

Daniel-François-Esprit Auber:
La Muette de Portici

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Edited and Introduced by

Robert Ignatius Letellier

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Daniel-François-Esprit Auber: *La Muette de Portici*,
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INTRODUCTION

La Muette de Portici, an opera in five acts, with libretto by Eugène Scribe and Germain Delavigne, was premiered at the Académie Royale de Musique (Salle de la rue Le Peletier) on 29 February 1828. The setting is Naples in 1647, against the historical background of the revolt led by the fisherman Tommaso Aniello (Masaniello) against Spanish rule. The story had already been treated, by Carafa in his *Masaniello* of 1827 among others. Scribe and Delavigne, like the librettists of Carafa's opera, used Mormoiron's *Mémoires sur la révolution de Naples de 1647* (1827), although the characters of Fenella, Elvire and Alphonse and their interaction were freely invented. Fenella was derived from the character of this name in Sir Walter Scott's *Pevekil of the Peak*.

This work, of crucial import for the genres of *grand-opéra* and grand historical opera, was one of the most successful of the nineteenth century, and became enveloped in a revolutionary mystique. This reputation was established particularly strongly following a performance in Brussels on 25 August 1830 which sparked the uprising for Belgian independence from the Netherlands, and was further sustained by the events of 1848 when stagings of the opera caused tumult and demonstrations in several opera houses.

In act 1 Prince Alphonse, son of the viceroy, has seduced and abandoned Fenella, the deaf-mute sister of a fisherman, Masaniello. His father has had her thrown into a dungeon. On the morning of his marriage with Elvire, Alphonse is troubled by remorse. Fenella has escaped and could reveal the identity of her seducer during the wedding procession. Act 2 opens with Masaniello and the fishermen on the seashore. He and Pietro swear to free their country from oppression. When Fenella communicates to her brother Masaniello what has befallen her, he incites his friends and the people to revolt. In act 3, Elvire wishes to take Fenella under her protection, and has her sought out. When the soldiers find Fenella in the marketplace and apprehend her without explanation, they are overwhelmed by the people. The angry masses decide to storm the palace.

As act 4 opens Masaniello hesitates, dreading the bloodshed that will accompany the revolt if he should lose control of it. When Alphonse and Elvire arrive at his hut as fugitives from the masses, and beg for his help, he protects them from his friends, even though he recognizes in Alphonse the seducer of his sister. The citizens of Naples bring Masaniello the keys of the city, but his friends have already begun conspiring against him. In the last act, his friend Borella poisons Masaniello, although before he dies he is able to pull himself together momentarily to lead the rebellion. Fenella remains behind. Elvire and Alphonse find her, and tell her that Masaniello has been killed trying to protect Elvire from the masses. In despair, Fenella throws herself from the parapet of the palace, as Vesuvius erupts in the background.

La Muette de Portici is the first *grand-opéra* with all the typical characteristics of the genre: five short acts, most of which culminate in a dramatic and decorative tableau; ballets loosely connected with the action (in acts 1 and 3); scenic sensation and mass scenes with lavish use of machinery, scenery, and costumes (the wedding procession, the market and revolt scenes, the eruption of Vesuvius); recurrent scene types and their appropriate type of aria. There is a group of important leading roles,

powerful and functional choruses, a much expanded reliance on the orchestra, the inclusion of ballet that is both important for setting the local scene (whether courtly, and therefore Spanish—as in the guaracha and bolero in act 1; or popular, and therefore Neapolitan—as in the act 3 tarantella) and innate to the dramatic situation (the extended mime sequences for the mute heroine each with its own specially crafted music and character). What raises the work above many examples of the genre to an exceptional degree is the music, its congruence with the drama, its verve, and its sober concision (with only a few conventional numbers, like Elvire's coloratura aria in act 1). Integral to the creation of this effect were the spirit of the march and the songs of the Revolution of 1789 that Auber infused into his score.

