguerite's fall from innocence. Mephistopheles intercedes in their duel, applying his devil's magic to guide Faust's sword: Valentin falls, mortally wounded.

As Mephistopheles drags Faust away, Marguerite finds her dying brother, who, in his last breath, harshly curses his sister for the shame and tragedy her love for Faust has brought them. Marguerite falls before her dying brother, sobbing frenziedly. As Valentin dies, the crowd prays for peace for his soul.

ACT IV - Scene 1: In the Harz Mountains

In search of further adventure, Mephistopheles brings Faust to witness the revels of Walpurgis Night, a festival, according to medieval legend, that was held of the eve of the first of May in the Harz Mountains. In a gruesome scene, witches and demons participate in an orgy of wanton revelry invoking evil.

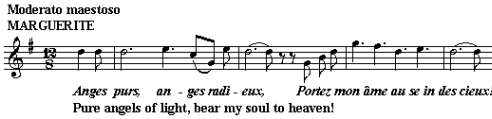
Mephistopheles summons the famous courtesans of history to appear before them; visions of Thaïs, Cleopatra, and Helen of Troy. Suddenly an apparition of Marguerite appears, crushed as if by the blow of an axe: Faust demands that Mephistopheles take him to Marguerite.

Scene 2: A prison.

Marguerite, her mind shattered by guilt, awaits execution for infanticide. Mephistopheles arrives with Faust who has come to rescue her. Faust and Marguerite reminisce dreamily and tenderly of their first meeting at the Kermesse, and their tryst in the garden. Faust frantically urges her to escape with him, but he is unable to reason with her raving, broken mind.

Mephistopheles calls out impatiently that they must hurry. Marguerite rises, stands transfixed as she recognizes the archfiend, and calls to God for protection. As she prays, she envisions heaven and forgiveness.

Anges purs, anges radieux,



Marguerite's last words to Faust damn him forever: "Why those bloody hands? They fill me with horror." Mephistopheles exults, assured that he has captured Marguerite's soul and she is condemned to hell. Marguerite falls lifeless to the ground.

A a chorus of celestial voices chant the Easter hymn, "Christ is risen!", announcing that Marguerite has been redeemed. The Apotheosis – the deification of Marguerite - vividly contrasts the opposing forces of good and evil. In a glorious choir of seraphic voices, Marguerite's tormented soul is borne to heaven as Faust falls to his knees in prayer. Mephistopheles seizes Faust and drags him off to further perdition.

Gounod.....and Faust

Charles François Gounod (1818-1893), was a major figure in nineteenth century French opera: his most famous work, *Faust,* which premiered in 1859.

Gounod's father, who died when Charles was still a child, had been a painter and winner of the second Prix de Rome. The composer's mother, familiar with the hardships of an artistic life, reluctantly taught her son the piano. Gounod would later study music at the Paris Conservatoire under the French composer Jacques François Halévy, the composer of some 20 operas, his most well-known, the inspired grand masterwork, *La Juive.* In 1839, at the age of 21, like his father, Charles won the Grand Prix de Rome that enabled him to study in Italy where he developed a passionate interest in church and sacred music.

Gounod was eternally in conflict between the scared and the mundane, vacillating between spiritualism and the enjoyments of luxury and pleasure. He studied theology for two years and abstained from holy orders only when convinced he could succeed in a musicalal career, an explanation in part why most of his later works possess ecclesiastical themes.

Upon his return to Paris from Rome, he became a church organist, and indulged in the writing of religious choral music. At the same time, he composed his first opera, *Sapho,* produced in 1851, a failure that did not deter him from further pursuing operatic composition. In 1858, he achieved success with the light opera, *Le Médecin Malgré Lui,* "The Doctor in Spite of Himself," based on a comedy by the French playwright Molière.

Between 1852 and 1860, Gounod directed the Orphéon, a Parisian choral society, further stimulating his profound interest in religious and choral music: it was then that he became inspired to compose the celebrated *Ave Maria,* based on a prelude by Johann Sebastian Bach, as well as several masses, oratorios, motets, and hymns.

Gounod's fame, however, rests on his fourth opera, *Faust,* (1859), based on a portion of Goethe's famous play in verse. *Faust* made Gounod world famous, and although he wrote eight other operas thereafter, only two remain successful: *Mireille* (1864), and *Roméo et Juliette* (1867).

