

Daniel-François-Esprit Auber:
Le Cheval de bronze

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Edited and Introduced by

Robert Ignatius Letellier

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P U B L I S H I N G

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D. F. E. Auber. Lithograph from the mid-1830s

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INTRODUCTION

Le Cheval de bronze was premiered at the Opéra-Comique on 23 March 1835. It was described as an *opéra-féerique* in three acts. The librettist, Scribe, derived the plot from the tale “Les Sept Fils du Calender” in *The Arabian Nights*. The scene is set in Shantung province in China in legendary times. The magical Bronze Horse of the title, which has appeared mysteriously on a nearby hill, will transport any man who climbs onto its back to the planet Venus, where a group of female sirens, led by the lovely Princess Stella, live. If the traveller in space can resist the sirens’ advances, he can return to earth with the lady of his choice; if not, he is whisked back alone, and turned to stone if he speaks of his experiences.

Act 1 opens with the landowner Tchín-Kao celebrating the engagement of his daughter Péki to the elderly mandarin Tsing-Sing. The mandarin’s fourth wife, Tao-Jin, is not happy about this new marriage to a younger woman – and neither is the intended bride, who really wishes to marry the young farmer Yanko. At this point the Crown Prince of China, Prince Yang, arrives, and when Yanko enters with a strange tale of a bronze horse he has taken a magical ride on, the Prince and Tsing-Sing determine to do the same. In Act 2, Tsing-Sing returns alone from Venus, and when he and Yanko begin to talk about their experiences, they turn into statues. Péki decides to ride the horse herself to investigate this mystery and rescue her beloved Yanko. Act 3 opens on Venus. Péki arrives, disguised as man, and thus resistant to the sirens. She finds Prince Yang still there, who kisses Stella and is returned to earth. Péki snatches away the Princess’s protective magic bracelet, and both the women are transported to earth, where Prince Yang has also been turned to stone. Péki first frees Yanko and the Prince, then only a part of Tsing-Sing; she will change him back entirely only on condition that he releases her to marry Yanko. He agrees, to general happiness, as Péki can now marry Yanko, Tao-Jin has her husband back, and Prince Yang can marry his ideal woman, the beautiful Princess Stella.

The plot thus revolves around a series of variations on the theme of love and marriage. Péki is forcibly engaged to a wealthy elderly man, but really loves Yanko; the frustrated wife Tao-Jin yearns for her husband to return her love, and Prince Yang is looking for his ideal vision of love, who, unbeknown to him, is languishing on Venus, waiting to be rescued from enchantment. Surprisingly, it is Péki, the social inferior and embodiment of the ‘weaker sex’, who becomes the agent of redemption, using the situation to her advantage to become mistress of the magic. The Bronze Horse itself is the medium of magical transformation; all the male characters make use of its powers, but all of them – peasant, mandarin and prince alike – are rendered ineffectual, to the point of being turned into stone. Only Péki can win their liberation and enable the proper series of marriages.

The witty libretto, that with its exotic subject perfectly captured the taste of the time, offers differentiated characterizations, much situational comedy, and some eroticism in the Venus scenes. The score is among Auber’s best achievements, brimming over with invention: fantasy and comedy are captured perfectly, and the big love duets allow the expression of genuine feeling to break through the burlesque situations. The exotic and fairytale tone is achieved without obvious musical chinoiserie, being rather transmuted into instrumental and harmonic richness,

especially in the big ensembles. This is possibly the most precisely and carefully controlled of all the composer's scores. The sense of detail and care is everywhere apparent, as in the short but beautifully crafted entr'actes to acts 2 and 3. The ensembles in act 1, especially the brilliant quintet, and the act 2 finale are remarkable. The thematic integration is extraordinary, and in some instances achieves a genuine use of *Leitmotif*.