The music responds to, and reflects, the vivid and imposing scenic effects (based on historical and pictorial research by the great stage designers and painters Pierre-Luc-Charles Cicéri and Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre). One of the most striking and Romantic features of the Scribe-Auber opera is the vivid evocation of nature. The opening of act 2, with its airy entr'acte, chorus of fishermen and barcarolle, uses the popular musical genres and stage topoi to great purpose in setting the scene, in conveying a sustained sense of limpidity, light and maritime freshness. The opening of act 5 presents a radical reversal of fortunes reflected in the darker and violent side of nature. Pietro's barcarolle is now an account of rock and tempest, a preliminary to the terror of Masaniello's poisoned madness. All personal tragedy and political stress find compacted tonal expression in the eruption of Vesuvius which dominates the closing scene, and absorbs all the musical attention with tremendous power. The relentless but unhurried semiquaver string writing becomes an ostinato, a cypher of unease and disruption, that eventually bursts into the violent tone painting of the eruption, with great orchestral force and extended instrumental imagination used to depict the sublimity of explosion as an objective natural correlative of human strife, sorrow and loss.

The music is also remarkable for its melodic abundance, the excitement of its ensembles, the verve of its dances, the power and variety of the choruses. Several pieces became popular: the overture; in act 2 the barcarolle and the patriotic duet; in act 3, the Market Scene and Prayer; in act 4, the *Air du Sommeil*, the revolt (war song and triumphal march); act 5, the barcarolle ("Voyez du haut de ces rivages").

The overture begins stormily with music from the introduction to Masaniello's recitative and highly original aria at the beginning of act 4; this is repeated after a quieter interlude. A running triplet figure in the strings, full of quiet ominous menace, provides a fine example of the dramatic melody that establishes the tragic mood of the opera, a *tinta* which is consistently sustained throughout all its parts. This dissolves into a sequence of agitated rumination on the fluid and fluent strings, another recurrent feature of this score, before suddenly resolving into the main theme of the overture, a march-like tune that comes as the climax of the act 4 finale, in which the chorus hail the revolutionary hero—"All honour to Masaniello". After some spirited music, essentially a development of the first triplet figure, the march theme recurs in strengthened form, and a *più animato* coda brings the overture to a rousing conclusion, full of military prowess.

The contrast between the two heroines—Fenella, a mute peasant who expresses herself in gesture and dance in free-form balletic sequence; and Elvire, a glamorous princess who uses the full range of Italianate vocal form and vocabulary—makes a series of innate dramatic and symbolic points about power and powerlessness, authenticity of emotion, and the nature of commitment. The two tenor roles have a similar, strong, if less vivid, contrast. The prince, Alphonse, comes across as weak

and vacillating, whereas Masaniello, the fisherman, is a natural leader, a man among men, whose devotion to his people, to freedom, as well as to his pathetic broken sister, mark him out as hero. This role, created by Adolphe Nourrit, set a standard that would be aspired to in all the *grands-opéras* that followed by Rossini, Meyerbeer and Halévy. Scribe's scenario focuses on this all-important hero who dominates the opera to an extraordinary extent. The patriotic duet captures the essence of the bravery and nationalistic sentiments so typical of the 1820-30s. The opening words, with the emphatic chords and downwards rushing strings provided by the composer, epitomize the heroic enterprise, while the unison march refrain ("Pour un esclave est-il quelque danger?") became a famous rallying cry for freedom.

The hero is also given the most intimate personal dimension, as seen in the tender relationship with his pathetic deaf-mute sister, the innocent and symbolic victim of various oppressions. Masaniello's lullaby for the exhausted Fenella has become one of Auber's most famous arias, challenging the tenor's sense of line and breath-control. Scribe's poetry, so simple but telling, captures the very essence of the yearned-for peace and magic restorative powers of sleep. The sheer range and variety of the hero's role is an exercise in so many aspects of vocal art: from the smooth open lines of his folk-like aubade ("Amis, la matinée est belle"), the military fervour of his patriotic duet ("Amour sacrée de la patrie") in act 2, the broken agitation and personal anguish of his heroic recitative and aria at the beginning of act 4 ("Spectacle affreux!...Adoucissez la rigueur"), to the tender *legato* of his lullaby to his stricken sister ("La fatigue t'accable...Du pauvre seul ami fidèle")—which with its seamless line and soothing melismas has become a test case of *bel canto portamento* for the tenor.