Volumes have been written about the genesis of the legendary story of Faust, the philosopher and magician who made a sinister compact with the devil, Mephistopheles. The legend itself derives from antiquity and myth, much of it buried in historical obscurity. Nevertheless, the tale entered popular literature transmitted orally through the centuries, and later, through ballads, puppet plays, and the drama.

The Medieval world was consumed by the Christian path to salvation, possessed by immortality and the conflict between heaven, hell, and damnation. Humanity's energies seem undaunted in their ability to conjure up images of diabolical forces: man's myth-making capacity is boundless, only requiring an imaginative stimulant to bring it to consciousness. Many elements of the Faust legend are found in works which captivated the medieval imagination: men of learning and accomplishment were deemed necromancers or dealers in the black arts, and bondsmen of the infernal powers; among the many, Zoroaster, Democritus, Empedocles, Apollinaris, Virgil, Albert Magnus, Merlin, and Páracelsus.

In the sixth century, Theophilus of Syracuse supposedly sold himself to the devil, saved from damnation only by the miraculous intervention of the Virgin Mary, and architects of cathedrals and engineers of bridges were rumored to have bartered their souls in order that their great conceptions might find realization.

In recent centuries, the superstitious peasantry of Bavaria envisioned that the engineer who ran the first locomotive engine through that country was in league with the devil; they also conceived the notion that the Prussian machine-gun which had wrought such horrible destruction to their

soldiers, was an infernal machine for which Bismarck had traded the immortal part of himself to the devil; Poland had its popular tales of wizardry and black magic in the legend of Pan Twardowsky; and in Bohemia, a legend recounted the nefarious adventures of Cyto. All of these wizards were formidable practitioners of the black arts.

It is widely believed that the real Dr. Johann Faustus was a native of Würtemberg who was a practitioner of the magical arts toward the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries: he made a compact with the devil Mephistopheles, performed many miraculous feats, and died a horrible death. The legend recounts that he was initially poor, but money inherited from a rich uncle enabled him to attend the University of Cracow where he seems to have devoted himself with particular assiduity to the study of magic; that art, or science, at that time having a quasi-respectability in the curriculum. After obtaining his degree, he traveled about Europe practicing necromancy and acquiring a reputation as a fiendish sorcerer who would boasted that his magic arts had enabled the imperial armies to win their victories; nevertheless, he was abominated and his soul considered lost beyond all hope.

The earliest known account of Faust in print was written by Johann Spies: *Faustus,* published in Frankfurt in 1587. Shortly thereafter, in 1590, an English translation of the entire Spies tale appeared, becoming the source from which Marlowe drew his stage play *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus,* printed in 1604. In Spies's rendition of the story, Faustus expresses a wish to marry, but Mephistopheles refuses to permit him to do so on the ground that marriage is something pleasing to God, and therefore, foreign to the terms of their contract. Mephistopheles says: "Hast thou sworn thyself an enemy to God and to all creatures? To this I answer thee, thou canst not marry, thou canst not serve two masters, God and thy prince. For wedlock is a chief institution ordained of God, and

that thou hast promised to defy as we do all, and that hast thou not only done, but moreover thou hast confirmed it with thy blood. Persuade thyself that what thou dost in contempt of wedlock, it is all to thine own delight. Therefore, Faustus, look well about thee, and bethink thyself better, and I wish thee to change thy mind, for if thou keep not what thou hast promised in thy writing, we will tear thee in pieces like the dust under thy feet. Therefore, sweet Faustus, think with what unquiet life, anger, strife and debate thou shalt live in when thou takest a wife. Therefore, change thy mind."

In Spies's story, Faustus accedes to Mephistopheles but very shortly summons his spirit and demands the devil's consent to marry. Spiess portrayed the devil as a dreadful, ugly monster whom Faustus dared not look directly at. Suddenly, punishing Faustus, Mephistopheles conjures up a whirlwind that fills the house with fire and smoke, hurling Faustus about until he is motionless. The devil then facetiously asks Faustus: "How likest thou thy wedding?", Faustus promising never to mention marriage again, and becoming more than content to accept Mephistopheles promise to bring him any woman, alive or dead, whom he may possess if he so desires; thus, Helen of Troy is brought back from the netherworld to become Faustus's paramour. In Spiess's story, Helen has a son called Justus Faustus, but after Faustus dies, mother and child vanish.