The overture presents all the essential elements of the story in powerful symbolic summary. It is dominated by the central image of the Bronze Horse, the agent of change. The vigorous opening tune is from the act 1 finale, and represents the Horse's mystical dynamism, its capacity to transport the rider to unknown realms. The seriousness of these journeys is emphasized in the closing section of the overture leading to the peroration—announced by another galloping theme pertaining to the Horse's spatial power and taken from the act 1 finale. The rushing opening theme of the Horse is immediately followed by the serene *andante*, a graceful melody for flute, clarinet and violin—Péki's act 2 couplets, the central piece of the opera physically and thematically. The third subject of the overture is taken from the serenade in act 2, when the villagers led by Tchín-Kao try to wake Tsing-Sing from his slumbers, unaware that he has fallen into an enchanted coma. The springing series of demisemiquaver figures represent the powerful magic of the Horse, the elemental power that can be harnessed only by Péki's enterprising wisdom. The confusion caused is indicated by a small motif of a falling semiquaver, the active power of magic at work. The Prince's ineffectuality is represented by a fleeting reference to his Dream Narration, swept up into the surging development.

Act 1 opens with the people's invocation to the local deities, which acts as a binding force in the musical texture, recurring at the opening of act 1, the act 2 finale and in the final moments of the work. The bridal chorus with its celebratory wedding bells forms an inclusion around the whole work, commenting on the notion of marriage and its changed fortunes in the course of the opera. The extended introduction, a speciality of Scribe, effectively presents the world of ancient China, as well as the major characters of Tchín-Kao and Tsing-Sing, each of whom has an embedded entrance aria that conveys the essentials of their characters with their rather materialistic world views, the ting-ting of the bells becoming the jingle of newly acquired wealth in a dexterous patter duet that captures the best of Scribe's fondness for onomatopoeic topoi. The duet for the avaricious father-in-law and lubricious groom is followed by the entry of the frustrated loyal wife Tao-Jin, to create a trio of commentary on the situation.

Auber uses a Rossinian idiom to capture the older character of Tchín-Kao and his mercantile attitude to marriage. The dotted rhythms and heavily decorated line of his cavatina look back to the older style but through a fluent and witty patina that is all Auber's own, and infused with his own very real but subtle humour. This is also apparent in the transformation of the Italian patter tradition into fleet iterative *allegro* patterns that embody a Gallic elegance and verve as well as genuine melodic sentiment—nowhere better illustrated than in the brilliant and mercurial stretta of the act 1 quintet, that requires incredible speed and precision to achieve its breathless and poised effect that is both vocal and orchestral.

Péki, as the heroine and redemptrix figure, shares something of the Horse's dynamism, and her powerful providential resolution is emphasized on several occasions by a sequence of rising dotted chords that have an integrating effect in the musical texture throughout the score. The most obvious motif of the Bronze Horse and its magic power comes from Péki's Act 1 ballad in which she explains the

mysterious presence of the mythical creature on its high promontory: “Là-bas, sur ce rocher sauvage”. In its simple, direct language and imagery there is a powerful evocation of remoteness, of mystery, elevation and the vastness of space, each verse focusing on the paired opposites of ‘là-bas’ and ‘là-haut’. The leaping and lingering, the incremental effects, extend the story which suddenly in the last verse pulls the impersonal ageless fable to the reality of present personal experience in Péki’s love and loss of Yanko. This is not included in the overture, but recurs fleetingly throughout the action, at moments when the power of the magic is most potent, and with the thematic transformation that makes it a genuine *Leitmotif*. So when Yanko tries to explain why Tsing-Sing has fallen asleep, he too is caught up in the somnolent mystery of the Horse’s power.