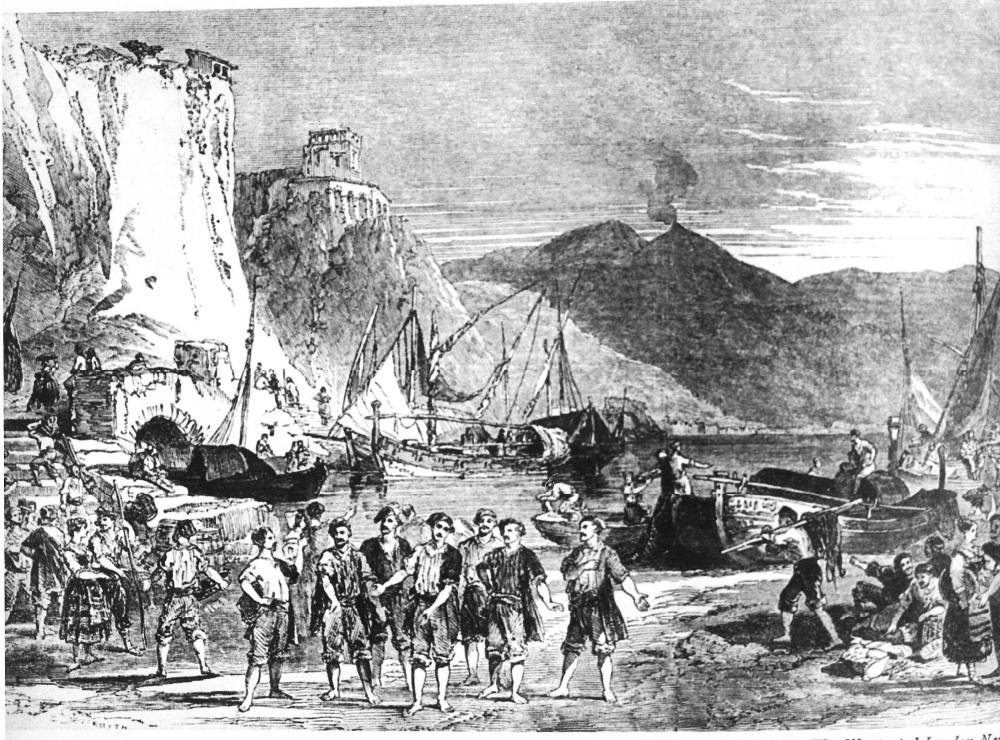
Auber added extra ballet music to the score for later revivals on several occasions. The first was a Spanish dance, the *Jaleo* (in 1837). Other dances were added for new productions in Brussels (1861) and Paris (1865). These were a *Pas de trois*, three *Échos* (a movement for solo dancer, synonymous with 'variation'), and *Finale* for the corps de ballet. The Brussels dances were dedicated to the choreographer Petipa. Several of these pieces are in the Spanish style.

The roles were created by Adolphe Nourrit (Masaniello); Alexis Dupont (Alphonse); Laure Cinti-Damoreau (Elvire); Henri-Bernard Dabadie (Pietro) and Prévot (Borella); with Pouilley, Jean-Etienne-Auguste Massol, Ferdinand Prévot and Mlle Lorotte. The dancer Lise Noblet realized the role of Fenella. The opera was one of the greatest successes at the Paris Opéra, the 100th performance taking place on the 23 April 1840, the 500th on 14 June 1880. It was also successful in other countries, especially Germany (where there were five contemporary versions). From 1829-98 it was performed 285 times at the Berlin Hofoper. The work was translated into German, Hungarian, English, Italian, Czech, Dutch, Danish, Polish, Norwegian, Swedish, Croatian and Russian. It was played across Europe, and was the first French opera to have a real success in Italy. It had reached New York by 1831, St Petersburg by 1834, Sydney by 1845 and Rio de Janeiro by 1846.