In the Polish version of the legend, Faustus is represented by Twardowsky who has the privilege of demanding three requests of the devil. After enjoying the benefits conferred by two, like the Spiess legend, he asks the devil's permission to marry. The devil is unwilling and breaks the compact, freeing Twardowsky. It is this Polish version of the legend that may have inspired Thackeray's amusing tale, *The Painter's Bargain*. New versions of the legend followed each other rapidly, and the *Faust* story eventually became the favorite subject of 19th century Romantic playwrights and poets.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Goethe conceived the idea of utilizing the *Faust* subject as the basis for his comprehensive philosophy about human life, his final literary synthesis between poetry, philosophy, and religion. But while Goethe was working on his *Faust,* literary versions, musical pantomine, and puppet plays of the legend were appearing simultaneously: Galliard's *Harlequin Faustus* in 1715; Phanty's *Dr. Faust's Zaubergurtel* in 1790; and Walter's *Dr. Faust,* in 1797.

Goethe published the first part of his adventures of the legendary necromancer in 1808; the second part published posthumously in 1833. After Goethe's monumental treatment of the legend, librettists, composers and poets, pursued the folk-tale and legend with boundless enthusiasm: Spohr's opera, *Faust* (1818), still performed today on the German stage, but known in America primarily through the recital stage song, *Die stille Naclit entweiclit;* Boito's *Mefistofele* (1868), an attempt to cover the entire phantasmagoria of both parts of Goethe's voluminous play; Rietz's *Faust* (I836); an English version by Bishop, *Faustus* (1827), with a French version (1831), and a Brussels version (1834); Donizetti's *Fausta* (1831); Gordigiano's *Fausto* (1837); Raimondi's *Fausto Arrivo* (1837); Verstowsky's Russian version, *Pan Twardowsky* (1831); and Zaitz's Polish version, *Twardowsky* (1880). Even the 20th century Marxists carried the legend a step further and staged *Faust* in satiric modern guise, the hero, an American millionaire who sold his soul to the Devil and ;oved sumptuously in a Berlin hotel.

The subject has copiously served as the basis for cantatas, overtures, and symphonies, inspiring music from such composers as Kreutzer, Reissiger, Pierson, Lassen, and Prince Radziwill; but their compositions do little more than illustrate the truth of the old adage that "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." Schumann composed concert music on the subject, Wagner composed the *Faust Overture,* and Liszt, the Faust symphony: all represent specific portions of the tragedy transformed into musical language.

Gounod's choice of the *Faust* subject reflected his profound admiration for the poetry of the great German Romanticist, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. While in his early twenties, his favorite amusement was reading Goethe's *Faust.*

Gounod reveals in his autobiographical sketches, that he personally proposed *Faust* as an operatic subject to the librettists, Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, the idea so favorably impressing them that they immediately brought the project to the director of the Théâtre Lyrique, M. Leon Carvalho.

Carvalho was intrigued with Gounod's idea of a *Faust* opera, but in deference to the then undisputed "king" of French opera, Meyerbeer, he offered him the first opportunity to write the opera. Meyerbeer declined, refusing to consider a subject he deemed sacred, what he termed the *Ark of the Covenant,* a sanctuary not to be approached through the profanity of music. Meyerbeer's refusal to write music for an operatic version of *Faust* complements the artistic conscience of the man who has been charged more often and more virulently than any other opera composer in history with a willingness to pander to stage sensationalism. Nevertheless, in operatic hindsight, it would be more truthful to conclude that Meyerbeer knew well his inability to write the kind of music which Goethe's tragedy required. Assuming the story to be true, Meyerbeer's honesty is admirable, particularly the dignity with which he gave expression to what he called the *Ark of the Covenant*.

However, there was indeed one composer who was fit to cope with the awesome task of writing dramatic music worthy of a marriage with Goethe's vast creation; that composer was Beethoven. Likewise, Beethoven was hesitant to profane the Goethe sanctuary, although for one short moment at least, the thought occupied his mind.