The young Prince is given excellent musical characterization at appearance: his couplets not only provide the archetypal musical form of the old *opéra-comique*, but in their amalgam of entrance aria, wander song and picaresque cavalcade underpinned by the strutting dotted rhythms and reiterated downwards runs suggest a bold and enterprising young adventurer. The picture is expanded and filled out by his Dream Narration that immediately follows—a full-scale aria, extended, through-composed, full of soaring melody and a smooth high-flying vocal line often over a luminous orchestral accompaniment, with extended octave sequences in the treble line that adds to a floating buoyant quality

Act 2 is particularly rich in original melody; among others Péki’s couplets in A major “Quand on est fille, hélas!” and the witty duet “Ah! ciel, en croirai-je mes yeux!”. The orchestral modulations during the Mandarin’s dream have a suavity that is entirely Oriental in feel. Act 2 also offers several variants on the themes of marriage, with the opportunist father Tchin-Kao musing, in Tsing-Sing’s absence, on the possibility of further rich suitors for his daughter, and Tao-Jin contemplating widowhood if her husband does not return. There are two duets. The first is the frustrated exchange between Tao-Jin and Tsing-Sing, returned from his magic flight and about to be rendered incapable. The second is the rapturous but equally frustrated unison exchange between Péki and Yanko over the mandarin’s murmuring in his enchanted sleep.

The last act sees Princess Stella’s dream of liberation balancing the prince’s celibate dream vision in act 1. The Princess’s big aria with chorus at the beginning of the act is of particular note, not only because of its exquisitely crafted *fioriture*, but also because of the effects of its unusual orchestration. This *bel canto* aria serves to set the Princess apart from the other female characters. Her meeting with the Prince generates another love duet, a sprightly aspiring exchange, but one doomed to frustration. Her duet with Péki is an ironic inversion because Péki is only disguised as a man, and so can resist the fatal and debilitating consequences of passion. In act 3 the *chanson* of Lo Mangli (“Tranquillement il se promène”) is also remarkable. The high ethereal orchestral effects of the entr’acte, chorus and aria at the beginning of act 3 show the care with which the orchestra is disposed in differentiating the symbolic worlds of the story, here to conjure up the magic realm of Venus. The denouement of the capture of the magic amulet is realized in orchestral writing of very considerable strength, that becomes torrential and ecstatic in the triumphant return to earth and the arrival in the temple.

The roles at the premiere were sung by Auguste Féréol (Tsing-Sing), Louis-Benoît-Alphonse Révial (Prince Yang), Jean-Francois Inchindi [Hinnekindt] (Tchin-Kao), Étienne-Bernard-Auguste Thénard (Yanko), Mme Félicité Pradher (Péki), Mme Sophie Ponchard (Tao-Jin), Mme Marie Casimir (Princess Stella), and Mlle Fargueil

(Lo Mangli). The opera was initially a hit, with 84 performances in the first year, and over the next few years was staged in numerous countries from London (Covent Garden December 1835) to Russia (St Petersburg January 1837) and the United States (New York October 1837), but then sank into an undeserved obscurity. The work was revived in expanded form at the Opéra on 21 September 1857, but even this reworking, which had 20 performances, could not save it. Engelbert Humperdinck's revival of the work in his own arrangement (10 November 1889 in Karlsruhe), despite an extraordinarily gifted translation, and sensitive and measured dramaturgical and musical abridgement, did not endure because of the success of Arthur Sullivan's grotesque operetta *The Mikado* (1885), which had captured the repertoire for burlesque Oriental opera.



Répertoire
DES OPÉRAS FRANÇAIS.

52

CHEVAL DE BRONZE,

Opéra-Comique en trois actes,

Musique de

D. F. E. AUBER,

AVEC ACCOMPAGNEMENT DE PIANO.

PRIX NET : 12 FR.

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A PARIS,

Chez **E. TROUPENAS ET C^{ie}**, Éditeurs de Musique,

ROUE NEUVE-VIVIERNE, 40.

OUVERTURE.

All.^o vivace (♩ = 152)

PIANO.

ff

2

3

ff

2

1

p

1

p

1

pp

pp

Allegretto (♩ = 84)

p

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

1

Tempo 1.^o (♩ = 132)

The musical score is written for piano and organ. It begins with the tempo marking *Tempo 1.^o (♩ = 132)*. The first system shows the piano part with a *p* dynamic and the organ part with a *ff* dynamic, followed by a first ending bracket. The second system features dense organ textures. The third and fourth systems continue with complex organ patterns. The fifth system includes a *cresc.* marking and a *p* dynamic. The sixth system has a *p* dynamic. The seventh system ends with a *pp* dynamic and a first ending bracket.