In the nineteenth century there were several arrangements: *Masaniello* by André-Jean-Jacques Deshayes (London 1829) as a ballet with chorus; the arrangement by Thomas Simpson Cooke and Barham Livius (*Masaniello, or the Dumb Girl of Portici*, London 1829); Trieste 1832 with additions by Vincenzo Colla and Gaetano Donizetti; Naples 1836 as *Manfredi primo, rè di Napoli*; Rome 1847 as *Il escatore di Brindisi*; Venice 1831 as *Fenella, o La muta di Portici*, with arrangement of the material by Gaetano Rossi (text) and Stefano Pavesi (music).

The revolutionary élan of the work gave it a brief special appeal in the 1920s. In Darmstadt in 1928 it was directed by Arthur Maria Rabenalt, with staging by Wilhelm

Reinking, conducted by Carl Bamberger, with choreography and title role by Cläre Eckstein. The work was extensively edited, the opera ending with the success of the revolution. Another arrangement of similar tendency and intrusive editing was the version by Wilhelm Neef and Lothar Schramm in 1953 for the Deutsche Staatsoper. The same production was taken to Wiesbaden in 1982. There have been a number of productions in the second half of the twentieth century: in Paris (ORTF broadcast 1965), Palermo (Teatro Massimo 10 December 1972, in Italian); London (BBC broadcast 1975, in French); Ravenna (Teatro della Rocca, 20 July 1991, in French), and Aachen (Theater Aachen 21 July 2002, in French).



La Muette de Portici (act 2). Lithograph from a 19c Viennese production

PERSONNAGES.

<i>Supra.</i>	<i>Tenors.</i>	<i>Basses.</i>
ELVIRE	MASANIELLO.	PIETRO.
////	ALPHONSE.	BORELLA
////	LORENZO.	MORENO.
////	////	SELVA.

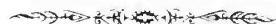


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LA MUETTE DE PORTICI.

OUVERTURE.

Allegro Moderato

PIANO.

Andante.

sotto voce.

This page of musical notation for piano consists of seven systems of staves. The notation is complex, featuring various dynamics and markings. The first system includes a *legro* marking and a *ff* dynamic. The second system includes a *p* dynamic. The third system includes a *p* dynamic and a *ff* dynamic. The fourth system includes a *p* dynamic and a *ff* dynamic. The fifth system includes a *ff* dynamic and a *p* dynamic. The sixth system includes a *ff* dynamic and a *p* dynamic. The seventh system includes a *ff* dynamic and a *p* dynamic. The notation is written in a style typical of 19th-century musical manuscripts, with a focus on dynamic contrast and rhythmic complexity.

This page of musical notation, titled "La Muette de Portici" and numbered "5", displays seven systems of piano accompaniment. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The music is written in 2/4 time and is characterized by intricate, rapid passages in the right hand, often featuring sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The left hand provides a more rhythmic and harmonic foundation with chords and eighth-note patterns. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, beams, and dynamic markings like "pp" (pianissimo) and "p" (piano). The page is a high-quality reproduction of a musical score, showing clear notation and a professional layout.

This page of musical notation, likely for piano, consists of eight systems of staves. The notation is in a single key signature (one flat) and a 2/4 time signature. The music is characterized by dense, rhythmic patterns, often using triplets and sixteenth notes. Dynamics include *fp* (fortissimo piano), *f* (forte), *p* (piano), and *ff* (fortissimo). Articulations such as accents and slurs are used throughout. A "cresc." marking is visible in the fourth system. The notation is written in a clear, professional style typical of 19th-century musical publications.

5

This musical score is for a piano piece, likely from the opera 'La Muette de Portici'. It consists of seven systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 2/4. The score is marked with various dynamics: *sf* (sforzando) appears in the second, fourth, and fifth systems, while *p* (piano) appears in the fifth system. The notation includes a variety of notes, rests, and articulation marks such as slurs and accents. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs in the final system.