In his book, *Für Freunde der Tonkunst*, Rochlitz relates that in the summer of 1822 he carried a commission to Beethoven from Breitkopf and Härtel, the Leipzig Publishers, for *Faust* music "in the manner of the *Egmont* overture." Beethoven had met Goethe at Carlsbad, and ever

since, had been reading his poetry daily. Beethoven divined Goethe, believing that its prose elevated the soul, and sincerely believed that the master's words were written for music; "Goethe sees, all his readers see with him, and that was the reason one could appropriately put his words to music. "

Nevertheless, at that particular time, Beethoven was immersed in gigantic tasks he had already undertaken: two symphonies, and an oratorio undertaken for the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston that never came to fruition. In the end, his preoccupations yielded the Ninth Symphony, but he never penned a note containing a *Faust* theme..

Librettist Carré is reputed to have had reservations about Gounod's *Faust* project, reasoning that he had recently produced *Faust et Marguerite*, a three-act play fashioned after Goethe that was moderately successful at the Gymnase-Dramatique in 1850. But after Barbier laid out his scenario, Carré was won over, and the libretto team enthusiastically started writing Gounod's *Faust* text. It was unanimously agreed that the opera would avoid much of Goethe's profound religious and philosophical context, and only deal with the love story and romance between Faust and Marguerite.

Gounod's *Faust* had been scheduled to premiere in November 1857, but Carvalho halted work after learning that the prestigious Théâtre St. Martin was about to stage a melodrama based on the legendary theme; after a short run, that play folded, and Carvalho authorized Gounod and his librettists to move forward.

Rehearsals started in September, 1858, and were continuously buried in difficulties. There were severe tensions between the librettists and directors of the Théâtre-Lyrique, the librettists struggling to keep their most original ideas from becoming excised: the censors threatened to remove the dramatic church scene confrontation between Marguerite and Mephistopheles, fearing repercussions from a scene they deemed offensive during a period when relations between France and

the papacy were strained. The pressures of the battle affected the usually calm Barbier profoundly, and it is rumored that he stayed home the night of the premiere because he was suffering from nervous exhaustion.

The tenor featured in the title role of *Faust* was Hector Bruyer, a singer possessing a charming voice, an attractive physique, but unable to sustain the weight of the role; just one month before the premiere he was replaced by Barbot, a veteran from the Opéra-Comique roster. It is rumored that Gounod himself, reputed to have had a beautiful voice that he was decidedly fond of exhibiting, had seriously considered the feasibility of singing the Faust part himself.

The premiere took place on March 19, 1859, ultimately becoming Gounod's greatest theatrical success, yet at first, not creating a remarkable nor sensational impression. A distinguished audience attended the premiere: Auber, Berlioz,, Reyer, Janin, Perrin, Ollivier, and many other prominent men who had made their mark in literature, art or politics; among the latter, Delacroix, Vernet, Giraud, Pasdeloup, Scudo, Heugel, and Lévy.

It became Mme. Carvalho – the manager's wife known as Madame Ugalde – who carried the performance by achieving a brilliant success as Marguerite. Gounod concluded that though her virtuosity and masterly qualities of execution and style had already placed her in the front rank of contemporary singers, no role until that of Marguerite had afforded her the opportunity to demonstrate her secure lyric qualities, assuredness, and refinement. Gounod's praise of his Marguerite may have resulted from an artistic compromise with the implacable diva: she was reputed to have altered any opera she participated in to suit her own tastes; no aria was safe from her greedy hands as she loaded melodic lines with her own arabesques and trills.

Opening night criticism of *Faust* contained a blend of censure and praise: if it was not a critical success, neither was it a failure. On the positive side, the audience considered the opera daring and different, far from a mere succession of pretty

tunes. Others considered the *Soldiers' Chorus* - a last-minute transfer from Gounod's unfinished opera *Ivan the Terrible* – to be a show-stopping masterpiece, and others raved at the sublimated mood and ecstasy of feeling in the *Garden Scene*.

On the negative side, Germans claimed that Gounod had failed to grasp the larger conception of the Goethe epic, even though Gounod's librettists admittedly intended to portray only the love story portion: some felt the third act monotonous and too long; that the devil did not summon up the terror felt for the 'Prince of Darkness' in the Middle Ages, his characterization, not more impressive than a conjurer at a children's party.