This page of musical notation for piano consists of seven systems of staves. The notation includes various musical elements such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The first system begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a time signature of 3/4. It features a melodic line in the treble and a bass line in the bass. A dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo) is present. The second system continues the melodic and bass lines, with a dynamic marking of *p* (piano). The third system shows a melodic line in the treble and a bass line in the bass, with a dynamic marking of *pp*. The fourth system features a melodic line in the treble and a bass line in the bass, with a dynamic marking of *p*. The fifth system shows a melodic line in the treble and a bass line in the bass, with a dynamic marking of *p*. The sixth system features a melodic line in the treble and a bass line in the bass, with a dynamic marking of *pp*. The seventh system shows a melodic line in the treble and a bass line in the bass, with a dynamic marking of *f* (forte). The notation is written in a clear, legible style, with various musical symbols and markings used throughout.

The musical score is written for piano in B-flat major and 4/4 time. It consists of seven systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The music features a variety of textures, including arpeggiated chords, block chords, and melodic lines. The notation includes many accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and dynamic markings such as accents (>) and a fortissimo (ff) marking in the fifth system. The piece concludes with a final chord in the seventh system.

This page of musical notation, likely for piano, consists of seven systems of staves. The notation is complex, featuring many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes, suggesting a fast tempo. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The first six systems are primarily composed of chords and arpeggiated figures. The seventh system introduces a more melodic line in the right hand, with a crescendo marking. The eighth system features a piano (*p*) marking and a series of rapid sixteenth-note passages in the right hand. The ninth system continues with similar rapid passages and includes a piano (*p*) marking. The final system on the page shows a piano (*p*) marking and a series of rapid sixteenth-note passages in the right hand, with a crescendo marking.

1 *p*

p

p *cresc.*

Allegro (♩ = 112.)

f 3 *ppp*

ppp

pp

This page of musical notation for piano consists of seven systems of staves. The notation includes various musical elements such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The first system shows a treble and bass staff with a key signature of two flats and a 2/4 time signature. The second system continues the melody and accompaniment. The third system introduces a new melodic line in the treble staff. The fourth system features a forte (ff) dynamic marking and an 8va (octave) marking. The fifth system continues the accompaniment. The sixth system features a forte (ff) dynamic marking and a crescendo marking. The seventh system features a piano (p) dynamic marking and a crescendo marking.

This page of musical notation, titled "Le Cheval de bronze" and numbered 11, contains seven systems of piano accompaniment. The notation is written in a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and uses a common time signature. The systems are as follows:

- System 1:** Features a melody in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand. Dynamic markings include *cresc.* and *f*.
- System 2:** Continues the melody and accompaniment. Dynamic markings include *ff* and *p*.
- System 3:** Similar to the previous systems, with *cresc.* and *f* markings.
- System 4:** Includes *f* and *ff* dynamic markings.
- System 5:** Marked *ff presto*, indicating a change in tempo and intensity. The left hand features a dense, rhythmic pattern.
- System 6:** Continues the *ff presto* section with complex rhythmic patterns in both hands.
- System 7:** The final system, concluding the piece with a double bar line.

ACTE 1.

N^o 1.

INTRODUCTION.

Allegro (♩ = 152)

PIANO.

1^{re} Soprane.

2^d Soprane.

Ténors.

Basse.

CHOEUR de PAYSANS CHINOIS.