6

The musical score is written for piano and consists of six systems of staves. Each system typically has a grand staff (treble and bass clef) and a single bass clef staff. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *f*, *p*, *pp*, and *dim*. The page is numbered "6" in the top left corner.

This page of musical notation, page 9 of 'La Muette de Portici', features six systems of piano accompaniment. Each system consists of a treble and bass staff. The notation is complex, with many beamed notes and rests. Dynamic markings are present throughout: 'fp' (fortissimo piano) appears in the second system, 'p' (piano) in the third and fourth systems, and 'ff' (fortissimo) in the fifth and sixth systems. The music is written in a key with one flat (B-flat) and a 2/4 time signature. The page number '9' is visible in the top right corner.

This page of musical notation, page 10 of a score by Daniel-François-Esprit Auber, contains seven systems of music. Each system consists of a treble and bass staff. The notation is in 3/4 time and features complex, flowing melodic lines in the right hand and harmonic accompaniment in the left hand. Dynamic markings include *pp* (pianissimo) and *ff* (fortissimo). The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs.

9

8^{va}

8^{va}

8^{va}

8^{va}

8^{va}

8^{va}

10 ACTE I.

N° 1.

INTRODUCTION ET AIR.

Al. maestoso, (♩ = 152)

PIANO.

ff

fp

f

Chœur du Peuple

Soprano

Tenors

Bass

ff

Du prince objet de notre a_

ff

Du prince objet de notre a_

ff

Du prince objet de notre a_

Du prince objet de notre a_

41

S. amour chan - tons l'heureuse des - ti - né - e les lam beaux d'hy - me.

T. amour chan - tons l'heureuse des - ti - né - e les lam beaux d'hy - me.

B. amour chan - tons l'heureuse des - ti - né - e les lam beaux d'hy - me.

S. né - e pour lui vont briller en ce jour pour lui vont bril - ler en ce

T. né - e pour lui vont briller en ce jour pour lui vont bril - ler en ce

B. né - e pour lui vont briller en ce jour pour lui vont bril - ler en ce

ALPHONSE.

Ah ces cris d'alle -

S. jour pour lui pour lui vont briller en ce jour.

T. jour pour lui pour lui vont briller en ce jour.

B. jour pour lui pour lui vont briller en ce jour.

ff

[illegible]

Andante. (♩ = 112)

43

VI
-heur o toi — je me vic-ti-me dont j'ai trahi la foi

VI
vois avec ef-froi — le mal-heur le mal-heur qui t'op-pri-me Fé-nella

Al.
Fé-nella — cache moi — ton courroux lé-gi-ti-me pour ex-pi-

VI
-er — mon cri-me je veille-rai sur toi pour ex-pi-

VI
-er — mon cri-me je veille-rai — je veille-rai — sur

4

Alcésaris — dalle — gresse etes

Les Flambeaux d'hymne ne — e vont brûler en ce

Les Flambeaux d'hymne ne — e vont brûler en ce

Les Flambeaux d'hymne ne — e vont brûler en ce

Mouet

chants d'hymne ne — e re dou — ble les tourmens qui de —

jour chan — tons chan — tons heu — reu — se des ti —

jour chan — tons chan — tons heu — reu — se des ti —

jour chan — tons chan — tons heu — reu — se des ti —

chi — rent mon cœur quide — chi — rent mon cœur

ne — e du prince ob — jet de notre a — mour du prince ob —

ne — e du prince ob — jet de notre a — mour du prince ob —

ne — e du prince ob — jet de notre a — mour du prince ob —

45

Fenê-la! Fenê-la!

-jet de notre amour du prince ob-jet de notre a-mour.

-jet de notre amour du prince ob-jet de notre a-mour.

-jet de notre amour du prince ob-jet de notre a-mour.

All.^o assai. (♩ = 100)

Ô toi jeune vie-time dont j'ai trahi la foi je vois avec effroi le mal-

heur qui t'opprime Fé-nel-la ca-che moi ton cœur-aux lé-gi-ti-me pou-

Chantons chan-tons la des-ti-née

Chantons chan-tons la des-ti-née

Chantons chan-tons la des-ti-née