Berlioz, seething with revenge against his fellow Parisians, had every reason to console himself since Gounod's new *Faust,* like his own dramatic cantata *La damnation de Faust* written several years before in 1846, had been unappreciated. Nevertheless, Berlioz was favorably inclined toward the work and generously pointed out the new opera's strengths: the opening measures with their fugal evocation of the old philosopher's despair; the first meeting of Faust and Marguerite; the opera's magnificent delicate balance between set pieces and recitative; Faust's rapturous *Salut! Demeure,* and Marguerite's *Roi de Thulé* and *Jewel Song;* the ecstatic conclusion of the *Garden Scene;* the *Church Scene*; and the poignancy when the pathetically twisted, but still recognizable Marguerite, is cursed by her brother, driving her to the final edge of the mental abyss. In spite of Berlioz's senthusiasm, few of Gounod's friends spoke to him after the premiere, and those who did, advised him to modify his advanced musical style.

Faust found its way into the repertoire slowly. Today, both Frenchmen and Germans seem to have forgotten that when the Théâtre Lyrique temporarily folded, and the Opéra-Comique closed its doors to *Faust,* it was the triumphant reception that the opera received in Germany that served as

a catalyst to bring the work back to France. During its premiere year, the opera was given fifty-seven times at the Théâtre Lyrique. Ten years later, it was revised to fit the unique patterns and schemes of the Grand Opéra, prompting the addition of the *Walpurgisnacht* ballet, and Valentin's aria, *Avant de quitter ces lieux*.

In retrospect, no opera in the history of the lyric theater has ever equaled the popularity of Gounod's *Faust*. In 1887, twenty-eight years after its first performance, Gounod was privileged to join his friends in a celebration of its 500th presentation, a proud record, but trivial when it is noted that *Faust* had its 1,250th Parisian performance in the summer of 1902. In 1863, the opera had possession of two rival establishments in London: at Her Majesty's Drury Lane, and at the Royal Italian Opera at Covent Garden. The first American production took place at the Academy of Music, New York, in 1863, and in 1883, *Faust* inaugurated the new Metropolitan Opera at Broadway and thirty-ninth street; however, it was sung in Italian. *Faust,* once the most popular opera in the world, approaches its three-thousand-performance mark in Paris. At Covent Garden, it was performed every season from 1863 to 1911, and until World War II, it was a full hundred performances ahead of all the other works in its repertory. In Budapest it still tops the performance totals of any other opera.

After it inaugurated the Metropolitan Opera in 1883, it was eventually performed so often that the redoubtable critic of the *New York Times,* W. J. Henderson, dubbed the Met not the *Festspielhaus* (Bayreuth's "festival house"), but the *Faustspielhaus,* "the house where they *play Faust."* Italians became enamored with *Faust,* and it was in Italian that earlier generations invariably heard it. In Germany, it was performed as *Margarethe* to distinguish it from their hallowed national treasure, Goethe's *Faust,* a work much more respected, but also much less often performed; in effect, the title *Margarethe* symbolically distanced Gounod's opera from Goethe's epic.

Faust is overwhelmingly important in the history of operatic singing. It is impossible even

to think of such great voices of the past as Patti, Melba, Eames, Nordica, the de Reszkes, Plançon, Challiapin, Caruso, di Stefano, and Bjoerling, without thinking of *Faust.* The renowned Marcel Journet sang *Faust's* Mephistopheles reputedly more than a thousand times, providing the stereotyped image of opera characters as devils in red tights.

Librettists Carré and Barbier dutifully adhered to Goethe's epic, but confined their story to the romance between Faust and Marguerite: nevertheless, their essential leitmotif became the epic's underlying conflict between good and evil; the elderly Faust's rejuvenation resulting from his unholy alliance with the Devil.