Clo_chet_tes de la Pa - go - de re - ten_tis_sez dans les airs

Clo_chet_tes de la Pa - go - de clo - chet - tes de

Clo_chet_tes de la Pa - go - de clo - chet - tes de

Clo_chet_tes de la Pa - go - de clo - chet - tes de

re - ten_tis_sez dans les airs tin tin tin tin tin tin tin tin re - ten_tis_sez

la Pa - go - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs clo - chet -

la Pa - go - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs clo - chet -

la Pa - go - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs clo - chet -

The image displays a musical score for a vocal ensemble and piano. The score is written in French and consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics for the first system are: "dans les airs retentis-sez dans les airs tin tin tin tin tin tin tin et sui -". The second system continues the lyrics: "tes de la Pa-go-de re-ten-tis-sez dans les airs et sui -". The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The score is marked with a forte (ff) dynamic. The lyrics for the second system are: "vant l'an-ti-que mo-de d'hymen for-mez les con -". The third system continues the lyrics: "vant l'an-ti-que mo-de d'hymen for-mez les con -". The fourth system continues the lyrics: "certs et sui-vant l'an-ti-que mo-de d'hymen for-mez". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern. The score is written in a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 2/4 time signature.

dans les airs retentis-sez dans les airs tin tin tin tin tin tin tin et sui -
tes de la Pa-go-de re-ten-tis-sez dans les airs et sui -
tes de la Pa-go-de re-ten-tis-sez dans les airs et sui -
tes de la Pa-go-de re-ten-tis-sez dans les airs et sui -
vant l'an-ti-que mo-de d'hymen for-mez les con -
vant l'an-ti-que mo-de d'hymen for-mez les con -
vant l'an-ti-que mo-de d'hymen for-mez les con -
vant l'an-ti-que mo-de d'hymen for-mez les con -
certs et sui-vant l'an-ti-que mo-de d'hymen for-mez
certs et sui-vant l'an-ti-que mo-de d'hymen for-mez
certs et sui-vant l'an-ti-que mo-de d'hymen for-mez
certs et sui-vant l'an-ti-que mo-de d'hymen for-mez

ff

1. les con - certs re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs re - ten - tis - sez
2. les con - certs clo - chet - tes de la Pa -
1. les con - certs clo - chet - tes de la Pa -
B. les con - certs clo - chet - tes de la Pa -

1. dans les airs tin tin tin tin tin tin tin tin tin re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs
2. - go - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs clo - chet - tes de
1. - go - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs clo - chet - tes de
B. - go - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs clo - chet - tes de

1. re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs tin tin tin tin tin tin tin tin
2. la Pa - go - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs
1. la Pa - go - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs
B. la Pa - go - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs

The musical score is written for four vocal parts (1st Soprano, 2nd Soprano, 1st Tenor, Bass) and piano accompaniment. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into three systems. The first system shows the vocal parts entering with the lyrics 'les concerts' and 'clochettes de la Pa'. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second system continues the vocal parts with 'tin tin tin' and 're-ten-tis-sez'. The piano accompaniment maintains the rhythmic pattern. The third system concludes the vocal parts with 'la Pa' and 'go-de'. The piano accompaniment ends with a final chord. The score is written in a standard musical notation style with a clear layout and legible lyrics.

TCHIN-KAO

Allegro Kia - o - tchangs toi qui rends nos cœurs nos corps forts de mon bleu puis -

Tempo 1^o (♩ = 132)

- sant Dieu entends mon vœu mon bon - heur ne peut se com -

- pren - dre ma fil - le épouse un Man - da - rin à tous i - ci - pour

mieux Pap - pren - dre sonnez clo - chet - tes tin tin tin tué tin tin je crois des

é - cœus de mon gendre enten - dre le son ar - gen - tin tin tin tin tin tin tin tin

ff marc.

tin tin tin tin tin

Clo- chet - tes de la Pa - go - - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs

Clo- chet - tes de la Pa - go - - de clo - chet - tes de

Clo- chet - tes de la Pa - go - - de clo - chet - tes de

Clo- chet - tes de la Pa - go - - de clo - chet - tes de

re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs tin tin tin tin tin tin tin tin re - ten - tis - sez

la Pa - go - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs clo - chet -

la Pa - go - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs clo - chet -

la Pa - go - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs clo - chet -

re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs tin tin tin tin tin tin tin tin

- tes de la Pa - go - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs

- tes de la Pa - go - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs

- tes de la Pa - go - de re - ten - tis - sez dans les airs