Gounod's *Faust* presents only a small segment from Goethe's classic, and therefore, could not by any measure of the imagination provide the profound essence of the total epic. Goethe's stage play in verse is immense, and its transformation to the opera stage transcends the limitations of just one opera: Gounod was certainly not Wagner, and could not conceive nor compose a work of such epic complexities as the *Ring.* Gounod himself challenged any comparisons of his work with the whole of Goethe: he had specifically created a love story for which he introduced the inherent accouterments of music drama; a ballet with classical figures, and, at the conclusion, the *Apotheosis,* or resurrection chorus. Brahms cynically defended any comparison of Gounod's *Faust* with Goethe's epic: "Any fool can see that!"

Goethe's *Faust* was partly autobiographical. As a young student, he loved and abandoned an innocent girl, his guilt haunting him throughout his life. But more importantly, Goethe was one of the godfathers of German Romanticism of the late 18th and early 19th centuries: they were searching for a new path to man's salvation and redemption. Kant inspired the Romanticist's by placing man, not God, at the center of the universe; as such, one particular essence of Romanticism became the conflict and tension between spiritual love and mundane love.

In the older *Faust* legends, the underlying conflict dealt primarily with the moral question of good versus evil; in the Goethe epic those forces are represented by the wavering Faust and the diabolical Mephistopheles. Faust bargains with his soul because he has become defeated, frustrated, and despairing in his relentless crusade to find meaning in life. His transformation explodes the war between good and evil: Mephistopheles overpowers Faust, and evil vanquishes good. In essence, Goethe's epic re-mythologized the Bible, using the conflict of good and evil to define the great moral questions of life, art, and faith, that classic battle between emotion and reason, the spirit and the flesh, and the sacred and the profane.

Although *Faust* derives from the Medieval conflict between good and evil, or the soul's struggle between salvation and eternal damnation, Goethe's work represented the soul of Romanticism; a new spiritual quest seeking eternal truths. But in the end, it posed its conflict in terms of morality, its underlying subtext praising the supremacy of virtue and morality, and punishing carnal sin. In the story, woman suffers, but through her travails she achieves salvation and forgiveness: in *Faust,* Goethe had introduced the saving, sacrificing woman, the "eternal woman," *la femme eterne,* or *ewige weibliche,* the female ideal that ultimately obsessed 19th century German Romantics.

Many operaphiles relish musico-dramatic comparisons with Gounod's operatic competitors: Berlioz, Boito, and Busoni. In Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust*, the dramatic cantata concludes with a ride into hell and an ascent to heaven, one of the supreme challenges in symphonic and choral literature. In Boito's *Mefistofele*, a windstorm created by an omnipotent God defeats Mefistofele, Faust finding salvation in his return to God. In Busoni's *Doktor Faust,* Faust resurrects his dead child, and dying himself, breathes life into the child's body. All three conclusions are dramatically compelling,

suggesting the spiritual conflicts of the soul that Goethe found in the old myth and applied to his 19th century quest for eternal truth.

Likewise, Gounod's conclusion provides dazzling music drama: the trio in which the victimized Marguerite triumphs over her unfaithful lover and the forces of evil, and the soaring and climactic *Anges Purs* that precedes the final *Apotheosis;* these represent musico-dramatic moments approaching spiritual transcendence, written by a composer whose entire life, like that of Faust, vacillated between spiritualism and earthly gratification.

Gounod was a supreme master of lyricism. The famous Act II *Garden Scene* contains a series of the most elegant arias and duets that were unparalleled and unprecedented for their grace and loveliness: until Wagner wrote *Tristan und Isolde,* the *Garden Scene* in *Faust* was considered the quintessence of sensuous romanticism in opera; after Wagner, it can seem almost impossibly small-scaled. Nevertheless, *Faust* was originally conceived, and first performed, as an *opéra comique;* that is, a small-scaled opera with spoken dialogue. Although sung recitatives were added for Strasbourg and ten years later the *Walpurgisnacht* ballet was inserted to satisfy the demands of the Paris Opera, *Faust* remained in essence what it was designed to be: an intimate rather than spectacle opera.

Gounod's *Faust* had inherent appeal in Victorian England's world of propriety; legend speaks of Queen Victoria, old, weak, and sick just before her death, summoning a group of French singers to hear pieces from Gounod's *Faust,* and smiling whenever she recognized a familiar tune.

Gounod introduced his characteristically Gallic gifts for melody into opera. He was a supreme melodist, the creator of a refined and expressive lyricism that he supported with sensitive harmony and expert orchestration. His opera music is noted for its lyric quality, its charm, and its lovely and fresh melodic invention, music containing a light

and dripping sentimentality that is easy on the ear like golden syrup. Because his music is restrained, sensitive, delicate, and filled with human values, it remains quite apart from the more ornate grand opera spectacles of Meyerbeer and his emulators.

Though Gounod undertook the operatic medium reluctantly, and enjoyed few real successes outside of *Faust*, the opera remains the high-water mark of French romanticism: Gounod invented that very special style called the French *lyrique*. The essence of the new school became not epic but lyric, not thematic but melodic, not heroic but purely and passionately personal. This new French *lyrique* eventually evolved to impart a new aura of dignity to the subject of its actions, portraying intense personal relationships, strongly marked personalities, and profound human passions; the antithesis of grand opera's cardboard characters and marching processions in those spectacles of Halévy, Meyerbeer, and Auber.

More importantly, *Faust* and its supreme lyricism rejuvenated French opera: it was a thoroughly modern work for its time, composed in Gounod's new *lyrique* style that would ultimately become the defining voice of French musical aesthetics for the entire 19th century. Great practitioners of Gounod's new school of French lyricism followed him with zeal: Saint-Saëns, Bizet, and Massenet.

Unlike his contemporaries, Bizet and Halévy, Gounod lacked the instincts for dramatic intensity: even his best works are generally considered weak and dramatically unconvincing. Nevertheless, one of his greatest attributes was to gradually build a scene to lyric intensity and end with a *coup de theatre*. Particularly in *Faust,* there is power and beauty in its music, and there is a profound contrast of human drama juxtaposed against fantasy and sorcery, but each scene concludes with brilliant theatrical effects.

Antagonists of *Faust* will argue vociferously that the character of Marguerite approaches that of a society debutante; that Mephistopheles is tinged with shades of Leporello; and that Faust is little more than a lovesick cavalier. And, by

sublimating Goethe's profound transcendental significance and dealing solely with the Marguerite-Faust romance, Gounod surrendered to excessive sentimentality, its musical style elegant but mostly saccharine. Indeed, *Faust* is saturated with Gounod's special lyrical qualities and subtle Gallic sensitivities: it possesses a preponderance of melody and a succession of old-fashioned, operatic *Hit Parade* songs, which, to many, still remains the essence of the operatic art form.

Nevertheless, *Faust* indeed contains moments of effective, dramatic intensity: Valentin's death, and its theatrically vivid contrast between his intolerance and the inherent morality of the majority; the church tableau that brilliantly captures Marguerite's isolation through its background of organ preludes and chant-like choral writing, Mephistopheles cynical laughter at the conclusion providing the ultimate dramatic contrast. And the concluding *Anges purs, anges radieux* that is ultimately united with the *Apotheosis* represents sheer spectacle and is unquestionably the dramatic coup of the entire opera.

Faust was a brave and forward-looking work: in its day, it refined, perhaps even redefined, the overblown Meyerbeerian concept of French opera. *Faust* set a precedent for integrating music with the nuanced inflections of the French language, scaling down dialogue to intimate moments resembling conversation; for Marguerite, Gounod virtually created a style of music – and singing - that nurtured the species of soprano now known as lyric; the magnificent lyricism and unity of the *Garden Scene* influenced an entire century of French music, such as the stage works of Bizet, Saint-Saëns, Massenet, Delibes, and Lalo, as well as the instrumental music of Franck, Fauré, and D'Indy.

The greatness of *Faust* remains its astonishing melodic inventiveness: the opera contains some of the most beautifully crafted, sensuous, and luminously scored music ever written, melodies that delicately etch their characters and remain fixed in memory. *Faust* is a superbly realized

drama, greatly appreciated in its day, and composed by a master lyricist whose melodic legacies inspired generations of French opera composers.

As such, *Faust* is an indispensable opera, a reminder that new currents and trends arise in opera, and there are certainly vastly more intelligible and cohesive opera dramas. However, *Faust* is firmly rooted to the opera stage; its devoted audiences continually hypnotized by Gounod's lyric splendor, music that seems to become engraved in memory not only after the curtain falls, but endures for eternity.